PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

SIXTH SERIES—VOLUME 313

HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SECOND PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FORTY-SEVENTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 1997–98

COMPRISING PERIOD
1 June—11 June 1998

£70

HER MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT

MEMBERS OF THE CABINET

(Formed by the Rt. Hon. Tony Blair, MP, May 1997)

Prime Minister, First Lord of the Treasury and Minister for the Civil Service—The Rt. Hon. Tony Blair, MP
Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions—The Rt. Hon. John Prescott, MP
Chancellor of the Exchequer—The Rt. Hon. Gordon Brown, MP
Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs—The Rt. Hon. Robin Cook, MP
Lord Chancellor—The Rt. Hon. The Lord Irvine of Lairg
Secretary of State for the Home Department—The Rt. Hon. Jack Straw, MP
Secretary of State for Education and Employment—The Rt. Hon. David Blunkett, MP
President of the Board of Trade (Secretary of State for Trade and Industry)—The Rt. Hon. Margaret Beckett, MP
Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food—The Rt. Hon. Dr. John Cunningham, MP
Secretary of State for Scotland—The Rt. Hon. Donald Dewar, MP
Secretary of State for Defence—The Rt. Hon. George Robertson, MP
Secretary of State for Health—The Rt. Hon. Frank Dobson, MP
President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons—The Rt. Hon. Ann Taylor, MP
Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport—The Rt. Hon. Chris Smith, MP
Secretary of State for Social Security—The Rt. Hon. Harriet Harman, MP
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland—The Rt. Hon. Marjorie Mowlam, MP
Secretary of State for Wales—The Rt. Hon. Ron Davies, MP
Secretary of State for International Development—The Rt. Hon. Clare Short, MP
Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Lords—The Rt. Hon. The Lord Richard, QC
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster—The Rt. Hon. Dr. David Clark, MP
Minister of Transport—The Rt. Hon. Gavin Strang, MP
Chief Secretary to the Treasury—The Rt. Hon. Alistair Darling, MP

DEPARTMENTS OF STATE AND MINISTERS

Agriculture, Fisheries and Food—
Minister—The Rt. Hon. Dr. John Cunningham, MP
Minister of State—Jeff Rooker, Esq, MP
Parliamentary Secretaries—
Elliot Morley, Esq, MP
The Lord Donoughue

Cabinet Office—
Minister Without Portfolio—Peter Mandelson, Esq, MP

Culture, Media and Sport—
Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport—The Rt. Hon. Chris Smith, MP
Minister of State—
Minister for Film and Tourism—The Rt. Hon. Tom Clarke, CBE, MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretaries of State—
Mark Fisher, Esq, MP (Minister for Arts)
Tony Banks, Esq, MP (Minister for Sport)

Defence—
Secretary of State—The Rt. Hon. George Robertson, MP
Ministers of State—
Minister for Defence Procurement—The Rt. Hon. The Lord Gilbert
Minister for the Armed Forces—Dr. John Reid, MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State—John Spellar, Esq, MP

Education and Employment—
Secretary of State—The Rt. Hon. David Blunkett, MP
Ministers of State—
Minister for Employment, Welfare to Work and Equal Opportunities—The Rt. Hon. Andrew Smith, Esq, MP
Minister for School Standards—Stephen Byers, Esq, MP
The Baroness Blackstone
Parliamentary Under-Secretaries of State—
Ms Estelle Morris, MP
Dr. Kim Howells, MP
Alan Howarth, Esq, CBE, MP

Environment, Transport and the Regions—
SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt. Hon. John Prescott, MP
MINISTERS OF STATE—
Minister of Transport—The Rt. Hon. Gavin Strang, MP
Minister for the Environment—The Rt. Hon. Michael Meacher, MP
Minister for Local Government and Housing—Ms Hilary Armstrong, MP
Minister for the Regions, Regeneration and Planning—Richard Caborn, Esq, MP
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—
Nick Raynsford, Esq, MP (Minister for London and Construction)
Ms Glenda Jackson, MP (Minister for Transport in London)
The Baroness Hayman (Minister for Roads)
Ms Angela Eagle, MP

Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs—
SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt. Hon. Robin Cook, MP
MINISTERS OF STATE—
Derek Fatchett, Esq, MP
Tony Lloyd, Esq, MP
Doug Henderson, Esq, MP
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE—The Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean

Health—
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR HEALTH—The Rt. Hon. Frank Dobson, MP
MINISTERS OF STATE—
Alan Milburn, Esq, MP
Minister for Public Health—Ms Tessa Jowell, MP
The Baroness Jay of Paddington
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE—Paul Boateng, Esq, MP

Home Office—
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE HOME DEPARTMENT—The Rt. Hon. Jack Straw, MP
MINISTERS OF STATE—
Alun Michael, Esq, MP
Ms Joyce Quin, MP
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—
George Howarth, Esq, MP
Mike O'Brien, Esq, MP
The Lord Williams of Mostyn

International Development—
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT—The Rt. Hon. Clare Short, MP
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE—George Foulkes, Esq, MP

Law Officers' Department—
ATTORNEY-GENERAL—The Rt. Hon. John Morris, QC, MP
SOLICITOR-GENERAL—The Lord Falconer of Thoroton, QC

Lord Advocate's Department—
LORD ADVOCATE—The Rt. Hon. The Lord Hardie, QC
SOLICITOR-GENERAL FOR SCOTLAND—Colin Boyd, Esq, QC

Lord Chancellor's Department—
LORD CHANCELLOR—The Rt. Hon. The Lord Irvine of Lairg
PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY—Geoffrey Hoon, Esq, MP

Northern Ireland Office—
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND—The Rt. Hon. Marjorie Mowlam, MP
MINISTERS OF STATE—
Paul Murphy, Esq, MP
Adam Ingram, Esq, MP
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—
The Lord Dubs
Tony Worthington, Esq, MP

Paymaster General's Office—
PAYMASTER GENERAL—Geoffrey Robinson, Esq, MP

Privy Council Office—

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL AND LEADER OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS—The Rt. Hon. Ann Taylor, MP

LORD PRIVY SEAL AND LEADER OF THE HOUSE OF LORDS—The Rt. Hon. The Lord Richard, QC

Public Service, Office of—

CHANCELLOR OF THE DUCHY OF LANCASTER—The Rt. Hon. Dr. David Clark, MP

PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY—Peter Kilfoyle, Esq, MP

Scottish Office—

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR SCOTLAND—The Rt. Hon. Donald Dewar, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE—

Minister for Home Affairs and Devolution—Henry McLeish, Esq, MP

Minister for Education and Industry—Brian Wilson, Esq, MP

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

The Lord Sewel, CBE

Sam Galbraith, Esq, MP

Calum Macdonald, Esq, MP

Social Security—

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR SOCIAL SECURITY AND MINISTER FOR WOMEN—The Rt. Hon. Harriet Harman, MP

MINISTER OF STATE—

Minister for Welfare Reform—The Rt. Hon. Frank Field, MP

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

John Denham, Esq, MP

Keith Bradley, Esq, MP

The Baroness Hollis of Heigham

Ms Joan Ruddock, MP

Trade and Industry—

PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD OF TRADE (SECRETARY OF STATE FOR TRADE AND INDUSTRY)—The Rt. Hon. Margaret Beckett, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE—

Minister for Trade—The Lord Clinton-Davis

Minister for Trade and Competitiveness in Europe—The Lord Simon of Highbury, CBE

Ian McCartney, Esq, MP

Minister for Science, Energy and Industry—John Battle, Esq, MP

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

Nigel Griffiths, Esq, MP (Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs)

Mrs. Barbara Roche, MP (Minister for Small Firms, Trade and Industry)

Treasury—

PRIME MINISTER, FIRST LORD OF THE TREASURY AND MINISTER FOR THE CIVIL SERVICE—The Rt. Hon. Tony Blair, MP

CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER—The Rt. Hon. Gordon Brown, MP

CHIEF SECRETARY—The Rt. Hon. Alistair Darling, MP

PAYMASTER GENERAL—Geoffrey Robinson, Esq, MP

FINANCIAL SECRETARY—Ms Dawn Primarolo, MP

ECONOMIC SECRETARY—Mrs. Helen Liddell, MP

MINISTER FOR TRADE AND COMPETITIVENESS IN EUROPE—The Lord Simon of Highbury, CBE

PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY—The Rt. Hon. Nicholas Brown, MP

LORDS COMMISSIONERS—

Robert Ainsworth, Esq, MP

Graham Allen, Esq, MP

Jim Dowd, Esq, MP

John McFall, Esq, MP

Jon Owen Jones, Esq, MP

ASSISTANT WHIPS—

Clive Betts, Esq, MP

David Clelland, Esq, MP

Kevin Hughes, Esq, MP

David Jamieson, Esq, MP

Jane Kennedy, MP

Greg Pope, Esq, MP

Ms Bridget Prentice, MP

Welsh Office—

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR WALES—The Rt. Hon. Ron Davies, MP

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

Peter Hain, Esq, MP

Win Griffiths, Esq, MP

Her Majesty's Household—

LORD CHAMBERLAIN—The Rt. Hon. The Lord Camoys, GCVO

LORD STEWARD—The Viscount Ridley, KG, GCVO, TD

MASTER OF THE HORSE—The Lord Somerleyton, KCVO

TREASURER—George Mudie, Esq, MP

COMPTROLLER—Thomas McAvoy, Esq, MP

VICE-CHAMBERLAIN—Janet Anderson, MP

CAPTAIN OF THE HONOURABLE CORPS OF GENTLEMEN-AT-ARMS—The Lord Carter

CAPTAIN OF THE QUEEN'S BODYGUARD OF THE YEOMAN OF THE GUARD—The Lord McIntosh of Haringey

LORDS IN WAITING—The Lord Haskel, The Lord Whitty, The Lord Hoyle

BARONESSES IN WAITING—The Baroness Farrington of Ribbleton, The Baroness Ramsay of Cartvale

---

SECOND CHURCH ESTATES COMMISSIONER, REPRESENTING CHURCH COMMISSIONERS—Stuart Bell, Esq, MP

HOUSE OF COMMONS

PRINCIPAL OFFICERS

THE SPEAKER—The Rt. Hon. Betty Boothroyd, MP

CHAIRMAN OF WAYS AND MEANS—Sir Alan Haselhurst, MP

FIRST DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF WAYS AND MEANS—Michael J. Martin, Esq, MP

SECOND DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF WAYS AND MEANS—Michael Lord, Esq, MP

CHAIRMEN'S PANEL—
Mrs. Irene Adams, MP, Donald Anderson, Esq, MP, Peter Atkinson, Esq, MP, Joe Benton, Esq, MP, John Butterfill, Esq, MP, Dr. Michael Clark, MP, Frank Cook, Esq, MP, Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, MP, Roger Gale, Esq, MP, Jimmy Hood, Esq, MP, Barry Jones, Esq, MP, John McWilliam, Esq, MP, John Maxton, Esq, MP, Mrs. Ray Michie, MP, Edward O'Hara, Esq, MP, Mrs. Marion Roe, MP, George Stevenson, Esq, MP, Bowen Wells, Esq, MP, Andrew Welsh, Esq, MP, The Rt. Hon. Miss Ann Widdecombe, MP, Mrs. Ann Winterton, MP, Nicholas Winterton, Esq, MP

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION—
The Rt. Hon. The Speaker (Chairman), Archy Kirkwood, Esq, MP, The Rt. Hon. Sir Peter Lloyd, MP, Dr. Lewis Moonie, Esq, MP, The Rt. Hon. Gillian Shephard, MP, The Rt. Hon. Ann Taylor, MP

SECRETARY OF THE COMMISSION—M. R. Jack, PhD

BOARD OF MANAGEMENT—
W. R. McKay, CB, (Chairman) (Clerk of the House of Commons), P. N. W. Jennings (Serjeant at Arms), Miss J. B. Tanfield (Librarian), A. J. Walker (Director of Finance and Administration), I. D. Church (Editor of the Official Report), Mrs. S. J. Harrison (Director of Catering Services)

SECRETARY OF THE BOARD OF MANAGEMENT—B. A. Wilson (Head of the Establishments Office)

SPEAKER'S SECRETARY—N. Bevan, CB

SPEAKER'S COUNSEL—J. S. Mason, CB, J. E. G. Vaux

SPEAKER'S CHAPLAIN—Rev. Canon D. C. Gray, TD, PhD

PARLIAMENTARY COMMISSIONER FOR STANDARDS—Sir Gordon Downey, KCB

1 June 1998

THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SECOND PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 7 MAY 1997]

FORTY-SEVENTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 313**

TWENTIETH VOLUME OF SESSION 1997-98

House of Commons

Monday 1 June 1998

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Regional Theatre

1. **Mr. Bill Rammell** (Harlow): If he will make a statement on his plans to support regional theatre. [41984]

The Minister for Arts (Mr. Mark Fisher): The network of British regional theatres and touring companies is one of this country's great artistic achievements. We are determined to strengthen and develop that network.

Mr. Rammell: Under the system of theatre funding by the regional arts council, two theatres in my region are funded at the expense and to the exclusion of all the others, including the successful Playhouse in my constituency. Does my hon. Friend agree that such an unfair system of funding should cause concern? Does he further agree that regional arts councils should be charged with distributing their funds more equitably?

Mr. Fisher: My hon. Friend and the new management of the Harlow Playhouse have been having discussions with the chief executive of the Eastern arts board. I wish them well in those discussions. My hon. Friend is right to say that the record of the Arts Council and regional arts boards in backing new companies and developments is less than inspiring—their priority has tended to be the defence and preservation of existing companies. I am confident that the new Arts Council and its chairman, Mr. Gerry Robinson, will want to take an early and positive look at that.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross): The new structure of the Arts Council has led to the resignation of the entire theatre panel. How will the perceived needs of theatre in the regions be communicated to the Arts Council?

Mr. Fisher: The new chairman of the Arts Council and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State have made it clear, in letters to the papers and in press statements, that they recognise that one of the Arts Council's great strengths lies in its professional, independent, detailed advice from specialist panels. That will continue, and my right hon. Friend's letters and statements have made it clear that that advice is valued and that the council will have access to it.

Mr. Richard Spring (West Suffolk): What does the Minister think about the resignation of the entire drama panel of the Arts Council and the unprecedented refusal by 58 theatre directors to fill the gap—coming on top of the closure of regional theatres such as the one in Farnham, the Liverpool Playhouse and Greenwich theatre? Does he agree that that is a shocking indictment of the Government's policies, as opposed to the false impression of support that was conjured up in the Secretary of State's book?

Mr. Fisher: No, I do not. All those on the advisory group were eminent people who gave good advice, but, as I said to the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan), professional, expert advice of that quality is at the heart

of all the Arts Council's decisions. I assure Opposition Members that that specialist advice, not just in drama but in other art forms, will continue.

Art Market

2. **Mr. Andrew Robathan** (Blaby): If he will make a statement on the future of the major art houses in the United Kingdom. [41986]

The Minister for Arts (Mr. Mark Fisher): The Government recognise the great contribution that the United Kingdom art market makes to the national economy. It employs some 40,000 people and has a turnover of £2.2 billion a year. The Government are determined to play their part in ensuring that the market continues to be competitive and to thrive.

Mr. Robathan: I whole-heartedly support the Minister's response. Will he undertake to defend the art market against the threat of harmonisation of VAT across the European Union? He will know that the introduction of 2.5 per cent. VAT on the sale of works of art has already seriously affected the art market in London and in the rest of Britain. If VAT is harmonised, the art market may be driven not just from Britain but from the European Union, and may go to the United States and Switzerland. Will he take action to prevent that?

Mr. Fisher: VAT is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that it has caused problems for our art market, as has the possible threat of harmonising droit de suite. We have undoubtedly played a major part in trying to get a more rational debate on droit de suite in Europe. Other countries do not have such legislation and support us in being sceptical and critical of droit de suite. We continue vigorously to argue that case in the European Union.

Elgin Marbles

3. **Mr. Gordon Prentice** (Pendle): Under what circumstances the Elgin marbles might be returned to Athens to mark the millennium. [41988]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr. Chris Smith): The Government have no plans to return the Parthenon sculptures to Athens.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Prentice: I suspect that I may not have the House with me on this matter, Madam Speaker.

Thirteen years ago, the then leader of the Labour party, Neil Kinnock, said that the Parthenon without the marbles was like a smile missing a tooth, and pledged to return the frieze to Greece. If the case was so compelling 13 years ago, why is it not equally compelling now?

Mr. Smith: Although I sympathise with my hon. Friend's view, we have had time over the intervening 13 years to reflect on the matter, and it is clear that the Parthenon sculptures were legally and properly acquired. They have been kept in very good condition—very great care has been taken of them ever since—and they are seen, for free, by 6 million people a year from all over the world. We believe that the British museum is the best place to keep them.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Without pursuing the matter of Commissioner Kinnock's marbles, which might be indiscreet at this stage, may I welcome what the Secretary of State has said? The right hon. Gentleman will recognise that it would lead to absolute chaos if we started down the path of relocating works of art, wherever they are in the world. The best, safest and most proper position is the one that he is adopting.

Mr. Smith: It is rare for me to agree whole-heartedly with every word that the right hon. Gentleman says, but on this occasion I do, because he is right: if we were to open this question, a host of other questions about the location of works of art throughout the world would arise. I do not believe that anyone wants such questions to be reopened.

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): Is my right hon. Friend aware that 13 years ago I took this matter up with Mr. Neil Kinnock and that, with me at any rate, he did not seek to defend the position? Is he further aware that it would be one thing if the marbles could be placed on the Acropolis itself, but that it would be nonsense to take them from one museum and put them in another museum that is not as well looked after as ours?

Mr. Smith: My right hon. Friend is right to point out that the proposal is not that the marbles should be replaced on the Acropolis but that they should be housed on the Acropolis hill in a museum specially built for the purpose whose architecture has been widely criticised. The marbles were legally acquired; they have been where they are for a long period; and they are seen by many millions of people, not just from Britain but from around the world. We do not believe that the case for their return is in any way compelling.

Media Ownership

4. **Miss Julie Kirkbride** (Bromsgrove): If he will make a statement on the regulations governing media ownership. [41989]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr. Chris Smith): New rules on media ownership were established in the Broadcasting Act 1996. The Government have no plans to change them.

Miss Kirkbride: I thank the Minister for that response, but I should like to ask him about the proposals for the privatisation of Channel 4. We understand that the Chancellor of the Exchequer is trying to squeeze any amount of money out of any pocket that he can find, and I am sure that £1 billion-worth of proceeds from the privatisation of Channel 4 would make him very popular among his Treasury colleagues. What does the Secretary of State think of that proposed privatisation, especially

given that, when it was proposed by the Conservative Administration, it was widely scorned by Labour Members?

Mr. Smith: The hon. Lady will probably know that, during the election campaign, we made it clear that we had no plans to privatise Channel 4. That remains the case.

Mr. Derek Wyatt (Sittingbourne and Sheppey): What conversations on European media ownership has the Secretary of State had during our presidency of the European Union? Does he agree that the solution to the problem of United Kingdom media ownership is to be found in a broader European regulation?

Mr. Smith: Although we accept, and are seeking to implement, the television without frontiers directive, we do not believe that it is necessary to extend to Europe the purview of the entirety of media regulation. We believe that Europe has a role to play, and that is properly reflected in the television without frontiers directive, but we do not want to go further than that at this stage.

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford): The Secretary of State should perhaps consider straight away a detailed piece of media regulation: the switch-off of analogue television services. Is he aware that his decision not to take a decision for two or three years will put in danger the development of digital television in this country, and will possibly damage the interests of an industry that is culturally and economically vital to our future?

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman should have been present at the meeting of the digital television group to which I spoke last week. I said that we intended to make a decision on the switch-off of analogue as soon as possible. We are consulting on this matter: we issued a consultation paper a couple of months ago and the deadline for replies is within the next couple of months. We shall consider carefully the results of the consultation process, and shall then come to a view.

Performing Arts (Kettering)

5. **Mr. Phil Sawford** (Kettering): What plans he has to support the performing arts in Kettering. [41990]

The Minister for Arts (Mr. Mark Fisher): Kettering has benefited from several national lottery awards totalling £1.7 million, including a £1.2 million award for a new performing arts centre at the Latimer school in Kettering.

Mr. Sawford: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. We welcome the funding for the arts centre at Latimer school in my constituency, which will provide a much-needed facility for young people at the school and for the wider community. How will the latest lottery reforms help budding young artists and performers in my constituency and in the rest of the country?

Mr. Francis Maude (Horsham): They will make things worse.

Mr. Fisher: They will not, as the right hon. Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude) suggests, make things worse: on the contrary, the reforms will help by getting more money out to the regions so that decisions can be made more strategically and money can be spent more coherently, especially on projects, such as the one in my hon. Friend's constituency, which link community arts work to education. The strategy will develop a new generation of audiences in towns such as Kettering, and will bring out the creative talent of young people who may be the artists of the future.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): The Minister will appreciate that probably the best and most well-known theatre in the Kettering area is that in Market Harborough.

Madam Speaker: The question is about the Kettering area. I know the hon. and learned Gentleman's constituency very well, and the distance between the two areas. We are talking about Kettering.

Mr. Garnier: You are quite right, Madam Speaker, although the distance between Market Harborough and Kettering is nought, because that is the boundary; besides, as you will know from your local knowledge, many people from the Kettering constituency come to the Market Harborough theatre.

Madam Speaker: But how many people from Market Harborough go to the theatre in Kettering? The hon. and learned Gentleman's question is not in order and we shall go no further with it.

Sport (Social Exclusion)

6. **Mr. Harold Best** (Leeds, North-West): If he will make a statement on the role of sport in combating social exclusion. [41991]

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Tony Banks): We will never know the answer to your question now, will we, Madam Speaker?

I am convinced that sport can help to tackle the problems of social exclusion. I am encouraging the English Sports Council to direct more of its resources at that problem and to work closely with other agencies. My Department is working closely with the social exclusion unit in this area.

Mr. Best: Will the Minister confirm that the Government's national lottery policy will ensure that the Sports Council's money provides for disadvantaged areas such as the inner-city area of North-West Leeds? Will he also ensure that, when such funding goes to professional clubs—if it does—there is a guarantee that facilities will be made available to local schools and local community sport?

Mr. Banks: The priority areas initiative of the Sports Council for England allows up to 90 per cent. lottery funding—the usual being 65 per cent.—for sports projects designed to give special help to deprived areas. So far, it has supported more than 350 projects with awards totalling £186 million. The National Lottery Bill, once enacted, will enable the Sports Council to adopt a strategy that directs lottery funding to areas where there is an obvious lack of resources and where there is a great need for such projects.

Sport is one of the greatest ways of reaching young unemployed people who might otherwise be hanging around on street corners, expending their energy in non-constructive ways. Sport is a wonderful and imaginative way of organising young people and teaching them a great many things, including respect for themselves. I suspect that the new strategy of the English Sports Council will fully accord with the sort of views that my hon. Friend has just expressed.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): Will the Minister for Sport comment on the impact on the English football team of excluding Gazza from the squad?

Mr. Banks: That is a very ingenious interpretation of social exclusion, and I congratulate the hon. Lady on being the first to raise the matter in the House this afternoon. It is a subject of great national concern. I think that the national coach, Glenn Hoddle, is to be congratulated on his brave decision. Sport is even crueller than politics: if someone gets it wrong, retribution follows quickly. We must all keep our fingers crossed in the hope that the decision was the right one—my own feeling is that it was. I expect the English team to do even better now, despite the personal tragedy surrounding the footballing exclusion of that great character Gazza.

Mr. Bruce Grocott (Telford): I know that my hon. Friend, like me, supports the widest possible dissemination of the benefits of sport, but does he agree that, when sport acquires large additional funds through sponsorship, television income or other commercial activity, it is desirable that the benefits of that additional income—I am thinking of football particularly—should be spread through the whole game? They should not result in an ever-widening divide between the haves and the have-nots.

Mr. Banks: My hon. Friend raises a point about which I know large numbers of ordinary football supporters feel strongly. I addressed a meeting of the Football Supporters Association in Wolverhampton on Saturday—the first sports Minister to do so, incidentally—where its members made the same point. Football must recognise that there may come an end to the enormous flow of money currently pouring into it. The game is fashionable at the moment; an awful lot of people who support football today may not do so in a few years' time. It is essential that resources are more evenly distributed throughout the game. Unless the grass roots are nourished there will ultimately be problems for the premier league. I hope that that message is taken seriously by the football authorities—I am always reminding them of it.

Museum Funding

7. **Mr. John Bercow** (Buckingham): If he will make a statement on funding for museums. [41993]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr. Chris Smith): Funding for the national museums and galleries was protected for the current year. Additional funding has been made available to five museums and galleries to enable free admission to be maintained.

The Heritage Lottery Fund's £7 million access fund will support initiatives to widen access to museums and galleries throughout the UK. I will make a further announcement in the summer, when the departmental spending review is concluded.

Mr. Bercow: I thank the Secretary of State for that answer. The right hon. Gentleman pledged to provide free universal access to the national collections at an estimated cost of £40 million, yet he has succeeded in finding only £2 million, plus a further £7 million which he has raided from the lottery. Does not this latest betrayal prove that what needs to be preserved as a museum piece is Labour's list of broken promises?

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman conveniently forgets that no such promise or pledge was ever given. Indeed, I am surprised that he is not more enthusiastic about the fact that we have managed to preserve the important principle of free admission to the national gallery, the Tate gallery, the national portrait gallery, the British museum and the Wallace collection.

That contrasts savagely with the actions of Buckinghamshire county council which, despite an increase in its standard spending assessment for education for the current year, is putting two museums under threat. As I recollect, Buckinghamshire has been under continuous Tory control since 1889.

Ms Beverley Hughes (Stretford and Urmston): I thank my right hon. Friend for the support that he has given so far to efforts to secure funding for the proposed imperial war museum of the north. However, is he aware that, although the project has already secured funding of £19 million from Europe and the private sector, the Heritage Lottery Fund is still refusing to consider the application? Is my right hon. Friend satisfied with the way in which the heritage lottery fund has responded to this application and, more generally, with the way in which it is allocating funds as between London and other parts of the country?

Mr. Smith: I know that this is a matter of great importance to my hon. Friend, who has discussed it in some detail with me. Both she and I have also discussed the matter with the Heritage Lottery Fund. I would urge her to continue such discussions in the hope of eventually obtaining a satisfactory outcome.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): One way of assisting museums is to ensure that, when artefacts are made available by Government Departments such as the Ministry of Defence, appropriate museums are given advance notice and an opportunity to buy those artefacts at a reasonable price. Will the Secretary of State support a campaign to ensure that that is done?

Mr. Smith: I certainly view that as being entirely sensible. I think that it happens in the vast majority of cases anyway, but if the hon. Gentleman has a particular case in mind, I should be delighted to take it up personally.

Performing Arts (National Lottery Reforms)

8. **Mr. Martin Linton** (Battersea): How the lottery reforms will benefit the performing arts. [41994].

The Minister for the Arts (Mr. Mark Fisher): The National Lottery Bill will radically reform the lottery, making the process easier for applicants, distributing grants faster and therefore more effectively, and ensuring that in future more is spent on supporting artists and activities, rather than just on bricks and mortar.

Mr. Linton: Is the Minister aware of pioneering schemes such as the ladder of development which has attracted a grant of £275,000 from the lottery's arts-for-everyone programme to the Battersea arts centre, an organisation which specialises in enabling young performing artists to get their feet on the first rung of the ladder? I should add that I am the chairman of that organisation. Has the Minister seen a letter from the director of Battersea arts centre to the Prime Minister congratulating him on the impact of the new deal on young performing artists, many of whom have in the past used the dole while getting on to that all important first rung of the ladder?

Mr. Fisher: My hon. Friend is quite right to state that Battersea arts centre is enormously resourceful in accessing lottery money. It has received £810 million for refurbishment and—

Mr. Linton: Thousand.

Mr. Fisher: Yes, £810,000—there is a slight difference. It has now also received a further grant for development. My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the potential of the new deal for young artists at a crucial stage in their career. Young artists want a chance to work and to get their work in front of audiences. The Government are determined, through initiatives such as the new deal, to help them to do that.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): As I am not persuaded by the argument that the introduction of a sixth good cause will not adversely affect the money going to the five existing good causes, including the performing arts, may I ask the Minister at least to monitor what happens? Does the hon. Gentleman accept that there is a need to help the performing arts institutions which, although not national institutions, are not regarded as regional institutions either—especially if they are in the outer London boroughs? The Old Bull arts centre in Barnet is a very good example of such an institution. It puts on some very good work, some of which, I understand, has recently fallen out of favour with new Labour.

Mr. Fisher: It is absolutely essential that the benefits of the lottery grants, and especially those for the arts, get to every part of the country, feed grass roots and community developments and bring on a new generation of artists and audiences. I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman that that is a priority, and it is something which is very close to the Government's heart.

New Opportunities Fund

9. **Mr. Ben Chapman** (Wirral, South): When the national lottery New Opportunities Fund will start to finance out-of-school-hours clubs. [41995]

The Minister for Film and Tourism (Mr. Tom Clarke): Subject to parliamentary approval of the National Lottery Bill, the New Opportunities Fund is likely to invite applications for the £400 million of funding for out-of-school-hours activities early in 1999.

Mr. Chapman: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that response. I greatly welcome the National Lottery Bill and the New Opportunities Fund, which provide for a fairer geographical distribution of lottery moneys—Wirral, South has fared particularly badly in that respect—but this is an important programme, and early next year seems a long way off. Will my hon. Friend consider what steps he can take to bring forward the programme—pilot applications, for example?

Mr. Clarke: It is perfectly possible that pilot applications will be considered. I well understand my hon. Friend's arguments, which he put to the House very forcefully on 7 April and which we have taken into account. The policy directions that my right hon. Friend is issuing to all distributors will emphasise the importance of funding reaching all parts of the country. I hope that my hon. Friend will feel that he has made his point.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): Does the Minister not recognise that the £400 million of lottery money that will now be spent on out-of-school-hours clubs should come out of Government taxation and that, if the trend continues, the original five causes, which include charities and the arts, are bound to have their money reduced. How much further will the process go?

Mr. Clarke: The hon. Gentleman must know that those hoary old arguments were totally exposed on Second Reading and in Committee. The Prime Minister said before the election that we do not believe it would be right to use lottery money to pay for things which are the Government's responsibility. The policy that we are pursuing, with the overwhelming support of those who were consulted, is in addition and means that we can embrace social problems and social inclusion—issues which might be of interest to the hon. Gentleman.

Tourism

10. **Mr. Peter L. Pike** (Burnley): What the Government are doing to support local authority initiatives in tourism. [41996]

The Minister for Film and Tourism (Mr. Tom Clarke): The Government fully recognise the major role that local authorities play in relation to tourism. Local authorities are closely involved in the Department's work on developing a comprehensive strategy for tourism which will identify how best to work together in future.

Councillor John Price is chairing the domestic tourism working group which is reporting to the main tourism forum.

Mr. Pike: My right hon. Friend will know that many local authorities, including Burnley, are becoming

increasingly involved in tourism. Regional development agencies will be key players in the development of tourism in the years ahead. Will local authorities be given a full role, working in co-operation with regional development agencies?

Mr. Clarke: Yes, unreservedly. My hon. Friend has raised an extremely important point. He will be pleased to know that almost all local authorities are members of their regional tourist boards, which, in turn, have taken the positive step of bidding to become partnership organisations of their regional development agencies, and we warmly welcome that.

Mr. Peter Brooke (Cities of London and Westminster): Will the lottery be funding English tourism in future?

Mr. Clarke: The right hon. Gentleman, as a former Secretary of State, will know that—particularly because of the comprehensive spending round—all those matters are currently being discussed. I cannot respond to his specific point about the lottery, as the matter is still under discussion. He will understand that, because of the comprehensive spending round, he will have to wait just a little longer.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas (Harrow, West): Is my right hon. Friend aware that local authority initiatives to encourage tourism in my area may be undermined by the need to divert resources to fund trauma counselling for the younger members of the constituency after the departure of Geri Halliwell from the Spice Girls? Will he join me in encouraging Ginger Spice to think again?

Mr. Clarke: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that question. I had the opportunity to meet the Spice Girls on location; I was also delighted to be at the premiere of their film. I am sure that what has taken place is simply a little local difficulty, which they are perfectly capable of sorting out. I wish them well.

Mr. Francis Maude (Horsham): It is good to hear that the Minister has a policy on the Spice Girls, as well as on Gazza's exclusion from the England team. Does he accept that local authority initiatives on tourism depend heavily on the work of the English tourist board? Will he confirm the report in *The Times* on Saturday that his Department has agreed to the board's disbandment as part of the comprehensive spending review? Does he accept that his Department spends only a twentieth on English tourism of what is spent per capita in Scotland? Does he understand how angry the English tourism industry and English local authorities will be about this apparent concession by a Minister who sits for a Scottish constituency, made at the behest of a Chief Secretary and a Chancellor who also represent Scottish seats? Does that not confirm that the tourism industry is simply an optional extra for him and his team?

Mr. Clarke: That was a good try, but, as a former Treasury Minister, the right hon. Gentleman knows better. He should not indulge in what he clearly knows is speculation. He knows that the Government are committed to tourism, which is the fifth biggest industry in Britain and is worth £40 billion. He will recall that comprehensive spending reviews have taken place under all Governments. Our commitment to the British Tourist Authority and the ETB is the same as the one we inherited from the Conservative Government. The right hon. Gentleman should pay less attention to newspaper speculation and a good deal more to the praise that the ETB, the BTA and the regional bodies have given to the Government, and particularly to their excellent contributions to my right hon. Friend's tourism forum.

Commercial Television

11. **Mr. Chris Mullin** (Sunderland, South): What recent discussions he has had with the ITC regarding the quality of commercial television; and if he will make a statement. [41997]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr. Chris Smith): I meet the chairman of the Independent Television Commission periodically to discuss a range of broadcasting issues. Quality of content of commercial television services is an essential ingredient of the Government's broadcasting policy.

Mr. Mullin: Does my right hon. Friend share the widespread concern about the steady deterioration in the quality of commercial television since the Broadcasting Act 1990? Is he satisfied that the ITC has the powers and the will to reverse that trend? If not, what are his plans?

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend will doubtless know that the report issued by the ITC on the 1997 performance review, which was presented to Parliament on 30 April, addressed some of those issues robustly. This is a matter for the ITC rather than the Government. The Government have a responsibility for the overall promotion of quality, but the assessment of individual programmes must remain a matter for the ITC.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): The ITC is responsible for ensuring the application of the aspects of the Broadcasting Act 1990 that ensure that controversial subjects are dealt with with due impartiality. Will the Secretary of State raise with the ITC in his next meeting the discussion programme scheduled for ITV next Wednesday evening, which will feature a raft of conspiracy theorists, including one notorious fabricator and defamer, who intend to exploit the death of Princess Diana to put their crazy theories forward, to the distress of the families and without any balancing argument?

Mr. Smith: I am sure that the ITC and, indeed, the Broadcasting Standards Commission, will have heard very clearly what the hon. Gentleman has said.

Millennium Projects

12. **Mr. Paddy Tipping** (Sherwood): What proportion of millennium projects will be outside London. [41998]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr. Chris Smith): The Millennium Commission has awarded just under £1.24 billion to 185 capital projects across the United Kingdom; 89.5 per cent. of the total has been awarded outside Greater London.

Mr. Tipping: Will the Secretary of State continue to consider the amount of funding going to the English

regions, particularly the east midlands? Will he turn his attention to the coalfield community landmark scheme, which I know he supports, and look at the apparent difficulties between the Millennium Commission and the partners?

Mr. Smith: First, my hon. Friend is right to identify the issue of relative underfunding of the east midlands region. The Millennium Commission is seeking particularly to address that through the awards scheme to individuals, which is up and running and proving to be remarkably successful. Secondly, I very strongly support the coalfield community project in principle. I know that there have been some difficulties with the details of the project, but I shall ensure that the Millennium Commission approaches them sympathetically.

MINISTER WITHOUT PORTFOLIO

(MILLENNIUM EXPERIENCE)

The Minister was asked—

Cost Overruns

27. **Mr. Austin Mitchell** (Great Grimsby): What allowance has been made for cost overruns in his estimates of expenditure on the millennium experience. [42014]

The Minister without Portfolio (Mr. Peter Mandelson): The project has a cash budget of £758 million. Within that, there is a prudent cost contingency provision of £88 million, which is subject to tight control and regular monitoring by the New Millennium Experience Company. The project, my hon. Friend will be pleased to hear, is on time and on budget.

Mr. Mitchell: I am delighted that my hon. Friend has time to be concerned at the looming problem. There is always a danger that, if there were no purpose, one could be bought for the project by throwing money at the problem. Is he as concerned as I am at the report by Rowan Moore in last week's *Evening Standard* of delays, major cost overruns, a lack of sponsorship and private contributions, and a failure to have a central purpose down at the folks' dome? All those looming problems will have to be compensated for by the lottery, draining even more money from the arts, education, health, sport and charities, unless they are tackled.

Mr. Mandelson: The article to which my hon. Friend refers—I gather—is almost entirely unsourced, unchecked and untrue. Money is not being thrown at a problem—far from it. I would have thought that he would be rather more optimistic considering today's news and would be congratulating the New Millennium Experience Company, which has announced with Marks and Spencer, yet another founding partner of the millennium experience, the launch of Children's Promise.

The Government have always believed that the millennium experience should be a truly national event and provide a lasting legacy. I cannot think of a better way in which to fulfil both those conditions than to organise for everyone to give their last hour's salary in this millennium to help children in need in the next millennium. That is what is being launched today. It represents precisely the purpose and values that are embodied in the theme of the millennium experience and the dome—a time to make a difference, which it certainly will be.

Mr. Norman Baker (Lewes): What will happen if there is a shortfall—I hope that there will not be—in funding from sponsors? Will the proposals for the dome be scaled down, will further money be taken from the lottery or will the taxpayer be further called on?

Mr. Mandelson: I have every confidence that the New Millennium Experience Company will raise the necessary funds. Nearly £100 million is already committed and confirmed in the form of private sector sponsorship. That is nearly £100 million of a target set for the end of this year of £150 million. That is what we have gathered since February. I have every confidence that 12 million or more people will want to visit the dome, and that the company's income target from visitors is equally realistic. I do not think that the problem to which the hon. Gentleman refers will arise.

Mr. Richard Spring (West Suffolk): The hon. Gentleman hyped up surfball as the new 21st century sport for the dome. Did cost overruns cause its mysterious disappearance, or was there a fabrication about a non-existent game? Was not the hon. Gentleman guilty of talking complete and utter surfballs?

Mr. Mandelson: The reshuffle beckons, Madam Speaker. The serious play zone, to which the hon. Gentleman refers, will include explanations of the world of sport and games in the 21st century. It will cover the sort of 21st century game for which the term "surfball" was an illustrative title.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): Will my hon. Friend keep careful track of the point when the Jeremiahs and detractors of the millennium experience and the dome suddenly and quietly become enthusiasts? My hon. Friend will know that, increasingly, businesses throughout the country—not just Marks and Spencer, which has today announced the £12 million Children's Promise—see the project not only as a way in which to show the best of British work, skills and products, but as an opportunity to benefit from tourism and travel, as people from all over Europe and the world will come to make this a profitable exercise for UK plc.

Mr. Mandelson: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is because of the enormous progress that we have made during the last year that so many companies and organisations are flocking to the millennium dome to invest and to take part in the project.

We should recall what we have achieved during the past year. The dome is now firmly established on London's skyline and the roofing material is going on over the steel girders right on schedule. Young British-based designers are working hard to ensure that we have contents as inspiring as the building in which they are to be housed. We have five founding partners,

each contributing £12 million to the millennium experience. The fifth of these, Marks and Spencer, was announced this morning.

The New Millennium Experience Company has let 24 main trade contracts, 23 to companies based in the UK. My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister has launched plans for the millennium village at Greenwich and for new riverbus services to open up the Thames. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport has launched the nationwide millennium festival. We have ensured that the dome will have a long and productive life, and will not be torn down after one year, as was originally planned by the previous Government.

In short, we have turned the vision of the previous Government into firm foundations for a unique event which will bring the entire country together. It will inspire us and will make a real difference to our well-being, socially, spiritually and economically.

Ticketing

28. **Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith** (Wealden): If he will make a statement on the role of Camelot as the distributor of tickets for the millennium experience. [42015]

The Minister without Portfolio (Mr. Peter Mandelson): The New Millennium Experience Company announced on 24 February that it had reached agreement in principle with Camelot for it to be official distributor of tickets for the millennium experience at Greenwich. This will mean that there is a ticket outlet within three miles of 95 per cent. of the population of the United Kingdom.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that Camelot has already contributed to the dome? Can he confirm that no additional pressure was put on Camelot to spend more money on the distribution of tickets or to pay for the commissions of those people who retail at the point of sale?

Mr. Mandelson: Absolutely no pressure has been placed on Camelot or on any of the other private sector organisations that are increasingly keen to take part in this unique national event, no doubt partly for perfectly laudable commercial reasons, but, more importantly, because they want to contribute to the nation's millennium celebration. It is particularly welcome that Camelot should be playing the role that it is, as ticket purchases to allow people to come to the dome for the millennium experience should be as simple, straightforward and accessible as possible—it should be as easy to get tickets as it is to play the lottery. I believe that Camelot's involvement will greatly help us in achieving that.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): The House is aware that my hon. Friend does not believe that there will be a shortfall in sponsorship moneys. However, if there is a shortfall and the contingency money is swallowed up in cost overruns, for which such capital projects are notorious, where will the additional money come from—from the taxpayer or from lottery funds?

Mr. Mandelson: I do not envisage that the scenario that my hon. Friend describes will arise, as I do not believe that there will be cost overruns. I assure her, however, that in no circumstances will any deficit be met from taxpayers' money.

Mr. Francis Maude (Horsham): Leaving aside the extraordinary reversal in recent months in the Government's view of Camelot, does the hon. Gentleman agree that Camelot sponsorship of the dome is nowhere near sufficient to fill the huge gap that still exists? Will he confirm reports that the cost of the contents of the dome have been spiralling out of control and that, given the huge gap in sponsorship, his grandiose plans, which were revealed with such drama in February, are having to be radically scaled down as, in effect, the chief executive of the dome recently admitted? Has not the hon. Gentleman's stewardship of this important project been so catastrophic that a reshuffle is the only way in which he can hope to save face and to be taken out of a disaster area of his own making?

Mr. Mandelson: No. I shall be at the opening night on 31 December 1999 whatever my capacity. It is a great shame that, as the right hon. Gentleman bids farewell, he should be characteristically churlish in his contribution. I hope that he does not think that I am being equally churlish if I say that I hope that he makes as little impact in undermining the Government's economic policies as he has in his attempts to torpedo the dome in the past year.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

The hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, was asked—

Bishops' Chauffeurs

35. **Mr. Norman Baker** (Lewes): If he will make it his policy to reallocate money currently provided for bishops' chauffeurs. [42024]

Mr. Stuart Bell (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners): No.

Mr. Baker: I am disappointed by that answer. Does the hon. Gentleman recognise that many people regard as an affront the fact that £317,000 is being spent on chauffeurs for bishops when poor people could benefit from that money? Would not it be better if the bishops dispensed with their chauffeurs and used the money to help the poor?

Mr. Bell: The two are not mutually exclusive. The money spent on full-time and part-time drivers enables the bishops who make use of those services to work while travelling to their many commitments, both in their dioceses and nationally. The service can also remove pressure, especially as travel, often late at night, is an unavoidable part of a bishop's job. The money spent represents about 0.05 per cent. of the Church's annual running costs.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Faversham and Mid-Kent): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, if the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Baker) became a Minister in any conceivable

Government, he would expect to have a driver for exactly the same reasons? Does not his question represent a Liberal Democrat hypocrisy that we could do without?

Mr. Bell: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's assistance. In fact, seven bishops use their own cars and are paid a mileage allowance. In 1997, 31 bishops employed full-time or part-time drivers, which is hardly a heavy burden on the Church.

Assets

37. **Mr. Ben Bradshaw** (Exeter): If he will make a statement on the returns made on the commissioners' assets for 1996–97. [42026]

Mr. Stuart Bell (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners): The commissioners' financial year runs to the end of December. The total return on their assets was 17.1 per cent. in 1996 and 20.8 per cent. in 1997. In both years, their returns have been significantly higher than the performance of the United Kingdom pensions fund average.

Mr. Bradshaw: I thank my hon. Friend for his answer. Can he confirm that that means that the commissioners have now recovered the £800 million that they lost through their disastrous deals in the late 1980s and early 1990s?

Mr. Bell: I appreciate my hon. Friend's question, but the amount that he mentions relates to the fall in the valuation of the Church's assets between 1989, when the property market peaked, and 1992. Since then, the value of our assets has increased from £2.1 billion to £3.5 billion, and during my stewardship of one year, we have increased their value by £500 million. Success may have a thousand fathers, and I may be the 995th.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that a large proportion of the income of the Church Commissioners goes towards meeting the stipends and pensions of a considerable number of clergymen? Should not the House encourage the Church Commissioners to maximise their assets, albeit within ethical constraints?

Mr. Bell: We do pay the pensions of clergymen and their widows. Following the Pensions Measure passed last year, they will be paid by the dioceses in future, but the hon. Gentleman's point is important: the assets that we accumulate today mean better possibilities for the Church in years to come.

Ethical Investment

38. **Ann Clwyd** (Cynon Valley): What recent discussions he has had with the Church Commissioners on ethical investments. [42027]

Mr. Stuart Bell (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners): Earlier this year, as a member of the commissioners' board of governors and of the assets committee, I was able to discuss and endorse the commissioners' revised statement of ethical investment policy. The secretary to the ethical investment working group also keeps me regularly briefed on ethical issues.

Ann Clwyd: In view of GEC's long and continuing involvement in the arms trade with Indonesia, what exactly do the Church Commissioners think that they are achieving in their meetings with its board?

Mr. Bell: As always, I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her question.

Representatives of the ethical committee met senior management of GEC not long ago to discuss those very issues. We discuss them constantly with GEC, and we obviously have a strong ethical policy of not investing in companies whose main business is armaments. The current position in GEC does not constitute a breach of that policy, but we shall, of course, keep it continuously under review.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): Following the question from the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) and earlier questions on the same subject, can the hon. Gentleman tell us whether the forthcoming Lambeth conference will seek to agree a tougher regime on ethical investment—especially in relation to countries where democracy is at stake, such as Indonesia, or where nuclear weapons may be developed, such as India and Pakistan?

Mr. Bell: The hon. Gentleman may be interested to learn that the ecumenical Church investors group met today to celebrate 25 years of working together on matters of mutual concern in which the hon. Gentleman has an interest. I have already drawn the Archbishop of Canterbury's attention to the last question on this issue that the hon. Gentleman tabled for the Lambeth conference to consider, and I am sure that his voice will be heard.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMISSION

The Chairman of the Public Accounts Commission was asked—

Non-departmental Public Bodies

39. **Mr. David Heath** (Somerton and Frome): What recent discussions he has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the financial implications of extending the scrutiny of the National Audit Office to non-departmental public bodies not presently covered. [42028]

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Chairman of the Public Accounts Commission): The Comptroller and Auditor General has inspection rights in regard to virtually all the 265 non-departmental bodies; however, he is not the auditor of nearly half those bodies, and, in the circumstances, accountability to Parliament is exercised only by his inspection rights. If the Comptroller and Auditor General were to be auditor of those bodies, he would be able to provide a more efficient and effective service to Parliament. The Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee and I met the Chancellor of the

Exchequer on 26 March this year, and we raised the possibility of the Comptroller and Auditor General's becoming the auditor of all non-departmental public bodies.

Mr. Heath: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his reply. He is clearly dealing with the matter, and he clearly agrees with me that there are now gaps between the Audit Commission and the Comptroller and Auditor General in terms of audit. Does he not also agree that, if Ministers cannot abolish quangos, they can at least regulate them properly?

Mr. Sheldon: Of course I agree with the hon. Gentleman. It is a great pity that the European Court of Auditors has access that the Comptroller and Auditor General has not, as that means that the Comptroller and Auditor General cannot undertake the scrutiny that the House has a right to expect.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): The Chairman of the Public Accounts Commission will recall that I have raised this matter with him before in oral questions, particularly in relation to housing associations. Does he agree that a huge number of non-departmental public bodies are not properly scrutinised and that, therefore, there must be a risk that public money is being ill spent, possibly even fraudulently so? Will he renew his representations to the Chancellor that the Comptroller and Auditor General should have an auditing role over such bodies?

Mr. Sheldon: I fully agree, as £1.2 billion of public money is being spent in that area, and the Comptroller and Auditor General should be able to undertake the sort of examination that the House determines in so many other cases of that sort.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

The hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, was asked—

Assets

40. **Mr. Brian Jenkins** (Tamworth): What the ratio of assets will be in *(a)* property and *(b)* shares for the financial year 1997–98. [42029]

Mr. Stuart Bell (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners): At the end of the commissioners' financial year in December 1997, the proportion of their investment assets in commercial property was 14 per cent. Their agricultural and residential estates amounted to a further 8 and 6 per cent. respectively. The proportion of their assets in UK equities was 52 per cent. and in overseas equities, 9 per cent.

Mr. Jenkins: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. Is he as concerned as I am about the move that the Church Commissioners have been making into equities? Bearing in mind the turbulent nature of some of those markets, does he feel that that is an investment that gives the security that the electorate deserve?

Mr. Bell: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the volatility of the equity markets, certainly those in the far east. Having studied independent research, the commissioners believe, however, that UK equities provide the best long-term match with their expenditure commitments and intend to retain them as the cornerstone of their fund, whatever the short-term fluctuations in the market.

Nuclear Tests (South Asia)

3.30 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Robin Cook): With permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the recent nuclear tests in south Asia.

The Government of Pakistan have declared that they carried out six nuclear tests—five on Thursday and a further one on Saturday. We recognise that the Government of Pakistan were under immense pressure to conduct those tests to match those initiated by India, but we are dismayed by the decision to respond in kind, and believe that the interests of Pakistan have been badly served by their decision to do so.

Pakistan's foremost concern is its national security. That security has not been strengthened by the tests. Long-term security for Pakistan can come only from lowering tension with India. It cannot be built on the unstable foundation of an arms race, which will only raise those tensions. Already, it can be seen from news reports from the region that the voices that have been encouraged by the recent confrontation are the voices of extremism.

However, Pakistan's loss is wider than its own reduced security. Pakistan had the chance to win international support and respect for its restraint. That opportunity has now been lost. As with India, the effect of the nuclear tests by Pakistan has been to diminish, not to enhance, the status of that country within the international community.

We have made clear to the Government of Pakistan our dismay at their decision. The Pakistani high commissioner was summoned to the Foreign Office the day after the first tests to receive a message for his Government of our concern. I have recalled the British high commissioner from Islamabad for consultation in London.

We have already taken a number of measures to bring home to the Government of India the strength of our concern at their nuclear test programme. Last week, we cancelled the visit by the Indian Chief of Naval Staff and we have also cancelled a forthcoming visit by its Chief of Army Staff. At the meeting last week of the General Affairs Council of the European Union, we obtained agreement to a presidency text that invited the Commission to review India's preferential trade treatment. Having taken such steps against India, I would expect comparable measures to be agreed by European partners against Pakistan for similar action by it.

Britain's aid programme, unlike that of some other countries, is directly targeted on providing help to the poorest people in the poorest regions. We remain convinced that it would be wrong to penalise the most vulnerable citizens in either country by suspending that aid programme. However, no one, least of all the Governments of both countries, should understate the economic price that they will pay for isolation within the international community. Already, the value of the Indian rupee has fallen. Last week, the Indian Government offered $1 billion of Government bonds and got no takers. In May, there was a net outflow of foreign institutional investment and, last week, the World bank deferred three loans to India for energy and highways projects of almost a billion dollars as a result of member states' objections, including Britain's.

The adverse impact of those economic developments will make it more difficult for India or Pakistan to reduce poverty. That is why it would be a tragedy if both their Governments were to persist in an arms race to acquire the most expensive weapons, which would do nothing to help the millions of their citizens who live in poverty.

A regional arms race would have an impact that would stretch far beyond the region. Other states that have already demonstrated their interest in acquiring nuclear weapons technology will watch closely to see how the international community responds to the precedent set by India and Pakistan. Their nuclear programmes are not, therefore, merely an internal matter for India and Pakistan, but a legitimate matter of concern for the world.

At the suggestion of the United States, the permanent five members of the Security Council of the United Nations will meet in Geneva on Thursday to discuss the security implications of the nuclear test programmes and the heightened tension in the region. As President of the G8, Britain has called a meeting of the group's Foreign Ministers in London next week to co-ordinate the response of the leading economies to the nuclear test programmes, and to consider how best to promote dialogue with India and Pakistan, and between India and Pakistan.

There must be two strategic objectives in our dialogue with the two countries. First, we must press India and Pakistan to sign up to the global regime against nuclear proliferation. The best ways to reduce tension in the region would be for both India and Pakistan to sign up to the comprehensive test ban treaty, to join negotiations at Geneva, without conditions, and to halt production of fissile material for nuclear weapons. Neither the interests of Pakistan and India nor those of any other country in the world are served by encouraging the spread of nuclear weapons.

The second objective must be to tackle the roots of tension between the two countries. There must be a meaningful dialogue between India and Pakistan on the issues that threaten stability in the region. Their security would be much better promoted by confidence-building measures than by nuclear testing programmes.

We must seek a balance in our approach to the issue. We must confront firmly the dangers of nuclear proliferation, but without seeking confrontation with the peoples of India or Pakistan. Britain has a long history of close ties with both countries, and millions of people in Britain have community links with relatives throughout the sub-continent. Britain does not voice its dismay at the recent nuclear tests out of hostility, therefore. On the contrary, it is as a friend of both countries that Britain is appalled at the risks and costs to the peoples of the sub-continent of a nuclear arms race. I ask the whole House to show our united resolve in condemning the nuclear tests and in calling on the Governments of India and Pakistan to stop testing and start talking.

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): The Foreign Secretary is, of course, right to emphasise the extreme seriousness of the situation in which we find ourselves. Nuclear proliferation is one of the greatest dangers to face humanity as we move towards the millennium. When the Foreign Secretary last made a statement on the matter on 14 May, he urged the leaders of Pakistan to show restraint. I share his dismay at their actions since then, and at their failure to respond to his call.

Does the Foreign Secretary accept that these events represent a definitive crisis for the international community and its policy towards non-proliferation?

[Mr. Michael Howard]

If the actions that he has identified do not have the consequences that he seeks, will not the approach thus far taken by the international community to the range of problems posed by non-proliferation have failed? Does not the failure of the consequences for India to which he referred to deter Pakistan suggest that the omens for the continuation of this policy are not good?

We wish the right hon. Gentleman well in his efforts to participate in a resolute response by the international community to this grave state of affairs, but I hope that he accepts that what has happened thus far in the sub-continent, to the dismay of those who are friends of both India and Pakistan, means that the task that he and his colleagues face is immensely serious.

Mr. Cook: I am grateful to the right hon. and learned Gentleman for what I take as support for my statement. If we look back over the past decade, the history of nuclear non-proliferation is not one of failure. What is so depressing about the decision by India and Pakistan to proceed to nuclear tests is that, over recent years, a large number of countries have renounced the nuclear weapons path. The Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Belarus, emerging from under the Soviet Union, explicitly rejected the nuclear option and asked for removal of nuclear weapons. Brazil and Argentina have signed treaties that gave each other the confidence not to proceed to nuclear weapons. Throughout Latin America, countries that could have gone down that path have chosen not to do so. Perhaps most encouragingly of all, South Africa, with the change of Government and constitution, has dismantled its nuclear weapons programme.

The tragedy of India and Pakistan is that they are not going with the trend of the rest of the world but against it. For that reason, I would not at all dissent from the right hon. and learned Gentleman's description that this poses us with a critical challenge to the international response. It is up to us all to make sure that the international community rises to that challenge.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): Is my right hon. Friend aware that to condemn the tests carried out by Pakistan is an especial duty for those of us who for many years have regarded ourselves as friends of Pakistan, and continue to do so? Is he further aware that the world now faces the greatest danger of nuclear war since the Cuban missile crisis, that such a war between India and Pakistan almost took place in 1994, and that there was a danger of a war only last week? Is he aware that the danger of nuclear war between India and Pakistan, which would not be a regional war, will continue until Kashmir is solved between India and Pakistan? Will he therefore consult the United States Secretary of State, the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth and other people of good will actively to bring the parties together to prevent what otherwise will be a global catastrophe?

Mr. Cook: There has been no stouter friend of the people of Pakistan in the House than my right hon. Friend. His words therefore carry particular weight when he criticises this decision by the Government of Pakistan. I agree entirely with him and I said in my statement that the best way to build security for both countries is to tackle the source of tension between them. Any such meaningful dialogue, to be comprehensive, must include their disagreement over Kashmir. I agree that that must be part of the overall solution to the crisis. It is, of course, primarily for the parties concerned themselves to find the solution, but the search for it must now be all the more urgent, and a solution to the tensions over Kashmir would do far more for the security of both countries than 100 nuclear test programmes.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): There is nothing in the Foreign Secretary's statement with which I would disagree. I suspect that many hon. Members are in that position. Notwithstanding what he said in response to the shadow Opposition spokesman, the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), is it not the sad, harsh and incontrovertible fact that the efforts of the declared nuclear powers under the non-proliferation treaty to discourage nuclear proliferation have failed? The five declared nuclear members—who are, of course, the permanent members of the Security Council of the United Nations—have to take some responsibility for that failure, because they did not implement vigorously their responsibilities under article 6 of the non-proliferation treaty.

Ten days ago, when I raised the question of the level of the United Kingdom's nuclear deterrent, the Foreign Secretary said that that was a matter for the Secretary of State for Defence. Has he had time to reconsider that position? If we are to persuade India and Pakistan to exercise restraint and to become signatories to the comprehensive test ban treaty, should we not demonstrate some restraint ourselves? In that respect, will the right hon. Gentleman now confirm his Government's manifesto commitment to deploy no more warheads on the Trident nuclear missile system than there are on the Polaris system it replaces?

Mr. Cook: To repeat a point I made to the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), we have to keep in perspective any failure of the non-proliferation regime. After all, 150 countries have now signed the comprehensive test ban treaty and 180 countries have signed the non-proliferation treaty. It is India and Pakistan which are very much in the minority and on the margin of the international community, not the five permanent members of the Security Council, which have all played a leading part in negotiating those treaties.

As for the record of this Government, since coming to power we have withdrawn the free-fall bomb, the WE177, so there is now only one nuclear weapon system currently in deployment. In April, we, along with France, were the first countries among the nuclear weapon powers to sign the comprehensive test ban treaty. We are playing a leading part in Geneva in negotiating the fissile material cut-off treaty and we very energetically observe the moratorium on nuclear tests.

I said to the hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) last week, not that what became of the British nuclear deterrent was nothing to do with me, but that he had invited me to make a statement that would come best from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence. My right hon. Friend will be making his own statement about the disposition of our nuclear forces come the response to the strategic defence review.

When the hon. and learned Gentleman hears that, I think that he will find confirmation that our plans for nuclear arms control are both ambitious and practical.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): How seriously does my right hon. Friend take the danger that Pakistan might be tempted to use battlefield nuclear weapons first, using weapons technology given them by the Chinese and North Koreans, with the escalation that might follow from that, if, in any future armed conflict—he will know of the three armed conflicts since independence—the Pakistani armed forces were to be worsted because of the disparity in the armed forces of the two countries? What confidence-building measures does he envisage in the short term, especially in trying to get some form of hotline communication between the two countries?

Mr. Cook: Our objectives must be more ambitious than a hotline; in particular, we must put every possible pressure on both India and Pakistan to make sure that they do not proceed from tests of nuclear devices to deploying those devices as weapons in deliverable systems. My hon. Friend is right to say that there will be particular interest in those countries in battlefield nuclear weapons systems. Over the past few days, I have been dismayed to read what I think are dangerous analyses suggesting that the European experience can necessarily be replicated in south Asia, but if people want to learn from our experience, we in Europe took the deliberate decision to dismantle the theatre and battlefield systems first, precisely because they were the most dangerous systems and might have been used first. I therefore very much hope that that is not a line down which south Asia will now go.

Mr. Tom King (Bridgwater): Does the right hon. Gentleman accept the analysis of the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) that not only is this a most critical situation and the worst since the Cuban missile crisis, but there is a real risk that the events of the past week have given the impression that we might have been extremely close to nuclear conflict of some sort? At such a time, of such urgency and with such a need for leadership, is it not clear that there is not much question of where that leadership lies? This country has the presidency of the G8 and of the European Union, and a role in the Commonwealth. Should I read into what the right hon. Gentleman said about the meeting of the G8 and about opening a dialogue that an effort will be made to send, under this country's leadership, emissaries to both countries immediately to start negotiations and discussions? That could be done as well as withdrawing ambassadors and using conventional means, which, I understand, may be necessary in the protocol of such matters. Is it not now necessary to make a much greater impact in a very grave situation?

Mr. Cook: I take it from what the right hon. Gentleman said that he does not disagree with our decision to recall our high commissioner for consultation. Not only is that a way of bringing home our concern, in Islamabad as in Delhi, but it is of practical benefit, in that it enables us to have the advantage of the experience and direct knowledge of those high commissioners.

On leadership, I assure the right hon. Gentleman that the point of summoning the special meeting of the G8 Foreign Ministers, as with that of the Foreign Ministers of the permanent five, is to consider how, together, we can re-strengthen dialogue with India and Pakistan and encourage dialogue between them. That will be at the centre of our discussions. As to the precise method by which we shall choose to pursue that—whether it is by special envoy, by inviting their representatives to meet us or by another method—we shall be considering that until those meetings take place. We are all seized of the critical importance of this matter, and the world must act together to respond to it.

Mr. Roger Godsiff (Birmingham, Sparkbrook and Small Heath): I concur with what my right hon. Friend has said and I, too, condemn the Pakistani Government's decision to conduct nuclear tests. I welcome his statement that until the main issues that separate India and Pakistan are resolved, there will never be peace in that region.

On Kashmir, does my right hon. Friend acknowledge that, in the past, bilateral discussions between Pakistan and India have not, sadly, achieved a resolution of the dispute? Does he agree that it is incumbent on him, at meetings of European Foreign Ministers and of the G8, and on Britain, as a member of the Security Council, to bring Kashmir to the top of the international agenda, because without a resolution there will, regrettably, never be peace between India and Pakistan?

Mr. Cook: The House will be aware that, conventionally, I am criticised for paying too much attention to Kashmir rather than for paying insufficient attention. I agree with my hon. Friend's analysis, but, ultimately, the solution to the problem of Kashmir can be found only with the concurrence of India and Pakistan. The countries that wish them well and organisations such as the G8 and the permanent five members of the Security Council, which are now exercised about the tension between India and Pakistan, might have a role to play, but that role is to encourage the two main parties to find the solution with which they can both live.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid–Sussex): Will the Foreign Secretary consider examining the number of military students in Britain who are from Pakistan and India—he will find that there are quite a number of them—and whether it continues to be appropriate for them to undergo military training in this country? Secondly, will he consider following the model used in the discussions between the Palestinians and the Israelis, whereby a country that is quite dissociated from the area, such as Norway or Sweden, could take on a role that may be appropriated by the G8 to oversee a series of talks that would go on until they came to a conclusion?

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman's latter point will certainly be under examination when we meet. The role of mediator may not be appropriate, but perhaps there will be a role for a facilitator.

On the hon. Gentleman's other point, I shall consider what he said and inquire about the numbers of such students. As I have said, we have already acted to stop high-level military contacts and we are being particularly vigilant about any contact with nuclear scientists from either country. I would not necessarily wish to rupture the ties to which the hon. Gentleman referred. We can resolve the situation only by reducing the tension through dialogue between those countries. We need to achieve the

[Mr. Cook]

right balance between conveying our dismay at the decisions and promoting our contact with the countries, to avoid creating a sense of isolation and to encourage them to be drawn into, not to shy away from, the obligations of the international community.

Mr. Piara S. Khabra (Ealing, Southall): Does the Foreign Secretary agree that, following the nuclear tests by India and Pakistan, it is the moral duty of the five big powers to reduce their stockpiles of dangerous weapons to a level that encourages India and Pakistan to sign the comprehensive test ban treaty and the non-proliferation treaty? Does he further agree that countries such as China and America have in different ways helped Pakistan to develop its nuclear technology and that that has been a folly in American foreign policy?

Mr. Cook: Of course I would agree with my hon. Friend that the permanent powers, which happen also to be the nuclear weapon powers, have a special obligation under article 6 of the non-proliferation treaty. As it happens, Britain has reduced its nuclear stockpile within the past 12 months. Much more progress would have been made if the START 2 treaty had not been blocked in the Duma. I hope that a healthy consequence of the current international anxiety over south Asia will be to prompt some rethinking in the Duma as to whether it is doing its best for Russia's interests by blocking the progress of that treaty.

On the question of collaboration with Pakistan, America has been vigilant over recent years in its relations with Pakistan. There are obvious links between Pakistan and China, but if India reflects on the Chinese reaction to the nuclear test programme, it will realise that it is difficult for anybody in India to convince himself that he now has greater security in relation to China than he had before. Relations with China are now at a 20-year all-time low.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): I am sure that the Secretary of State realises that more than half of the world's poorest people live in India and Pakistan and that 5 million people suffer from AIDS in the Indian sub-continent, where the epidemic is totally out of control. Nearly 1,000 people died recently, simply from the effects of drought. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that this is an obscene recent example of countries not getting their priorities right? How can he make his ethical foreign policy work without jeopardising the poor in those countries?

Mr. Cook: I have to say bluntly to the hon. Lady that there is no way in which we can impose any form of economic sanctions without having an impact on some of the poorest at the margins of those societies. Of course that is one of the guiding principles that we are trying to apply, to make sure that we soften the impact as much as we can. That is why we do not propose, unlike some other countries, to withdraw our aid programme and why we are trying to target measures, such as reviewing trade preferences, in ways that may make some senior business men recognise that perhaps they should speak to senior politicians about the effect of the nuclear test programme. I cannot deny that if those measures were put into effect, they would worsen India's economic position and, therefore, that of its poorest people.

I entirely agree with the hon. Lady about mistaken priorities. One of the great ironies of the Indian nuclear test programme is that on the day that the tests were greeted with demonstrations of support in the streets, there were riots resulting in the smashing of electricity sub-stations because of dissatisfaction with the poor quality of India's electricity grid.

Mr. Dale Campbell-Savours (Workington): May I welcome my right hon. Friend's desire to promote discussions between India and Pakistan? I do not think that the process will be helped in any way if we introduce measures that will penalise either India or Pakistan. Such a process would be totally counter-productive. Given our special relationship with the peoples of those two countries, our function is to get in there, using friendships that have been built up over many generations, and ensure that they sign the necessary treaties as soon as possible.

Mr. Cook: I have great sympathy with the objective that my hon. Friend mentions, and I sought to make it clear in my statement that we are giving a balanced response that seeks to bring home our concern about the nuclear tests, but not to drive the peoples of those countries into a sense of isolation that might encourage them to support their Governments in the steps that they have taken rather than to be critical of them. Therefore, I am very conscious of the point that my hon. Friend makes, but if we do nothing, there is a real danger that the wrong lesson will be taken—that we do not really care about the fact that those countries have broken the world's non-proliferation regime. That is why it is important that we act in a way that cannot be portrayed as hostile to the peoples of those countries, but which brings it home to their Governments that we view this serious step with the greatest gravity.

Mr. Tony Baldry (Banbury): I am sure that the Foreign Secretary will agree that no hon. Member could have any quarrel with anything in his statement—indeed, we support all of it—but I suspect that he will also understand that everyone here is concerned that there should be some movement towards resolution of the issues that divide India and Pakistan and that, of all the countries in the world, neither Pakistan nor India has a better friend than the United Kingdom.

What we should like to hear is this. Of course the work that is done in the G8, the Security Council of the United Nations and the European Union is invaluable, but the UK, as the best friend of India and Pakistan, has a particular role. It would be interesting to hear whether the Foreign Secretary is prepared to signal to both India and Pakistan that quietly we are always willing to help to act as a facilitator, if India and Pakistan ever felt that that would be helpful. As has been said, the experience has been that it is only when a facilitator has been prepared to help that India and Pakistan have made any great progress. Of course, these matters have to be resolved between the two of them bilaterally, but they need help, and the UK is in a unique position to offer such help.

Mr. Cook: I have said to both countries that Britain is willing to offer its good offices if both countries are

willing to accept them. Some of the recent statements of support for that view would have been welcome at the time that I expressed it, but the offer is on the table and I welcome the fact that there is now increasing recognition of the importance of the issue and of the need for action to tackle it, particularly by the two parties concerned.

Of course, Britain, with long historical and close community ties, is well placed as a friend of both countries, but with that friendship and understanding, perhaps the best role that we can play is to ensure that the international community also understands those countries and acts with us in a way that helps to produce a solution and to reduce tension between them.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is my right hon. Friend aware that it gives those of us who marched the streets from Aldermaston to Hyde park and elsewhere, to call for unilateral nuclear disarmament, no comfort to know that the nightmare scenario that we talked about at that time has come about? Does he appreciate that the sad thing is that Britain does not have the same moral authority as many other countries that do not have nuclear weapons? Will he take a suggestion from me not to call on people in America, Russia and other countries that possess the bomb to intercede? Perhaps the best person to do the job would be Nelson Mandela, the President of South Africa, which has renounced nuclear weapons. He could take charge of some kind of mission to intercede on behalf of the big powers, because he commands more moral authority in this affair than we do.

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend speaks with great consistency. However, I do not think that Britain can be accused of speaking falsely on this issue. We do, after all, have the capacity to carry out nuclear tests. We have chosen not to do so. It would have been better for south Asia if both India and Pakistan had shown the same restraint.

My hon. Friend is right that South Africa's international stature and respect have grown immensely because it renounced its nuclear weapons and wound down its nuclear weapons programme. That may make it an acceptable interlocutor with India and Pakistan, but I hope that the Governments of both those countries will reflect on the fact that they, too, could have gained the same respect that South Africa now commands if they had shown the same restraint and the same responsible approach to nuclear weapons programmes.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): May I inject less of a doomsday scenario into the discussion? I remind the Foreign Secretary that he, like me, is old enough to remember the Cuban missile crisis of October 1962. I respectfully suggest to him that comparisons between that incredibly tense situation and what is happening now are overblown hoo-hah. May I also remind him that two years later, in 1964, the Chinese acquired the bomb and first exploded it? At that time, there was an hysterical reaction and people said that it would lead to an uncontrollable arms race and to disaster, but it did not. May I finally suggest that it was inevitable that, once India had exploded its bomb, Pakistan would do likewise? Their actions will not be affected by empty moral gestures by Labour Back Benchers or by a Liberal Democrat Front-Bench spokesman suggesting that the explosion of such weapons has something to do with the number of Trident warheads held by the British.

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman obviously believes in the theory that nuclear weapons at all times and in all places are a good thing. It is not clear to me from what he said where exactly he would draw the line or who he would suggest should not have nuclear weapons. The responsible attitude—which was also taken by the Conservative Front-Bench spokesman—is to seek to prevent the proliferation and escalation of nuclear weapons.

I am not sure that I take it kindly to be reminded that I am old enough to remember the Cuban missile crisis, but I remember it very well and how glad we were when it was all over. I would not wish to visit such a hair-trigger situation on the peoples of south Asia, and I hope that we can avert such a crisis.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): When my right hon. Friend visited India and offered to mediate, he was absolutely right about the issue of Kashmir, despite what some of his critics have said. He is right now to say that that is the root of the problem between India and Pakistan. A strong body of opinion believes that a free and independent Kashmir would perhaps be the answer. Would he consider raising the issue of a plebiscite, so that the people of Kashmir can say what they want?

Mr. Cook: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her kind words. The matter that she raises is the one issue which could unite Delhi and Islamabad, because neither is enthusiastic about an independent Kashmir. We have consistently taken the view that, to be just, the solution must be acceptable to all the peoples of Kashmir—Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist. Finding a solution that would be acceptable to all is a difficult task. Many of them will have a different view of where their future lies. They must be involved in finding a solution, and it must be acceptable to them.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): Does the Foreign Secretary agree that Britain's primary role as a good friend of both India and Pakistan is to urge restraint? Such restraint would be much more likely if a potential solution to the Kashmir problem could be found. This problem has existed since 1947: three wars have been fought and more than 1 million people have been killed. Is it not high time that Britain and America exercised some real leadership and sought a Security Council initiative to determine whether a solution to the problem of Kashmir is forthcoming? Does the Foreign Secretary agree that merely adopting the position of meaningful dialogue between the two countries is no longer acceptable?

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman highlights one of the ironies of India's actions. For 30 years, India has sought to prevent Kashmir from being an issue provoking international attention, but its nuclear test programme has achieved what has been the objective of its policy to prevent for all that time. As to the hon. Gentleman urging us to be more proactive on Kashmir, I repeat to the House that our offer of good offices and to work with other countries and multilateral organisations to find those good

[Mr. Cook]

offices is on the table if both parties are willing to participate. However, when I last made that offer, I do not recall his congratulating me on it. Those who now recognise the gravity of the situation in Kashmir should perhaps reflect on how much humbug they spoke last autumn when I raised the matter.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): As secretary of the all-party parliamentary Pakistan group and as a friend of India, although I understand the pressure on Pakistan to carry out nuclear tests following the tests by India, I believe that Pakistan's decision is regrettable and should be condemned. I strongly support my right hon. Friend in that respect. Unless we solve the tensions that simmer between those two countries, I fear that there will be a fourth war between them. Whether it is nuclear or non-nuclear, it will solve nothing.

I respect my right hon. Friend's views, and I completely understand that India and Pakistan must take the lead on the Kashmir issue, but we still need to spell out to them, time and again, that the only way to unblock the logjam is to get those two countries to sit down at a table and sort out the problem.

Mr. Cook: I agree absolutely: a solution can be found only with the co-operation of the two parties. That is why any willingness to help from outside must proceed with their agreement. But we would urge India and Pakistan to find a solution consistent with their own agreement at Simla and with the UN resolutions.

Mr. Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): While I agree with the condemnation of India and Pakistan, does the Foreign Secretary agree, after many years of the covert development of nuclear weapons by both countries, that there are now overtly seven nuclear weapons states? Is it not time that the five members of the Security Council called an urgent meeting with those two overt nuclear weapons states to discuss what they and some other countries have hitherto regarded as unfair and discriminatory treaties? I do not accept that argument, but it is used by India in particular. In that way, we can ensure that the process is not extended to the middle east and elsewhere.

Mr. Cook: I, too, reject the argument that my hon. Friend has outlined. The non-proliferation treaty has been signed by 180 countries, and it is difficult credibly to argue that it is an unequal treaty, when nearly every country in the world, with the exception of a few such as India and Pakistan, has signed up to it.

As for inviting the two countries to sit down with the five nuclear weapons powers as new nuclear weapons powers, I would urge extreme caution. In the wake of the tests, we must be careful not to appear to reward those countries for carrying them out. If we did so, I fear that that would encourage other countries to follow suit, secure in the knowledge that there was a precedent for them, too, to be treated as de facto nuclear powers.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): I speak as a friend of Pakistan with thousands of Kashmiris in my constituency. Is it not sick madness when a country such as Pakistan, 70 per cent. of whose population is illiterate, spends 25 per cent. of its national budget on defence? Should not that be unreservedly condemned?

When the button was pressed last Thursday evening, I was speaking in my constituency to a reception held by the Kashmir Welfare Association, where my message was the same. Many of my Kashmiri constituents, moreover, were very exercised by the line put out by the Pakistan authorities on Thursday as a pretext for the explosion—that the Indian Government were at that moment preparing to launch an attack on Pakistan's nuclear installations. Does the Foreign Secretary have any intelligence to confirm or reject that?

Mr. Cook: If I had, it would be most unwise of me to share it with the House. I notice that the Indian Government have denied any such intentions, and I have no reason to doubt their word on that.

I strongly agree with my hon. Friend's opening remarks; I know his constituency and his constituents, and I know that he speaks with genuine affection and concern for the peoples of Pakistan. It is deeply tragic that a country where combating illiteracy should be a real national priority carries a defence budget that so greatly outstrips its education budget.

Northern Ireland Referendum

4.14 pm

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Marjorie Mowlam): With permission, Madam Speaker, I shall make a statement about the outcome of the referendum held in Northern Ireland on 22 May.

There was a very positive result: 81 per cent. of the people in Northern Ireland voted, and 71 per cent. of them supported the agreement reached on Good Friday. There is no doubt that it was an emphatic endorsement of the agreement from all sections of the community—republicans, loyalists, Unionists and nationalists. Now they want to see the agreement as a whole—every part of it—work.

In their own referendum, the people of the Irish Republic voted by 94 per cent. to endorse the changes to the Irish constitution required to implement the agreement.

By these referendums, the people of Ireland, north and south, have voted overwhelmingly to say yes to the principle of consent; yes to using only peaceful means to resolve political disputes; yes to fairness and equality; and yes to building new relationships based on agreement, not coercion.

The people have spoken. Those who seek to frustrate that—whether by violence or by other means—fly in the face of democracy. Our job now—both as the Government and in this Parliament—is to act as the people wish.

Let me briefly set out for the House the steps that are now being taken. Last Wednesday, I signed an order bringing into force all the remaining provisions of the Northern Ireland (Elections) Act 1998. The elections to the New Northern Ireland Assembly will take place on 25 June, with the nominations closing at 4 pm on 3 June, this Wednesday. It would not be right for the Government during the election campaign to seek to influence the people's choice, directly or indirectly, but I hope that, on 25 June, those who voted in the referendum will finish the job by voting in the assembly elections as well.

In the meantime, we will work to implement the agreement. Both the British and the Irish Governments will very soon bring into force schemes under the Northern Ireland Arms Decommissioning Act 1997; I am grateful for the efforts of my predecessor, the noble Lord Mayhew, in establishing that legislation and its amnesty provisions. When that happens, there will then be no practical barrier to a start to decommissioning. We look to all parties to honour the commitment that they made to use any influence that they may have to achieve the decommissioning of all paramilitary weapons within two years.

I shall also present to the House shortly a Bill to implement the provisions of the agreement relating to prisoners. The Government are committed to seeking to enact the appropriate legislation to give effect to new arrangements by the end of June. The Bill, which I know the House will wish to examine carefully, will include the safeguards that are in the agreement and to which my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister drew attention in his speech in Belfast on 14 May. The agreement is to be implemented in all its parts, not cherry-picked.

As the Prime Minister said, we need to be sure that both the terms and the spirit of the agreement are met. The Prime Minister set out a range of factors on which it would be possible to make an overall judgment so that we can be sure that all parties are committed exclusively to peace and democracy and that violence is genuinely given up for good.

There are a range of factors to take into account, as the Prime Minister said:

"first and foremost, a clear and unequivocal commitment that there is an end to violence for good, on the part of republicans and loyalists alike, and that the so-called war is finished, done with, gone; that, as the Agreement says, non-violence and exclusively peaceful and democratic means are the only means to be used;

that, again as the Agreement expressly states, the ceasefires are indeed complete and unequivocal; an end to bombings, killings and beatings, claimed or unclaimed; an end to targeting and procurement of weapons; progressive abandonment and dismantling of paramilitary structures actively directing and promoting violence;

full co-operation with the Independent Commission on decommissioning, to implement the provisions of the Agreement;

and no other organisations being deliberately used as proxies for violence."

As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister again made clear:

"we are not setting new preconditions or barriers".

However, we will be giving legislative expression to those factors in the Bill relating to prisoners and the Bill to implement the remainder of the agreement which we shall introduce later this Session.

Our aim is to transfer powers to the assembly and to establish the north-south ministerial council, agreed implementation bodies, the British-Irish council and the British-Irish intergovernmental conference at the same time. We are aiming for early 1999.

In the meantime, following the elections, the assembly will meet first in shadow form in July. In the shadow period of the assembly, Members will elect a Presiding Officer, consider Standing Orders, elect a First Minister and Deputy First Minister, examine Northern Ireland departmental structures and arrangements and allocate other ministerial posts.

In the period after the assembly elections, there will also be meetings of the British-Irish council and the north-south ministerial council in shadow form. In the shadow north-south ministerial council, representatives from Northern Ireland and the Irish Government will undertake a work programme in consultation with the Government with a view to identifying and agreeing by 31 October this year areas for north-south co-operation and implementation.

The agreement also provides for a range of measures to promote rights and equality of opportunity in Northern Ireland which the Government will continue to implement.

I hope very shortly to announce the other members of the independent commission to review policing in Northern Ireland who will serve alongside the chairman, Chris Patten. I also hope to announce soon the arrangements for the review of criminal justice, including the assessors who will provide an independent element in the review.

On 22 May, the people voted overwhelmingly to endorse the Good Friday agreement. I commend that endorsement to the House as we undertake our clear duty to follow the will of the people and implement the agreement in the weeks and months ahead.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): I am sure that the Secretary of State was correct to say that the referendum

[Mr. Andrew MacKay]

was a remarkable milestone in the history of Northern Ireland. The turnout of more than 81 per cent. frankly shames the rest of the United Kingdom, where the participation rates in recent elections have been much lower.

There is absolutely no doubt that the overwhelming majority of people in Northern Ireland are anxious to show their democratic credentials and yearn for a lasting settlement and an end to the troubles. The result for the yes campaign was equally significant. By any reasonable statistical judgment, it was a vote in both communities for the agreement, and we must never let critics of the agreement say anything else, as it would be a plain untruth.

Looking forward to the assembly elections, may I ask the Secretary of State for slightly more detail about the forthcoming legislation which will be introduced before the elections are held? When I was campaigning for a yes vote in the Province with my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition, it became very clear indeed, particularly in the final few days of the referendum campaign, that a significant number of moderate, ordinary, decent people in both communities finally decided to vote yes only when the Prime Minister had given them clear, unequivocal assurances that decommissioning and the renunciation of violence would be incorporated in the legislation on early prisoner release and setting up the assembly, with particular reference to members of the assembly taking ministerial or Executive office. It would be a tragedy if those assurances were not fully incorporated in the legislation to be introduced shortly. I should like to be certain that they will be. If they are not, I fear that more politicians who will not act positively will be elected to the assembly, which would be a great pity and not in the interests of the people of Northern Ireland.

The Secretary of State was right to announce that the Government wish in no way to interfere in the assembly elections. Her Majesty's Opposition share that wish. However, this is a time for great sensitivity. I wonder whether the Secretary of State was right to have invited Sinn Fein-IRA leaders to the Hillsborough reception. Such acts will destabilise the Unionist electorate and community. We have been fortunate that, for wrong and inexcusable reasons, Mr. Adams and Mr. McGuinness have declined the invitation. I should like assurances that there will be no further such insensitive acts before the elections, which could bring about the wrong result.

Marjorie Mowlam: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's opening comments about the reasonable statistical judgment that there was a majority in both communities in favour of the agreement. We have done a fair amount of work on that and agree whole-heartedly with his interpretation. We also welcome his support for non-interference by Her Majesty's Government or Her Majesty's Opposition in the Northern Ireland elections. However, if individual Members of Parliament from either side want to go over, that is a choice for them. It is not up to us to dictate to other Members.

The hon. Gentleman's point about decommissioning and holding office is central, but I should like to deal first with his more minor point about the garden party later this week. It is normal to invite representatives of all political parties to the garden party. All those who signed up to the Good Friday agreement have been invited. That is the only just way to proceed. We cannot expect people to participate together in the assembly if we judge them by different standards. More than 90 per cent. of the invitations this year went to people from the national health service, because the 50th anniversary of the NHS is being celebrated at the garden party. We have kept the arrangements fully under discussion with all concerned parties. I was well aware of the sensitivities among the families who have been victims of the violence, including the royal family. Had matters turned out differently, as the organiser of the event I would have ensured that nobody suffered any further hurt or pain.

The hon. Gentleman also raised the more substantive point of the Prime Minister's comments on 14 May, outlining the factors that are crucial to moving the process forward. My right hon. Friend has made it clear that there must be a genuine and unequivocal commitment to peace by those participating in the assembly. We shall make an overall judgment based on those four factors, which I listed in my statement, so I shall not bother the House by repeating them all. One was about ensuring the full co-operation of the parties with the independent commission on decommissioning to implement the agreement. Our judgment will be based on consideration of all the factors. I cannot prejudge that decision, but I assure the hon. Gentleman that his point will be answered in the settlement Bill and the prisoners Bill. As he well knows, there are arrangements in the agreement for excluding from office those who are not genuinely committed to peace.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Rather than dwelling on invitations to garden parties, is it not far more important to dwell on the bigger picture—the fact that the attempt by terrorism, murder and violence to force Northern Ireland out of the United Kingdom has been defeated by democracy, something in which the whole House rejoices? Are there not two dangers? The first is of terrorist breakaway groups from the IRA, and possibly from loyalist murder gangs, that do not accept the ceasefire and would do their utmost to destroy the democratic decision of the large majority in Northern Ireland. Secondly, although I understand and appreciate why the Secretary of State does not want to intervene in the election for the assembly, would it not be extremely unfortunate if anyone elected were elected only on the basis of trying to wreck the agreement, and therefore, in his own way, undermined what the majority of people in Northern Ireland agreed to last week?

Marjorie Mowlam: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments. It is important that we act in a fair and just way in the weeks and months ahead as we try to put into practice the plans for building peace and ensure that the process begins to work. I agree that we should focus on the fact that democracy has spoken. The people in Northern Ireland—71 per cent. of them—have said that, by consent, they want to find a peaceful way forward. That is the answer to the terrorist breakaway groups, whether they be the Irish National Liberation Army, Loyalist Volunteer Force, Continuity IRA or the 32 County Sovereignty Committee. They in no way represent the people of Northern Ireland or of the Republic. There is a wish to find another way forward. I assure the House that terrorist breakaway groups that

continue to function will be treated very firmly by both the Governments in the north and in the Republic, working together where necessary to ensure that such groups do not destabilise the process, as they are clearly intent on doing. We will do our best as much as possible to ensure that destabilisation does not take place.

In the elections on 25 June, we would obviously want people who are committed to taking forward the spirit of the Good Friday agreement into the assembly. The election is the people's choice; it is their voice. The electorate in Northern Ireland are very savvy, they know how the electoral system works and I have faith in them.

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): The Liberal Democrats very much welcome the decisive referendum on 22 May. We congratulate the Secretary of State and her Ministers on the job of work that they did, as we do former Ministers on their work in bringing about the historic decision. We also welcome the fact that legislation, especially to deal with prisoners, will be brought before the House sooner rather than later. That will be a litmus test of whether the entire agreement will be followed through.

I spent last week partly in Northern Ireland and partly in the Republic of Ireland. As the concert at Stormont in Belfast was going on, I was speaking to people who voted no. We must remember that about 28 or 29 per cent. of the people of Northern Ireland voted no. It is crucial that we do not forget that large number, the majority of whom are not terrorists, bombers or wreckers but people who have genuine worries about the future of their Province. What efforts will the Secretary of State and her Ministers make to ensure that those people are not excluded from the future but are brought into the fold and can play a positive part in what we hope will be a very successful transition to peace in Northern Ireland?

Marjorie Mowlam: I thank the hon. Gentleman, and would add to his list of thanks gratitude for the support and help that the Liberal Democrats have given. I avoided giving a great thank you in my statement because it took so long last time. The people who have put in the work know who they are. Their collective effort has brought us to where we are today.

I agree that it is welcome that legislation on prisoners is before the House sooner rather than later. It is in the agreement that it will be in place by the end of June. We must not ever forget that we are dealing with a package and cannot cherry-pick. Some people do not like some bits and others do not like other bits, but we must treat the agreement as a package in order to be able to keep the whole thing together. That is what the parties signed up for and that is what we must keep on the table.

I agree with the hon. Gentleman's last point—the same point was made by the hon. Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay). There are many who voted yes for peace, and there are those who have concerns—there is no doubt about that. The Prime Minister, when he was across on 14 May, did his best to reassure those who were seeking more information.

Like the hon. Gentleman, I would like to build bridges, as we did during the referendum. We funded all the parties during the referendum to put their case because we did not want to discriminate against anyone, whatever their position. We are talking with all parties about the elections. We will do all we can—not just with the parties, but with the people—to answer questions and to ease fears, because unless we can allay those fears, trust and confidence will not exist for the future.

Mr. Peter Brooke (Cities of London and Westminster): I congratulate the people of Ireland, in both parts, on the clarity of their decision, and I congratulate the Government on their conduct of the referendum. Does the Secretary of State agree that, during the referendum, the two Governments made at least one decision that might have had serious adverse consequences? I speak delphically, but I think she knows to what I refer. Will the right hon. Lady acknowledge that, during this next difficult year, there will not be much margin for similar errors to be made?

Marjorie Mowlam: I do not know whether the right hon. Gentleman prefers to be seen as the father or the grandfather of this agreement, but his input eight or nine years ago created what happened early this year, and it took place, in many ways, thanks to his initial work and the risks that he took.

The releases, to which the right hon. Gentleman was referring, were different in nature. One was not ours—it was the Irish Government's. We have made releases to try to bring the process forward. The other point is that those releases are part of an overall package of prisoner compassionate and temporary leave that was put in place by the Government of which the right hon. Gentleman was a member. I had to decide whether to change the system on this occasion because of the individuals concerned, bearing in mind the impact of their release on the prisons and the impact on individuals of changing the system for external reasons. I thought that it was safer to stick with a scheme that had been in place for many years.

Kate Hoey (Vauxhall): The Secretary of State will be aware of the vital role played by the Prime Minister in the referendum campaign, particularly in the last few days. She will be aware particularly of the personally written pledges he gave when he spoke to an audience in Coleraine a couple of days before the vote. How will these pledges be incorporated into the Bill, as that is what the people of Northern Ireland thought was going to happen?

Marjorie Mowlam: I fully concur with my hon. Friend on the central role of the Prime Minister in the last days of the referendum campaign. On the personally written pledges which she and I saw in Coleraine, I repeated them in the House today and I listed them as the four factors. I have said that the four factors are part of the overall agreement and will be written into the Bills on prisoners and on the settlement.

Sir Brian Mawhinney (North–West Cambridgeshire): The right hon. Lady is absolutely right to propose legislation on the release of prisoners, however distasteful that will be to a lot of people and however inevitable it is, given Irish history. As she prepares the Bill, will she give a moment's thought to the horror of more than 3,000 murders in the past 25 years? Within that horror, will she recognise that some of the murders were so horrible that the sense of revulsion swept across the community, irrespective of political or religious view? Would she be willing to give herself reserved powers in the Bill so that,

[Sir Brian Mawhinney]

after consulting—perhaps on a bipartisan basis—it might be agreed that there are certain people on both sides of the community whose deeds were so dastardly that they ought not to be part of the release process?

Marjorie Mowlam: I give more than a moment's thought to the victims, and, as the right hon. Gentleman knows, we set up the Bloomfield commission many months ago to consider what responses we could make on a much larger scale than previously. It is difficult for everyone to cope with change, but victims' families will find it even harder—we want to ensure that they receive fair treatment in the consideration of the issues. I have appointed a Minister to ensure that the commission's recommendations are taken seriously, pushed through the system and delivered, so that the victims' families see a change in the policies that we adopt.

I thank the right hon. Gentleman for what he said in the first part of his question. There is no doubt that the release of prisoners has been an on-going factor. He and I know—as do many Conservative Members—that that process was started in 1995 under the previous Government, and that 240 prisoners have already been released early, some of whom are those horrific people to whom he refers. Half those who will be given accelerated release under the proposed scheme would be out even if we made no changes. Safeguards have been built in—I know that the right hon. Gentleman has considered them—such as the revocation of licences if there is a breach in the commitment to the ceasefire and to a peaceful way forward. Moreover, particular conditions apply to lifers.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): I welcome the neutrality of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on the election, but I think that we are all aware of the areas on which her glint of approval will fall. It is appropriate that the Government should not adopt a particular attitude, as there is no Labour party in Northern Ireland; if there were, the Government's approval might appropriately be given to it. Will the Republic adopt a similarly neutral attitude to the election?

Some of us, as Back Benchers, have the advantage of not being bound by the self-denying ordinance and can involve ourselves in the arrangements, although we should consider whether it would be tactically wise to do so, or whether people would be offended by our involvement. Nevertheless, I believe that we should all support the parties that are with the agreement 100 per cent. It is by no means the case that all those who voted no will not accept the decision that was made in the referendum—it is perfectly possible for people to vote one way, to find that the result went against them and then to operate in the new framework.

Marjorie Mowlam: It was exactly my hon. Friend of whom I was thinking when I said earlier that some individuals would want to do their own thing. I find it difficult, if not impossible, to speak for the Republic, and I should not speak for another Government, but it would be fair to say that they have shown sensitivity to the issue—I do not think that there will be any difficulties on that front.

I agree with my hon. Friend's final point—some who voted yes may vote in the elections to the assembly for a party that said no, and some who voted no may vote for a party that said yes. That is what I mean when I say that it is the people's choice and decision.

Mr. Tom King (Bridgwater): Will the right hon. Lady accept my congratulations on the roles that she and the Prime Minister played in securing the significant achievement that we are recording today, which is another important step in the long march towards a happier Northern Ireland and island of Ireland? She said that it is not for her to speak for the Republic of Ireland, but does she recognise the significance of the fact that a referendum was held on the same day on, in effect, the same issue in both parts of the island of Ireland? Those people who have said that the people of Ireland have not been able to express their will since the 1918 election no longer have a hiding place—let no one forget that that excuse is now totally expunged from a valid record of Northern Ireland events.

Will the right hon. Lady confirm that she made a slip of the tongue in saying that 71 per cent. of people voted for peace? I know that she meant to say that those people voted for the agreement. I strongly endorse the remarks of hon. Members that many of the people who desperately want peace but did not have the conviction to vote for the agreement can be won by the Government's confidence and resolution in the weeks and months ahead.

Marjorie Mowlam: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his contribution, partly because I know what a tough time he had in doing my job—it was not easy in those days, so I appreciate his comments. The consent of the majority of people north and south is historically crucial. I accept his slight rebuke, in that people voted for the agreement, but I believe that the agreement was the best option for getting all the parties together. Agreement on the basis of consent has given us a chance that we have not had for years, and I appreciate the support that he has given today.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): May I add to the congratulations to politicians on both sides of the House my congratulations to the armed forces and to the police? If those people had not put their lives at risk—and, in many cases, lost their lives—in manning the front line for so many years, the men of violence would not have recognised the importance of making peace.

I re-emphasise a point on prisoner releases that I made during one of the Secretary of State's previous statements and which she seemed partly to acknowledge. Does she agree that one of the reasons why men of violence from both sides of the divide have been keen for the agreement is to secure the release from gaol of convicted murderers? Does she accept the importance of retaining the incentive to prevent such people from returning to violence? If it is proposed that convicted killers should be let out en bloc on licence, will she confirm that, if the peace agreement breaks down, they will be put back in gaol en bloc, and not only if they, as individuals, are caught committing another crime?

Marjorie Mowlam: May I set the record straight in a number of ways? There are no releases en bloc; each case is considered individually by an independent commission.

If there is any breach in the conditions on which a prisoner has been let out, the licence will be revoked and the prisoner will be put back in gaol.

The agreement will work only if all the parts move together. There is no general release of prisoners at one point in time. To build trust and confidence between the groups, we must move in parallel on the different elements—prisoners, decommissioning, the north-south ministerial council and the New Northern Ireland Assembly—if we are to make progress. If we do not move on one element, the agreement will not work. That is why the four factors to which I referred in my statement are central to this process, as will be reflected in the forthcoming Bills. Those four factors encapsulate the essence of the six pledges that the Prime Minister made in Coleraine.

Mr. Tim Collins (Westmorland and Lonsdale): Given the importance of the commitment, which the Secretary of State repeated today and which the Prime Minister originally made, that participation in the Executive of the Assembly will be contingent on full co-operation in decommissioning, will she confirm that, for that assessment, she will continue to treat Sinn Fein and the IRA as the same organisation?

Marjorie Mowlam: I have already said that Sinn Fein and the IRA are inextricably linked. I also said today that the agreement sets out arrangements for excluding people from office if they are not genuinely committed to peace. The Prime Minister has made it clear that if the arrangements are not working, we shall support changes to them. The overall judgment on whether parties are genuinely committed to peace will be based on the range of factors set out by the Prime Minister, which will, as I said, be given legislative expression in both Bills that will come before the House later this year.

Crown Prosecution Service

4.49 pm

The Attorney-General (Mr. John Morris): With permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a statement.

The report of the review of the Crown Prosecution Service has today been placed before Parliament and published. I set up the review on 12 June 1997, under the chairmanship of Sir Iain Glidewell, to examine the organisation and structure of the CPS and to consider what changes might be necessary to provide for more effective and efficient prosecution of crime. Its terms of reference reflected the widely held concerns expressed about the Crown Prosecution Service in the Labour party paper "The Case for the Prosecution", published shortly before the election.

The report concludes that the CPS has not achieved the improvement in the effectiveness and efficiency of the prosecution process that was expected to result from its establishment in 1986. It recognises a number of reasons for that, extending back to the earliest days of the service, and recommends significant change in the structure and form of management of the CPS. It also makes clear, however, that the CPS has achieved much in its short life in establishing itself as a cohesive, national and independent prosecuting service. Moreover, the review team is certain that it can overcome its problems and that it has the potential to become a lively, successful and esteemed part of the criminal justice system. Sadly, it adds, none of those adjectives applies at present to the service as a whole.

The report—which, in large measure, confirms the judgments that we formed in opposition—sets out an agenda for an organisation that is less centralised and in which lawyers spending less time on management and more on prosecuting. Our paper "The Case for the Prosecution" covered only one, but a very important, facet of the Government's programme of reforming the criminal justice system. That programme includes improving the management and organisation of the magistrates courts system, changes in the youth justice system and proposals for speeding up justice generally.

The core proposal for the CPS—a national headquarters setting clear standards and policies, but with implementation effected by better-run and more local organisations enjoying real autonomy—is fully in line with the Government's approach on a range of issues. While the Government are keen to see toughly audited targets for performance and priorities, they also want the professional to be left to get on with what the professional does best.

The report endorses the Government's decision, announced in May last year, to divide the CPS into 42 areas coterminous with police areas, and recommends that the reorganisation needed to give effect to that decision be used as an opportunity for a genuinely new start for the service.

The report is comprehensive in its analysis and recommendations. I shall mention a few highlights. It proposes that each of the new areas should be headed by a chief Crown prosecutor. The 42 chief Crown prosecutors will be crucial to the success of the new CPS. They must be people of stature in the local community

[Mr. John Morris]

who are recognised by local people as their chief prosecutors. They must be able to stand on equal terms with the chief constable, the local judiciary and other key players in the criminal justice system, and they must be recognised as being responsible, with them, for the effective delivery of criminal justice in the area.

The report makes recommendations aimed at ensuring that staff in the CPS should be allowed to get on with their core activity of prosecuting and be released from the burden of management. Moreover, it recognises the need for a better career structure for the staff of the service. The report proposes a radical and far-reaching reorganisation of the CPS. It proposes that the role of headquarters should, in addition to some casework responsibilities, be focused on core functions of setting the national framework and resourcing and monitoring the areas, and that a chief executive, who would rank second in the organisation to the Director of Public Prosecutions, should be appointed. That individual would be responsible to and work closely with the DPP, but would relieve him or her of the great bulk of managerial and administrative work.

The report's recommendations are intended to enable the CPS to handle cases in magistrates courts speedily, while devoting greater effort to more serious cases in both magistrates courts and the Crown court. It recommends that the CPS should take over the conduct of a prosecution immediately after the police charge the defendant and proposes that some support functions of the police service and the CPS, which often involve substantial duplication, should be undertaken by an integrated unit, staffed by a mixture of CPS lawyers and caseworkers assisted by police officers attached to the unit. The unit would prepare and deal with many straightforward cases in their entirety. These are innovative proposals which will need to be considered with special care.

The report also deals with the role of central casework—the section of the CPS that deals with very serious and sensitive cases from all over the country, such as terrorism and cases involving serious allegations against the police. The report describes a series of long-running problems in that section which are now being addressed. It endorses the need for realistic staffing, external recruitment, better training and improved casework audit procedures. It also recommends that central casework should not be treated as if it were like a geographical area, but should be incorporated into headquarters, where the unique nature of the work done and the need for special expertise can be recognised.

The Glidewell proposals add up to a real challenge, not only for the CPS but for the Government. We must examine them in the context of our existing initiatives. The review team's report contains much that accords with the Government's approach. In particular, it recognises the need for the agencies that make up the criminal justice system to have shared and mutually reinforcing objectives. It recognises that the problems of the CPS cannot be viewed in isolation from those of the other agencies that make up the criminal justice system and that the improvements to the system that are so urgently required will come not just from improving the individual parts, but from ensuring that the various agencies involved operate together better. That approach is fully in accord with the Government's approach in setting up the cross-cutting spending review of the criminal justice system.

The Government fully accept the need for change in the CPS. We intend to lose no time in starting the process. A first major step will be the selection of the 42 chief Crown prosecutors, a programme put into abeyance on the advice of the review team. The new DPP will proceed with that, once in post.

The announcement by the Director of Public Prosecutions on 20 May 1998 of her intention to stand aside before the end of her contractual period so that her successor can be appointed to drive forward the necessary change is a generous move, reflecting her commitment to the interests of the service. I pay warm tribute to Dame Barbara Mills for some nine years of public service, first as Director of the Serious Fraud Office and currently as DPP. In both cases, she has provided strong leadership, and her contribution will long be valued.

The report contains some 75 recommendations covering a wide range of issues. The Government accept the thrust of its proposals for reordering CPS priorities to focus more on the core business of prosecuting, greater separation of management from legal work, greater autonomy for the areas and better prospects for staff. We accept the recommendation for the appointment of a chief executive. Mr. Mark Addison has been appointed and will take up his appointment within a matter of days. Other recommendations relating to the more detailed internal management of the CPS will be for the chief executive to consider as one of his first steps.

A number of the recommendations affect the responsibilities of other Ministers, notably my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and my noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor. Decisions on those recommendations will be taken in consultation with them. It is important that our views be informed by contributions from as wide a range of sources as possible. Therefore, I invite interested organisations, practitioners and others who may be affected by, or otherwise wish to comment on, the proposals in the report to forward their views to me or my ministerial colleagues.

The Government will publish a formal response to the recommendations, setting out our response to each recommendation, whether it will be implemented, and if so how. A plan of action will also be drawn up and published.

The quality of the report shows the hard work and talent of the review team: Sir Iain Glidewell, Sir Geoffrey Dear, Mr. Robert McFarland and the secretariat to the team. I could not have expected more. I extend to them on behalf of the Government the warmest possible thanks.

Finally, I should like to pay my own tribute to the staff of the CPS. The report recognises in many passages their commitment and professionalism. I have seen that myself during visits, both before and after the election, to CPS branches. There is a strong desire for change in most, if not all, of the CPS. I know that the staff of the CPS are willing and able to take their proper place in the criminal justice system. I also know that they are the most precious resource of the CPS. They have undergone a period of intense and demoralising uncertainty during the review. I believe that today marks the beginning of a new way forward for the CPS and its staff. In the making of

the decisions for the future, the staff must be consulted. Their interests must be considered and implementation must be phased so as to minimise disruption to them.

I have no doubt that the talent, enthusiasm and commitment exist to permit the CPS to take its rightful place in the criminal justice system. Change is needed. The work of the review team provides us with a firm basis on which to make decisions for the future. While there is more work to be done, I believe that the process has now well and truly begun which will permit the CPS to become a more effective and esteemed national prosecuting body.

Sir Nicholas Lyell (North-East Bedfordshire): First, we join the Attorney-General in thanking Sir Iain Glidewell and his team for the obvious hard work that has gone into the report. I was glad to hear the Attorney-General's tribute to the Director of Public Prosecutions, Dame Barbara Mills, and I hope that he will not think it out of order if I express some regret that the spin doctors that the Labour party often so effectively employs in other fields were unable to prevent—or at least balance—the disgraceful hatchet job in *The Sunday Times* this weekend, which she did not deserve.

Does the Attorney-General agree that the key to the way forward is the close working together of the police, the Crown Prosecution Service, the Court Service, the judiciary and the probation service? For that reason, I am pleased to see the Home Secretary is sitting beside the right hon. and learned Gentleman.

The Labour party must be careful not to believe too much of its own propaganda. In its report before the election, "The Case for the Prosecution", much was made of the fact that crime had doubled and the number of prosecutions or convictions had dropped to a third. The impression was given that that was somehow the fault of the CPS. Does the Attorney-General accept that that is not and could not be the case? The CPS prosecutes the cases brought forward by the police and it prosecutes in an overwhelming proportion of those cases.

I am glad that the report recognises that there remains a strong need for a powerful central core to the CPS, which will need strong and effective leadership in the future. Can the Attorney-General tell us what is happening as regards the appointment of a new Director of Public Prosecutions? Will the post be advertised? From where is he seeking to find such a person? When does he hope to make the appointment?

Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman recognise that in appointing 42 new chief Crown prosecutors—one for each police area—he is to some extent substantially increasing a higher level of management? I do not criticise that, but does he recognise that the prime reason for focusing a chief Crown prosecutor on a police area is to emphasise that the police and the CPS have a joint responsibility and that it will take all the backing that the Home Secretary can give and that of chief constables—as well as anything that the right hon. and learned Gentleman can do—to enable a chief Crown prosecutor who, in many areas, has perhaps 30 lawyers and 100 support staff under his command to gain proper respect equivalent to that given to a chief constable, who has perhaps 1,200 officers?

On magistrates courts and the preparation of work there, if the CPS is to run effectively the administration support units that are at present run by the police, does the Attorney-General agree that two things will have to happen? First, the CPS will have to be given the necessary resources. They will have to come out of the criminal justice budget, and the Home Office may have to give some ground in that respect. Secondly, there are 60 police officers for every CPS lawyer and one cannot conjure out of thin air lawyers to run the administration support units. They will need effective backing from senior police officers to ensure that the units deliver effective prosecutions.

Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman recognise that he is following the course that we were taking? I am glad that he and the Home Secretary are also following that course in seeking to speed up cases into magistrates courts, through the Narey report. Can the right hon. and learned Gentleman confirm that that will continue?

At least a year before the election, I saw some valuable studies in which e-mailing techniques were being used between the police, the CPS and the Court Service. Surely it should be possible to take that forward rapidly so that those three services can communicate better. I accept that information technology has been a bugbear for the CPS over the years. Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman agree? What will be done to improve that situation?

I welcome the fact that there are to be contributions from outside before the Government finally deliver their response, but can we now expect an early response? Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman accept that the report has been published six months later than he originally believed and led us to believe, and that there is little time to lose? Finally, can we expect a debate in Government time on this important subject before too long?

The Attorney–General: I shall try to deal with the right hon. and learned Gentleman's catalogue of questions. He started by mentioning what he described as a hatchet job in *The Sunday Times*. I, too, deplore that unnecessary personal attack on the Director of Public Prosecutions. I would not be responsible for allowing any spin doctor to do that. Indeed, the reverse would be true.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman may take a great deal of comfort on liaison with the police. Joint units are complicated and need to be carefully worked out, but they will require considerable discussion involving me, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, the Lord Chancellor's Department and the Association of Chief Police Officers. I believe that they are the right way to prevent one side blaming the other—a practice which used to prevail much more than it does now, but which I have experienced dozens of times in court. I want to bring that to an end.

I want high-calibre chief Crown prosecutors in each of the 42 areas. We will do away with the 13 areas set up in 1993, which were approved by the right hon. and learned Gentleman. Although some advantages have obtained from that reorganisation, including the welding of a better national system, Sir Iain Glidewell and his team have found, perhaps with hindsight, that it was a mistake. Whatever the intention, the system resulted in each area headquarters becoming an extension of the principal headquarters. Real devolution has not taken place, which is the defect of the previous reorganisation.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman is absolutely right to say that resources have to be considered whenever there is a new arrangement regarding the police and the

[The Attorney-General]

CPS. If the CPS takes more responsibility for managing cases after charge, including warning witnesses, comforting victims and matters of that kind, I believe cardinally—I have believed it all the years I have been a Minister—that no decision should be taken on the transfer of departmental responsibility without a decision at the same time about resources. It is no good complaining years later about lack of resources; the decision should be taken at the same time, as we have all learnt from experience. I am determined that that will happen.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman takes particular interest in speeding up justice. The object of the new arrangements is to streamline cases to avoid overlap and duplication and to shorten lines of communication between the investigator and the prosecutor.

There are detailed proposals on information technology. The Government are considering better means of ensuring a closer interface between various IT systems. When I was a young Minister in 1964, there were 12 gas boards and 12 electricity boards, and I took no comfort from the fact that each ordered its own computers. The situation has not changed a great deal, but we hope to do something about that, if very late in the day.

On the right hon. and learned Gentleman's point about our reporting six months late, I must say that we promised in "The Case for the Prosecution" that the report would be completed within a year of our taking office. Today is 1 June, so we are only a month after that date. I had hoped that it would be done earlier, and have from time to time indicated that it would be done earlier, but I do not believe that the right hon. and learned Gentleman has a great deal of room for complaint that we have missed the date by a month. Despite our hopes that it would be done more quickly, it was necessary that Sir Iain and his team should carry out full consultation, and they have done so.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman asked for a debate in Government time. He knows that that is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, who will have heard his words.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): I endorse my right hon. and learned Friend's tribute to Dame Barbara Mills. Whatever has gone wrong in the Crown Prosecution Service, it would be quite wrong to blame her.

Has obstruction by the police played any part in CPS difficulties? My right hon. and learned Friend will recall that the police resolutely opposed the independent prosecution service when it was first set up.

Would the CPS's problems be alleviated if its lawyers had rights of audience in the higher courts? When Dame Barbara Mills last came before the Home Affairs Committee, she said that the Bar Council was being obstructive on that.

Does my right hon. and learned Friend have any plans to deal with returned briefs, a problem endemic in the criminal justice system? Lawyers discover, often at the last moment, that something more interesting or immediate has turned up, which leads to severe difficulties.

The Attorney-General: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's remarks because, as Chairman of the Home Affairs Committee, he keeps a close watch on developments. When the CPS was set up there were difficulties between the police and the new organisation, but the whole idea of the new organisation was to separate investigation from prosecution. The independent reviewing of cases was the main reason for creation of the CPS. There were bound to be difficulties, but, in my experience the situation has improved enormously over the years. We want to build on that, and closer liaison and better machinery—the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Sir N. Lyell) attaches importance to it—will help us get over any remaining difficulty. There is a real need to speed up prosecutions as effectively and efficiently as possible. I hope that the Government can find the machinery to do so in these recommendations.

Sir Iain Glidewell and his team have commended what has already been done on limited rights of audience for the CPS. Further rights are a matter for my noble Friend the Lord Chancellor, who is concerned about that point.

The Home Affairs Committee, the National Audit Office and Sir Iain have all written a great deal on the return of briefs. The CPS will have to consider that issue carefully and, although I do not detract from Sir Iain's comments, there is a need for great improvement.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): We welcome the Glidewell report and congratulate Sir Iain and his team. We hope that we will soon have an opportunity to debate this important matter in the House, but welcome the establishment of 42 areas that will have significant autonomy.

The Attorney-General will agree that justice must be seen to be done, and be open and accountable. When the CPS decides not to prosecute, will he ensure that it gives its reasons? We understand that the CPS has to work closely with the police, but it is vital that it should be independent of the police. That is a difficult balance. What safeguards does he propose in sensitive areas, such as prosecutions of police officers? How much work is being done by unqualified staff at the CPS? Is he satisfied that there are sufficient experienced, legally qualified staff not only to cope with the burden of cases but to do so efficiently and expeditiously? More than anything else, that would restore the morale of the CPS and the public's faith in it.

The Attorney-General: I have already dealt with the question of a debate.

I welcome the hon. Gentleman's comments on the areas, which we regard as important. That is why we decided on the matter within weeks of taking office. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and I attach considerable importance to having chief constables responsible for areas that are coterminous with those of the chief Crown prosecutors. I believe that that is an important step.

Sir Iain and his team considered decisions not to prosecute, or to downgrade an offence, closely. Such decisions are of public concern, and many hon. Members—I for one—receive letters from constituents on them. Unfortunately, the statistics and the evidence are not clear. The team said that there are suspicions that downgrading happens. It varies in respect of particular offences and of different areas. These are matters of

concern, and further work needs to be done. As the hon. Gentleman said, it is vital that justice is seen to be done. Where someone has committed, or is alleged to have committed, an offence, he should be charged with an appropriate offence.

There is considerable emphasis in the report on unqualified staff, and qualified staff who hope to exercise their rights of audience in the Crown court, having adequate and proper training. I believe that they have an important role to play if they have such training.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): My right hon. and learned Friend knows that the House feels that this report is long overdue. The service had become constipated, incompetent and sadly lacking in leadership. The sooner action is taken, the better. Can he assure us that the reorganisation back to local units that are truly responsive to local needs will be undertaken as soon as possible? Will there be an audit of the quality of casework undertaken by those units? Above all, can he assure us that the public will no longer be subjected to cases being allowed to drag on for five years before they are finally lost?

The Attorney-General: I know of my hon. Friend's concern with a particular case. I have written to her substantially about her very real concern. She knows my interest in the matter.

The intention is to implement the report as rapidly as possible. That is what we did by setting up the 42 areas and what I do today by announcing the chief executive. I did not deal with this in my reply to the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Sir N. Lyell)—I should have told him that, in the summer months, the new Director of Public Prosecutions will be appointed by open competition, following advertisement. We hope that he or she will be in place by the autumn.

I assure my hon. Friend that all the other facets of reorganisation will be done as soon as possible. We have taken all the steps possible, but I was anxious that we should have the evidence before moving further than establishing the 42 areas. Sir Iain has provided me with the evidence, chapter and verse, so that I can go on, in concert with my right hon. Friends, to ensure that we deliver the parts of the Glidewell report that we deem, on further consideration, to be right and proper. It is a very detailed, careful and well worked out report.

There are proposals for expanding and enhancing the Crown Prosecution Service inspectorate by having a lay chairman and lay members on the committee that will oversee it. We attach importance to that, as we did in opposition.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): The report has much to commend it. I welcome the references to integrated units. The Attorney-General mentioned that in the past there were—I believe that they are still current—some areas where relations between the police and prosecutors were not as good as they should have been. Implementing the integrated units will go far to ensure better co-operation and better quality of service all round. I was pleased by the report's reference to prosecutors coming in earlier in the process, thereby applying the prosecution guidelines earlier in the process. That, too, has much to commend it.

The Attorney-General: The hon. Gentleman has considerable experience in the criminal field—professionally, of course. *[Laughter.]* I knew that I would do that; it was not intended. Both as a solicitor and now as a barrister, he is well acquainted with the problems in the service. I accept and value his comments. There is a need for integration. The interface is better, but there is a need for improvement. Hence Sir Iain and his team have set out distinct proposals that someone should take over the process of prosecution once the charge has been preferred. I hope that it will be done jointly between the police and the CPS, but the exact machinery needs to be considered carefully. I hope that it will achieve the aims that the hon. Gentleman has in mind. There is a need for improvement if we are to have speedy justice. That underlines his proposal, which I must reserve the need to consider, that the CPS, should take charge, if we approve of the proposal, of prosecutions earlier. I hope that that reassures him.

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): My right hon. and learned Friend was a distinguished Secretary of State for Wales in previous Administrations. How does his statement point to a much better service in Wales, especially in north-east Wales, where it has received criticism? Recent changes in magistrates courts have been controversial. I hope that the changes that he presages today will be less controversial. Can he confirm that Wales will not have American-style district attorneys?

The Attorney-General: Perhaps I may kill off that expression once and for all. I have no intention of having American-style district attorneys. I do not know where that came from and I am not the parent—or grandparent—of the description. They have quite different responsibilities. Some, if not all, district attorneys take part in the investigative process as well, and some are elected. I do not propose to go along that road any more than with the election of judges, which also takes place in many parts of the United States.

There are four police areas in Wales and there will be four chief Crown prosecutors in Wales. I am confident that the system in Wales will rise to the needs of the situation in exactly the same way as will the system in England.

Mr. Ross Cranston (Dudley, North): May I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on the appointment of Sir Iain Glidewell so soon after the election? It was a key manifesto commitment and he implemented it quickly. Knowing Sir Iain, I am sure that his is a full report, but may I raise one matter that does not seem to have been dealt with so far—excessive bureaucracy? My casual observation in court suggests that it is an important problem and when I visited my local CPS in Wolverhampton, the staff seemed to have files running out of their ears. Does Sir Iain's report address that important problem and make recommendations about dealing with the excessive paperwork?

The Attorney-General: I agree with my hon. Friend—it was certainly my impression when I toured a few of the CPS branches before the election that lawyers would complain that far too much of their time was taken up in form filling. How far those forms are read at the end of the day I know not, but the Glidewell report makes it clear that 400 of the senior prosecutors—the senior lawyers in the CPS—devote only a third of their time to case

[The Attorney-General]

advocacy and the preparation of cases, so there must be something wholly wrong. Sir Iain has said—I commend that part of his report with great pleasure—that much greater autonomy should granted to the chief Crown prosecutors in each area and that while, obviously, the headquarters in London should have responsibility for standards, ensuring that resources are available and monitoring, there should be a great slimming down of unnecessary bureaucracy in a system that is undoubtedly over-centralised. I am confident that we can achieve that.

Mr. David Lock (Wyre Forest): I am grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend for bringing the report before the House. As a former barrister who used to prosecute for the CPS in magistrates courts, I know not only that the amount of paperwork generated by each case is substantial, but that the law is complicated and the job that prosecutors do is extremely difficult. Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that lawyers are better being lawyers and managers are better managing? I hope that he can tell us that the Glidewell report will ensure that, in future, lawyers and managers will each do what they do best and that we will get a better prosecution service as a result.

The Attorney-General: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his remarks. The main ethos—the main thrust—of the Glidewell report is to ensure that lawyers do what they do best, which is prosecuting, and that managers play their part, which is an equally important part of the whole. After all, some people become lawyers because they want to practise the law, not because they want to practise management. My hon. Friend is right; there is an excessive amount of paper. Although it has been slimmed down over the years, there is more work to be done.

Mr. Andrew Dismore (Hendon): I welcome my right hon. and learned Friend's commitment to employing a chief executive for the Crown Prosecution Service. That mirrors recent experience in private practice in large solicitors firms, which have been effective in appointing chief executives, so freeing lawyers' time for lawyering rather than managing. Allowing lawyers to do lawyering is probably one of the best ways of raising morale in the CPS, because it allows them to get on with the job for which they were trained. Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that unqualified CPS staff are every bit as valuable as qualified staff and that, in many cases, unqualified staff with a lot of experience can do the job as well as, if not better than, qualified people?

The Attorney-General: The chief executive will play an important part in the future administration of the CPS and, as I said, I hope that he or she will be in post before the end of the week. Undoubtedly, and regrettably, morale has been low. That problem has been ignored over the years. Surveys that have been carried out—disagreed with by some and agreed with by others—have a common ground of highlighting low morale in the service. I believe that our proposals will be warmly welcomed.

As regards unqualified staff, I am old enough to remember the senior managing clerks who used to play a formidable role in the Inner London quarter sessions and all the other courts; they knew far more about the law and practice than many lawyers and I attached great importance to their role. There is an important role in the CPS for unqualified staff with proper training and standards. I want to ensure that both go hand in hand.

Orders of the Day

PETROLEUM BILL *[LORDS]*

Read a Second time.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 58 (Consolidation Bills),

That the Bill be not committed.—*[Mr. McFall.]*

Question agreed to.

Read the Third time, and passed, without amendment.

AUDIT COMMISSION BILL *[LORDS]*

Read a Second time.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 58 (Consolidation Bills),

That the Bill be not committed.—*[Mr. McFall.]*

Question agreed to.

Read the Third time, and passed, without amendment.

National Lottery Bill *[Lords]*

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

New clause 2

ADDITIONALITY

'. In Section 25 of the 1993 Act (Application of money by distributing bodies) after subsection (4) there shall be inserted—

"(5) A body shall distribute any money paid to it under section 24 only in areas that are not the responsibility of government.".'.—*[Mr. Spring.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

5.36 pm

Mr. Richard Spring (West Suffolk): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following: New clause 3—*Additionality (No. 2)*—

'. In Section 25 of the 1993 Act (Application of money by distributing bodies) after subsection (4) there shall be inserted—

"(5) A body shall not distribute any money paid to it under section 24 where it would substitute for funds that would otherwise have been provided by conventional public expenditure.".'.

Amendment No. 7, in clause 7, page 8, line 37, leave out 'such'.

Amendment No. 2, in page 8, line 39, leave out from 'environment' to end of line 40.

Amendment No. 3, in page 9, line 9, at end insert—

'(5) The New Opportunities Fund shall be a body for the purposes of sections 24 to 27 and 34 of the 1993 Act.'.

Amendment No. 4, in page 9, line 10, leave out from beginning to end of line 30.

Mr. Spring: In Committee, we had the extraordinary experience of seeing Labour Members voting, again and again, against their own manifesto commitment. The irony appeared to be lost on them, which is a reflection of their attitude toward their manifesto.

The new clause would bring additionality to the heart of the Bill. Of all the important issues relating to the Bill, it is on additionality that there is a huge gap between what the Government avow and what they are actually doing. The Government claim—no doubt we shall hear it again today—that they remain committed to the arm's-length principle, but, by any objective standard, that is manifestly not true. We shall clearly outline that failure in Government thinking this afternoon.

The Government claim to be holding to the principle of additionality, but, again, that is demonstrably not true. The proposals to deprive the original good causes of a share of the proceeds of the lottery are designed to enable the Government to divert money to finance their failing political agenda. That is a shabby piece of opportunism, made worse by the Government's hypocrisy and their determination to maintain that they are not breaking the principle they so vigorously sought to defend when in opposition. In Committee, the Government rejected Opposition amendments that would have clearly enshrined, without a shadow of doubt, the principle of additionality. The Minister rejected them, saying that

[Mr. Spring]

although the Opposition had made a reasonable attempt to define additionality, we had not been successful in doing so. That argument lies at the heart of the Bill.

We remain deeply concerned about the precedent set by the Government's decision to divert money from the good causes for which the lottery was originally set up to matters such as health, education and, eventually, environmental projects. We are trying again to persuade the Government of the virtue of our thinking and the importance of maintaining the integrity of the national lottery. We are trying to persuade them to incorporate a requirement to adhere to the principle of additionality in the Bill, in an effort to prevent the Bill from being a form of voluntary taxation and, indeed, an outpost of the Treasury. I trust that, this time, on further reflection, the Minister will not so airily dismiss the points made by the Opposition.

The Prime Minister's commitment to additionality was made clear in the White Paper, "The People's Lottery". The definition in new clause 3 is, apparently, that preferred by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport. The White Paper clearly stated that the Labour party was not abandoning the additionality principle. The Prime Minister is quoted as committing the Government to additionality when he said:

"We don't believe it would be right to use Lottery money to pay for things which are the Government's responsibilities".

We entirely agree with that. If only the Government could act according to the spirit of the Prime Minister's comments.

New clause 2 is based specifically on the point made by the Prime Minister. It would insert in section 25 of the National Lottery etc. Act 1993, which deals with the application of money by distributing bodies, a new provision, subsection (5), which says:

"A body shall distribute any money paid to it under section 24 only in areas that are not the responsibility of government."

I trust that the Minister will recognise that wording, which echoes the words of the Secretary of State, and the integrity of what the Opposition are trying to do to ensure, in turn, the integrity of the national lottery.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross): Will the hon. Gentleman clarify whether, in terms of the new clause, he believes that the arts should not be regarded as being within the responsibility of Government?

Mr. Spring: It is perfectly fair for the right hon. Gentleman to refer to the arts. Of course that is an area on which Government money has traditionally been spent. The difficulty with the Bill, as he will be aware, is that it deprives the arts of money and, because lottery money may be substituted for Government money, it thereby deprives the original good causes of an additional sum. That is the danger about which many people in the arts are legitimately concerned.

I hope that the Government will not dismiss new clause 2 by claiming that it uses an inadequate definition of additionality. New clause 3 is based on the definition that the Secretary of State says that he prefers. In Committee, the Government rejected an Opposition amendment that would have enshrined in the Bill the principle of additionality and—I make this point very clearly to Government Members—that was identical to an amendment tabled by Labour Front-Bench Members during the passage of the 1993 Act. There we have it. The Minister for Arts dismissed the amendment, claiming that it was a reasonable effort, but an inadequate definition—it was Labour's own definition. That demonstrates that Labour's view of what is additional has been changed to accommodate its new proposal—to grasp money from the existing good causes to put towards its political agenda.

On Second Reading, the Secretary of State said:

"I shall quote . . . a passage in the reply given to the Select Committee on National Heritage, as it then was, in July 1996 by the then Secretary of State for National Heritage, the right hon. Member for South-West Surrey (Mrs. Bottomley). She said very clearly—this is the precise definition of additionality:

'Lottery funds are not intended to substitute for funds which would otherwise have been provided by conventional public expenditure'.

We stand firmly by that principle; there is nothing in the Bill that undermines it."—[*Official Report*, 7 April 1998; Vol. 310, c. 162.]

New clause 3 would, therefore, insert in section 25 of the 1993 Act, which deals with the application of money by distributing bodies, a provision that:

"A body shall not distribute any money paid to it under section 24 where it would substitute for funds that would otherwise have been provided by conventional public expenditure."

I trust that the Minister recognises that the wording of the new clause comes directly from that of the Secretary of State. If Government Members reject the new clause, we shall be in the ridiculous situation whereby they reject the Secretary of State's words. We are making it easy for the Secretary of State. How can he seek to reject his own words? I trust that he will have no objection to the inclusion of the new clause in the Bill.

The reason why the Opposition object so strongly to the new opportunities fund—this is why we tabled the new clause—is that it flagrantly breaches the additionality principle. The lottery was established to fund initiatives—it was done with cross-party support and true nobility of intent—that are additional to core Government spending programmes funded from taxation. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) said on a number of occasions, these are areas that have traditionally been under-resourced by Governments of whatever political complexion.

5.45 pm

No one can seriously believe that the Government are committed to additionality in practice. The hon. Member for Hove (Mr. Caplin) certainly does not. In an outbreak of candour that must have had his pager humming for at least 48 hours, he said in an "On the Record" interview:

"I think what we said in Opposition was clear, and it was right at the time that the lottery was introduced. But what we have now is a situation where the Budget spending level is set, and we have said that we are going to stick to that level for two years. I think it's right that a Government can say, 'We have a different view of how the lottery should operate.' That is a view that we've consulted on. We've received the consultations back and we're now developing a Bill to reflect these priorities, so I don't think there's anything wrong with that. I don't think they're compromising the lottery in any way".

All I say to the hon. Member for Hove is that if he does not recognise Alice in Wonderland, here it is in black and white. He no doubt now has a bright future behind him.

The new opportunities fund represents a significant departure from the original purpose of the national lottery, which was set up to fulfil a Conservative manifesto pledge to

"restore our heritage and promote projects which will become a source of national pride".

Mr. David Prior (North Norfolk): Does my hon. Friend agree that the only safeguard against diverting lottery funds into core Government spending areas is for the money to be distributed by bodies that are genuinely at arm's length from the Government, and that it is the breach of the arm's-length principle which compromises additionality more than any other factor?

Mr. Spring: My hon. Friend is exactly right because the centralising, control-freak tendency that is part and parcel of the way in which the Government seek to do business, and which is manifest in the Bill, is damaging to the future success of the lottery.

The Government claim that the Bill is a matter of fine-tuning the national lottery and that it only puts right problems that have arisen since the creation of the lottery. There are, indeed, elements of the Bill to which we have no objection. However, the Government's view that they are remaining true to the original principles on which the lottery was established certainly does not have foundation. The Secretary of State has affected to be mystified that the Opposition have not been lining up to support the Bill.

I simply challenge the Minister to explain how the homework clubs, child care and teacher training that he proposes to fund from the lottery accord with its original aims, which were set out in 1992, to

"restore our heritage and promote projects which will become a source of national pride".

They do not—that is the simple truth. The original intention of the national lottery was to focus on areas of expenditure that were traditionally under-resourced by Government.

The initiatives that have been put forward under the umbrella of the Bill fall directly under the remit of the Secretaries of State for Education and Employment and for Social Security. Apparently, they were rejected by the Treasury and the Secretary of State's great friend and admirer, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who was not prepared to spend taxpayers' money on them, so the raid on the lottery has taken place. Of the schemes that the Government propose to fund from the new opportunities fund, teacher training, education and public health programmes have traditionally—there is no escape from this—been funded by general taxation. The Government admitted that in a series of written answers.

The proposals are the thin end of the wedge. The legislation will give the Government power to divert money to any of their pet projects, providing an alternative to money from taxation. The Government's response to that accusation is that they have not breached the additionality principle, that the initiatives that they have announced are additional to core spending and that Governments have not previously funded such programmes. That is simply untrue.

Mr. Tim Collins (Westmorland and Lonsdale): Does my hon. Friend agree that matters are getting worse? If the lead story in today's issue of *The Times* is to be believed, the Chancellor has imposed an absolute cap on public spending for the remainder of the Parliament. That will mean that raids on the lottery will increase in frequency and in scale.

Mr. Spring: My hon. Friend makes exactly the right point. There has already been an increase in Government spending, with European Union rebates and a Treasury underspend. More and more will be taken from the lottery because all the early pledges on education and health are manifestly failing, and people clearly know that.

It is flagrantly incorrect to say that the Government are somehow separating spending on the proposed new programmes from what has gone before. That is sheer sophistry. Even if the initiatives were genuinely new, they would still fail the additionality test because they relate to areas for which Governments traditionally accept responsibility—health, education and the environment. In Committee, the Minister for Arts amply demonstrated the absurdity of the Government's case when he was challenged by my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) to provide an example of spending that would breach the Government's new definition of additionality.

My hon. Friend said:

"I have repeatedly tried to think of a project that would breach additionality under the new, wholly elastic definition, but have not been able to do so. I hope that the Minister will be able to give one or two examples, and I would be happy to give way to any member of the Committee who can. The fact is that additionality will now mean whatever Ministers want it to mean."

Of course it was impossible to find an example; perhaps the Minister can work harder to try to find one today. Under the Government's new, narrower definition, no spending breaches the additionality principle, provided it is additional to existing spending. However, spending from the lottery is, by definition, additional.

The fraudulent nature of the Government's case was clearly demonstrated by the Minister's wholly inadequate responses to my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne. The Minister employed the traditional Front-Bench trick of trying not to answer questions. He said that there were no examples of breaches of additionality because the Government had not breached the principle. He said:

"The hon. Member for Eastbourne was incapable of finding an example of expenditure that had replaced Government funding. That holds true throughout the history of the national lottery under the previous Government and during the past year under this Government."

When challenged to refute the suggestion that the Government had introduced the Bill specifically to breach the additionality principle, the Minister fell back on the Secretary of State's definition, which is, effectively, "If it is lottery money, it is by definition additional." He said:

"It is vital to make a distinction between grant and aid, or core Government expenditure, and expenditure by the national lottery."

At the third attempt, the Minister at last came up with two examples that would not be eligible for money from the new opportunities fund because they would breach additionality. He said:

"The hon. Member for Eastbourne asked whether it would support hospital beds or text books. He wanted an example of Government expenditure that would not be eligible for the fund and, inadvertently, gave two such examples. The fund will not fund hospital beds or text books."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 30 April 1998; c. 125-32.]

[Mr. Spring]

However, under the Government's definition, there is no reason on earth for the new opportunities fund not to fund text books and hospital beds in due course. We shall simply wait to see. We already know that it will fund the digitisation of material in public libraries and services that are already offered by general practitioners. It will simply be a short leap to text books and hospital beds, or whatever is politically expedient, to echo the words of my hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins) about the supposed rigour of the Chancellor's public spending limits.

The Government will pay for teacher training from the new opportunities fund although they have already admitted that they currently provide £296.8 million to train serving teachers under the grants for education support and training programme, approximately 5 per cent. of which is spent on information technology training. Money from the budget of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport is spent on training library staff despite the fact that the Government plan to use the lottery for such funding.

Tellingly, the Chancellor announced in his pre-Budget statement that the Government intended to set up child care schemes, the cost of which would be met by the Treasury and the new opportunities fund. He did not even seek to disguise that fact. He said:

"Funds will be available to set up as many as 30,000 new out-of-school clubs, which will provide places for almost 1 million children. The total cost over five years is £300 million, which is now budgeted for in our plans and represents the biggest ever investment in child care. The cost will be shared between the Exchequer and the new opportunities fund . . . A national child care strategy is no longer the ambition of workless parents; it is now the policy of this country's Government".—[*Official Report*, 25 November 1997; Vol. 301, c. 777.]

There was no attempt to disguise the fact that, according to the Chancellor, Government policy is being paid for by the lottery. Despite the Secretary of State's claim that out-of-school-hours activities are not part of core statutory school provision, which course it is, of course, the Government's responsibility to fund, it is clear that the Government already provide money for out-of-school child care initiatives from the Department for Education and Employment budget. There we have it in black and white; it totally contradicts the spirit of what the national lottery was destined to be when it was set up, and it certainly contradicts the basis on which the lottery has been such a success.

Healthy living centres will compete either with NHS services, particularly those of GP fundholders and other primary health care providers, or with private sector health clubs, or both. Almost all the services that the healthy living centres will provide are already provided by GPs through the taxpayer-funded national health service. It is arguable that the whole basis of the NHS has moved further towards the provision of primary care. That was highlighted and emphasised in the White Paper, "Health of the Nation", and it is encouraging that, in the past few years, there has been such a focus on primary care and preventive medicine. The White Paper makes it clear that healthy living centres are to be part of the Government's health care provision. The document states:

"healthy living centres will play an important role in the Government's public health strategy".

Mr. Ivor Caplin (Hove): Hear, hear.

Mr. Spring: The hon. Gentleman says, "Hear, hear", but we are debating taxpayer-funded activities within the NHS being paid for by the lottery, at the expense of good causes. If, after sitting for weeks in Committee, he does not understand the importance of that, he understands nothing. The Government's published analysis of the responses to the White Paper makes it clear that many of the responding organisations, such as local government, health, education and voluntary service organisations, were concerned that the new opportunities fund would simply be used to replace rather than add to core Government spending.

The document states:

"A section of respondents from the education sector argued strongly that some of the proposed areas of activity and interest in the New Opportunities Fund, (as well as NESTA), especially the training of teachers and librarians to use and teach information and communications technology, and out of school hours activities are core to the education mission. There were doubts and uncertainties amongst the same groups about whether the principle of additionality could be adhered to. Some education authorities and professional bodies as well as campaign groups were clear that this principle would not continue to be supported over time, and that this should be faced up to openly".

6 pm

The respondents to the White Paper who strongly supported the establishment of the new opportunities fund demonstrated, in doing so, how clearly the Government are breaching the additionality principle and how the lottery is destined to become, tragically, the engine of the Government. Many of those respondents were concerned that initiatives funded by the lottery should be co-ordinated with other aspects of Government policy. "Analysis of Responses to the Lottery White Paper Proposals" states:

"There was a very positive welcome for developing Information and Communications Technology training programmes for teachers and librarians, consistently linked with the proviso that the programme should fit in with other DFEE initiatives. There was a particular concern that the apparent synergy between this White Paper and the *Excellence in Schools* White Paper should be captured. The *Excellence in Schools* White Paper proposes to increase levels of literacy, numeracy and information and communications technology skills. It was important that the Lottery initiative neither conflicted with nor repeated these initiatives".

Similarly:

"For example, one local authority said that it hoped that the development of Healthy Living Centres would be firmly placed within the broader public health remit of the White Paper *Our Healthier Nation*".

In Committee, Labour Members not only made it clear that they supported the Government's decision to breach the additionality principle, but unashamedly admitted that they looked forward to taking credit for some of the Government's schemes. I can just imagine, as the next general election approaches, lottery-funded schemes being sold as being somehow a Government initiative, paid for by the taxpayer and of some great benefit, purely for party

political reasons. My hon. Friends and I had the clear impression that Labour Members were simply drooling at the prospect of this raid on the lottery providing things that they might find electorally attractive in their constituencies. As the expert in these matters, the Minister for Sport, will know, photo opportunities galore appear to be very much in their mind.

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Tony Banks): I feel a photo opportunity coming on now.

Mr. Spring: I fear that the Minister may be disappointed.

There is another, more practical test of additionality. I confidently look forward to seeing queues of anxious Labour Members lining up to try to take credit for initiatives that have been funded from the lottery via the new opportunities fund even if, in the words of the Prime Minister, they are not the responsibility of Government. I hope only that they will have the decency—although I doubt it—to own up to the fact that these things will have come about at a certain cost, and that that will be faced by the good causes and the arts, heritage, charity and sports projects that should have received the money that has been diverted into the new opportunities fund to suit the Government's political agenda.

We all know what is going on here. Peter Riddell was correct when he wrote in *The Times* on 6 April of the proposal to create the new opportunities fund:

"a Treasury raid it still is, to evade tight limits on public spending and to find new sources of revenue without having to raise taxes."

There we have it. The Government have not lost the itch to spend. They happen just to be spending money from the national lottery at the expense of the arts, sport, the heritage and the caring charities. It gives new meaning to the seven-year itch.

Amendments Nos. 7, 2, 3 and 4 seek to re-establish the arm's-length principle in the distribution of lottery money, which, again, is under threat from the Bill. It is not only my hon. Friends and I who are concerned about that. For example, the Sports Council said in a letter:

"We believe that the arms length principle between government and the Lottery distributing bodies should be maintained, and that the new power given to the Secretary of State to instruct us to 'comply' with directions to delegate to specific organisations is too prescriptive.

We are also concerned that the powers on the Secretary of State to issue directions to us in relation to our distributing strategies should not be too prescriptive. Delegate bodies must demonstrate that they can effectively account for expenditure of lottery funds."

Here again we come to what is at the heart of our objections to the Bill. The Government claim, as they have on additionality, that they are adhering to the arm's-length principle, but, if that is true, why are they introducing in the Bill many powers that will enable them clearly to breach that principle by controlling how lottery money is spent?

Obviously, I accept that the Secretary of State has the existing power under the National Lottery etc. Act 1993 to give directions to the distributing bodies. That is not in dispute, but the Government recently published new directions that will, in effect, reduce the lottery's efficiency and its overall impact by allowing the distribution bodies to dispense with the requirements for matching funds to enable them to carry out the Government's political objectives.

That unwelcome development will, yet again, reduce the lottery's effectiveness and ultimately the public's faith in the national lottery, which stands at a high level at present. It will reduce the overall purchasing power of lottery funds; it represents a drift from encouraging initiative to fostering dependence. As ever, the Labour party is filled with rhetoric, but entirely misses the critical point that so endangers the success of the national lottery. The powers proposed for the Secretary of State in the Bill represent a wholly new departure from arrangements for the good causes in the 1993 Act. We object in principle to the idea of the lottery being used to fund areas that are the absolute responsibility of Government, but we also strongly object to the introduction of the order-making power in the Bill, which effectively gives the Secretary of State control of the new opportunities fund.

We have a flavour of what is to come in the draft directions for the new opportunities fund. We see, for example, that the Secretary of State has already given a direction that healthy living centres should cover 20 per cent. of the country. One can argue, "Why not 15 or 25 per cent?" It is an arbitrary decision, made on a political basis. The new opportunities fund has, in a sense, had its instructions made in advance.

If the Government planned to respect the arm's-length principle, they would have set up the new opportunities fund in the same way as the other good causes were set up. There is no need to have done it in this way. They would not have proposed an order-making power for the Secretary of State to specify on an ad hoc basis how the money in the fund should be spent. To enable them to get their hands on the proceeds of the lottery to supplement general public expenditure, the Government have dramatically increased the Secretary of State's control over the lottery.

That order-making power does not exist in respect of any of the other good causes and was simply not envisaged when the lottery was first conceived, when both sides rigorously defended the arm's-length principle. It is a great tribute to those who introduced the Bill in 1993 that that principle being enshrined in legislation was approved by all hon. Members. It was achieved with true nobility of purpose. Why, therefore, is it being changed? The Government are incapable of providing a satisfactory answer.

The Bill contains deliberately vague definitions of health, education and the environment. It enables the Secretary of State to make ad hoc decisions. Can the Government offer any other explanation or justification for including this order-making power, which is a great departure from previous legislation, other than that it will enable the Secretary of State flagrantly to use the lottery to pursue the Government's political agenda?

It is extremely unfortunate for the long-term health and success of the lottery that the new opportunities fund will, unlike the other good causes, be under direct ministerial control. That is directly in conflict with the arm's-length principle supported by both parties when the original Bill was enacted, and it was much prized by the lottery industry.

The Secretary of State and his successors will be able to specify new causes that will benefit from lottery money without further reference to Parliament. There is no point

[Mr. Spring]

the Minister telling us that new initiatives will have to be approved by affirmative resolution. In Committee, he said:

"I want to make one further point clear, which I hope the hon. Gentleman will consider before, I hope, deciding to withdraw his amendment. He raises the spectre of the Secretary of State extending matters further: any further initiatives, over and above those in which the New Opportunities Fund will get involved, will—as he will appreciate from his close reading of the Bill—require affirmative resolution of the House. So, the powers remain with the House, rather than the Secretary of State."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 28 April 1998; c. 70.]

How can the Minister sit there with a straight face believing that that in any way justifies the centralisation of power to the Secretary of State? That is utterly absurd. It was not the crowning parliamentary explanation of the Minister's life. He knows perfectly well that affirmative resolution is not the same as primary legislation: it will not require any measure of public support.

Was the Minister really suggesting that an order-making power receives anything like the same scrutiny as a Bill during its passage? Of course it does not. Is he suggesting that the Secretary of State would have difficulty getting such measures approved by Parliament? The Government will not even have a proper debate on their proposals. Parliamentary scrutiny of something as important to the life of the nation as the lottery is crucial for its continued acceptance by the public and for its continued success, but the Government reject such a provision.

By contrast, as the Minister knows full well, the 1993 Act required primary legislation to divert money from the original five good causes. This Bill gives the Secretary of State a mechanism to pay for any new scheme he chooses to fund. In Committee in the other place, the Minister admitted that the new opportunities fund was fundamentally different from the other distributing bodies in the way in which it was being set up and would operate. Lord McIntosh of Haringey said:

"Of course, the relationship between the Secretary of State and the new opportunities fund, as proposed in the Bill, is different from that which exists between the Secretary of State and the other lottery distributors. There is no pretence otherwise."

We are grateful for the candour of one Minister at least.

Lord McIntosh went further when he made it clear that the activities of the new opportunities fund had deliberately not been clearly defined. The Bill has been drafted to give the Government maximum room for manoeuvre. Lord McIntosh said:

"The relationship is different because the new good cause is different. The existing good causes are pretty well defined and the distributors are in the main well established as expert bodies within their fields. In the case of sport and the arts, the distributors are the key sectoral bodies; the Heritage Lottery Fund was not the biggest player but was well placed to understand the whole sector, and the National Lottery Charities board has quickly established itself as a respected and knowledgeable body in the charitable field."

He added:

"By contrast, the new good cause ranges over a vast area. It encompasses health, education and the environment, each of which in itself is broader than any of the other good causes."—[*Official Report, House of Lords, Grand Committee*, 22 January 1998; Vol. 584, c. 71-72.]

6.15 pm

Mr. Prior: May I draw to my hon. Friend's attention the definitions in clause 6, which states:

"'education' includes training and the provision of activities for children;

'the environment' includes the living and social environment"

Those definitions could hardly be wider.

Mr. Spring: My hon. Friend is absolutely right; that is the danger of the Bill. It includes an order-making power and centralisation measures, but it lacks provisions for parliamentary scrutiny. It could result in an increase in activities under the umbrella of the new fund without proper scrutiny, to the great cost of the original good causes, which need most support and financial backing.

Mr. Christopher Fraser (Mid-Dorset and North Poole): I concur with the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for North Norfolk (Mr. Prior). Does my hon. Friend agree that "environment" in this context also means the political environment? The Government may seek later to develop the political environment, and that is increasingly worrying.

Mr. Spring: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. At the airport the other day, I saw an advertisement for a cosmetic called "Control Freak"—this may be of interest to the Minister for Sport; I mean that in the nicest possible way. The advertisement talked about taking the oil out of the system and replacing it with something better. It reminded me of the way in which the Bill is being orchestrated by the Secretary of State of a Government who are the most incredible bunch of control freaks in the history of government in this country.

The Minister in the other place admitted that the order-making powers in the Bill were different from what had gone on before. We are not in agreement with the establishment of the new opportunities fund, as the Minister for Arts implied in Committee, although none of us understood what he was on about. The Minister seemed unable to grasp the fact that we were fundamentally opposed in principle to the establishment of the new opportunities fund. As some Labour Members pointed out, although it may be desirable to spend money in some of these areas, it should not be pinched and raided from the national lottery.

We want to make it absolutely clear by our amendments that we are opposed to the establishment of the new opportunities fund, and to the way in which the principle of additionality and the arm's-length principle are being flouted. We believe that the removal of those two key elements will gravely damage the long-term success and viability of the national lottery.

Mr. Fraser: Before I speak—

The Minister for Arts (Mr. Mark Fisher): Before you speak?

Mr. Fraser: Before I come to the main thrust of my speech, I should like to allude to some of the work that Labour Members did or, rather, did not do in Committee. The hon. Member for High Peak (Mr. Levitt) came top of the list, with nine interventions and two speeches. I should

like to continue down the list as an illustration of how the Bill should have been more fully debated by Labour Members—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. This is all very interesting, but the hon. Gentleman must deal with the terms of the amendments.

Mr. Fraser: I will indeed, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is, however, sad to note how the Government ignored what we had to say about additionality. The *Hansard* reports of the Committee would make interesting reading in that respect.

The purpose and heart of the Bill are to allow the Government to get their hands on money from the lottery. The Government have tried to dress up the legislation in nonsensical talk about the evolution of the lottery and the need to restore public confidence in it. However, the Government's approach to the Bill in Committee was a sure-fire way of destroying that public confidence. The fact is that, after so many years of whining in opposition, the Labour party now, in government, has to make decisions, circumscribed by the difficulty of being bound by the previous Government's spending limits.

In Committee, Labour implied—although not in so many words—that power has come its way, and it will be used to raid the lottery for health, education and the environment. The Government argue that they must look to the lottery for funding. Of course they must: the Chancellor has presented his case to the country over the past year, and that has left the Government with no alternatives. That means ditching the additionality principle straight away. Labour Members failed to recognise that in Committee; they also failed to speak up in defence of what the Government are doing.

Governments can always make up new definitions of good causes, thereby moving the additionality goalposts. That is precisely what the Government are doing. They have introduced a range of devices allowing the Secretary of State to control how lottery money is spent. The fact that Labour Members seem to believe that that is fine is extremely worrying, given that the Bill will have profound effects well beyond those that the lottery was set up to achieve.

The arm's-length principle has been ditched, too—and the Government appear equally unconcerned about that. The silence from the Government Back Benches has been deafening, and it has been left to the Opposition to table amendments designed to preserve the original intentions behind the lottery. No one in the Labour party seems to care about the fact that, when in opposition, Labour stood four square behind the principles of additionality and arm's length and sought to enshrine them in the original Bill. Now we are told, "That was then." Labour's former principles appear to count for nothing, and it would seem that the Government have changed their priorities. Their view is: if the lottery has to be used to fund these new priorities, so be it.

Put simply, the Government intend to use the national lottery to subsidise public spending without raising taxes. The Treasury is seeking an additional £1 billion by the back door, and the Bill paves the way for that.

By setting up a new lottery distributing body under the direct control of the Secretary of State, the Government are giving themselves the chance to do as they please with the money. Writing in *The Times*, Peter Riddell made the point very clearly:

> "The new fund also violates the basic principle, reaffirmed by Tony Blair last summer, that it would 'not be right to use the lottery to pay for things which are the Government's responsibilities'".

The Government are breaking the additionality principle that was so vehemently supported when the lottery was set up in 1993; and they are doing so to finance mainstream health, education and environment programmes. "Environment" is a generic word, covering a multitude of projects that we cannot anticipate at present. It is open to this or a future Government to misuse the term, which is why I would argue against its inclusion in the Bill.

The idea of an information-rich and an information-poor society has been debated at some length elsewhere, and the Government have stated that they want everyone to join in the information-rich society. In Committee, I told the Minister that schools should therefore offer all pupils an equal chance to participate in that society—hence the teaching of technology must be part of core Government spending. I was not wholly convinced by the response that I was given by the Minister. Public spending programmes continually evolve. Some hon. Members, including me, made the point on Second Reading that the Government cannot justify transferring to the national lottery the costs of such evolution. I should like to know how any of the planned projects fall within the remit of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport—on current evidence, they do not. They all fall into areas for which Governments have traditionally accepted responsibility. The projects in question have been mooted by the Secretaries of State for Education and Employment and for Social Security; but they were rejected by the Treasury, so now they have to be paid for by the lottery.

As has been said, the Bill brings in an order-making power allowing the Secretary of State to determine how lottery money is spent, thereby at a stroke overturning the arm's-length principle. It is the Secretary of State who will specify initiatives. Other distributing bodies set up by the National Lottery etc. Act 1993 are truly independent of Government, and all involved in that arrangement have witnessed the benefits of such independence. Now the Secretary of State will exercise enormous control over the new opportunities fund. That runs against the whole spirit of the establishment of the lottery, which thus far has been a remarkable success.

Evolving Government spending programmes should not be paid for by plundering the lottery. Because of the initiatives that the new opportunities fund will carry, the Secretary of State will become a distributing body. I concur with the view of my hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring), that the whole idea is Treasury-led and means abandoning the hands-off principle. The independence of the good causes will be put in jeopardy. Had the Government wanted to respect the arm's-length principle, they would have set up the new fund along the lines of the other distributing bodies: they chose not to do so. Furthermore, they would not have proposed for the Secretary of State a power to specify, on an ad hoc basis, how the money in the fund is to be spent. The fact that the Secretary of State can involve himself fully justifies the concern expressed by my hon. Friends that he will decide on the scope and direction of his involvement on a whim or fancy.

[Mr. Fraser]

The Minister may recall that I put it to him in Committee that the arm's-length principle and the additionality principle go together. If the Secretary of State did not have the power vested in him, he would not be able to breach those principles. The power vested in him means that anything he spends has to count as Government spending because he is part of the Government. He has given himself the mandate that he needs.

6.30 pm

The truth is that the Labour party is changing the purpose of the national lottery. I am sure that the Secretary of State and the Minister for Arts will agree that the Secretary of State is intervening in the way in which lottery money is distributed, as the Labour party manifesto promised he would. Labour stated:

"There has been no overall strategy for the allocation of monies and no co-ordination among the five distributor bodies about the projects deserving to benefit from the National Lottery."

That quotation comes from a document entitled "New Labour: Because Britain Deserves Better", published in April 1997.

Policy directions by the Secretary of State will be introduced with the passage of the Bill. On Second Reading, the Secretary of State referred in detail to some directions when he said without any intended irony that they were important to ensure that

"lottery money is going where it counts."—[*Official Report*, 7 April 1998; Vol. 310, c. 170.]

I wondered at the time whether that was not a Freudian slip and whether the Secretary of State had unconsciously decided to reveal that the money would be spent where Labour votes counted. That has been my suspicion since that comment was made.

The Government want to establish a new direction for the lottery, one that fits with the broader sweep of Government policy and which will serve as a means for redistributing wealth by funding a range of social programmes. To make matters worse, the activities of the new opportunities fund have not been clearly defined. Why have the Government drawn up such vague definitions of health, education and the environment? As I said, "environment" is a generic term, and I should be interested to hear the Minister explain his precise understanding of the environment—social, economic or political—in this context.

We have had few clues from the Government, so we cannot be clear what their intentions are. The Government will not even have a debate in the House on what they propose. The 1993 Act would have required primary legislation to divert money from the original five good causes, yet these proposals come from a party that professes to support open government. I support the new clause.

Laura Moffatt (Crawley): I am a little confused about why the hon. Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole (Mr. Fraser) should be amazed that in Committee Labour Members found it difficult to take an active part, when all that we have heard today from Conservative Members is a rehearsal of what we heard then. Given the uninspired new clause, I am beginning to wonder whether there is truly any real opposition to the Bill.

It was very difficult to sit and listen to the arguments about additionality and the wonderful contribution to the debate made by Mr. Riddell in the newspaper. I am sure that he is a terribly interesting writer, but I listen much more to the people I meet in the street who are in favour of the proposals.

Mr. Spring: I am interested to hear the hon. Lady use the word "contribution". Will she confirm that she made no speech in Committee and that her sole contribution was a single intervention?

Laura Moffatt: I am glad to say that that intervention left the hon. Gentleman speechless for few moments, which pleased me immensely.

I hope that we shall shortly finish this debate and see the Bill in place, so that it can reach the people who are interested in what the new opportunities fund will bring. It is sometimes galling to have to listen to the same trite old nonsense, when people want lottery money to be spent as the Government propose.

I was recently lucky enough to attend a session organised by my local health authority to deal with healthy living centres. They are the reason why I was inspired to contribute to debates on the Bill. I am a nurse of 25 years' standing, and the proposals seemed to me to be a new way to bring good health to our communities and to inspire people to take their health into their own hands.

Mr. Prior: Will the hon. Lady explain what is wrong with raising taxes to fund health?

Laura Moffatt: This is a new way, a way to involve communities. We get caught up in the nonsense about additionality, but people on the street are asking when they can contribute and how they can work with their general practitioners. It has been said that the proposals would do terrible damage to private health clubs, but if private health clubs had any sense, they would be entering into partnerships with the local groups that are setting up the healthy living centres. The Opposition have completely missed the boat.

Mr. Fraser: The hon. Lady is ranging rather wide, so perhaps I can ask her to clarify whether she agrees that the money going to healthy living centres will undermine the good work currently being done by GP fundholding practices.

Laura Moffatt: I do not believe for one moment that it will undermine the work being done by GP fundholders. In fact, I shall carry on talking about the meeting that I attended with many GPs in West Sussex. They were very keen to take part in the programme and were asking whether it would be only for inner cities or whether rural areas could contribute. They wanted to know how they could show that they knew people who suffered poor health and whom they could help to adopt a healthy way of living, so I do not think for one moment that GPs will be threatened. In fact, they will welcome the proposals with open arms, as will others in our communities and our children.

The new opportunities fund involves new initiatives, things that have not been done before and on which we shall be able to expand. Indeed, 20 per cent. of our communities will be able to take part. That is very exciting. I understand that the areas where the health action zones are located will naturally have priority, but I shall be very excited when the first centre is set up.

I listened to the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring), who is currently involved in a conversation, saying that we must have a sense of national pride in our arts and treasures. Of course we must, but, as a nurse of many years' standing, my national pride means making sure that we have a healthy nation that can be proactive in achieving good health and which can live longer. I shall be very proud when the first healthy living centre is set up.

Mr. Collins: The hon. Member for Crawley (Laura Moffatt) made an interesting speech. Although I agreed with her on one point, I shall start with another, with which I disagreed. The hon. Lady said that as people want the proposals in the Bill, we should jolly well get on with them. No doubt some people want them, but it is equally clear that others do not. It is the duty of the House properly to debate matters on which there is division in the country and not simply to sweep aside debate on the ground that because the Government want something, they should have it without debate or discussion.

I agree with the hon. Lady about the importance of health, education and the environment. If I had a limited sum of money, I would always prefer to spend it on schools or hospitals rather than on skating rinks or opera houses. For precisely that reason, some of those facilities are clearly intended to be funded by the taxpayer, under a system whereby one can go to prison for failing to contribute to the national health service or state education. Other things that are less important but still valuable are funded in another way. That is why the lottery was set up. As long as those good causes were reliant on taxpayer funding, politicians of any party would always sideline, exclude and reduce them. The lottery was set up on a principle of additionality, which not only had bipartisan support at the time, but arguably enjoyed stronger support from Labour than from the Conservatives.

I pay tribute to the role played by my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) as Prime Minister in bringing about a national lottery. Had it not been for his drive in overcoming the bureaucratic and political obstacles to the creation of a national lottery, we would have nothing to discuss today.

The principle of additionality is extremely important and so is new clause 2, in the names of my right hon. and hon. Friends. The principle of additionality that it sets out is defined in exactly the language employed by the Prime Minister, not in an off-the-cuff speech in a Sedgefield pub, but in his foreword to the White Paper "The People's Lottery", on which the Bill is based. Therefore, it falls to the Government and the Labour party to explain precisely why they are not happy with the wording in new clause 2, which seeks carefully to include in the Bill the words used by the Prime Minister in a declaration of Government policy after the general election and in an official White Paper.

Some Opposition Members believe that the Government are not happy about the principle of additionality being written so clearly on the face of the Bill, precisely because the story in *The Times* this morning is right. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, in his own campaign—which has rather less to do with the progress of the British economy and rather more to do with his ambition to become the next leader of the Labour party—is seeking to prove his own toughness by establishing tough public spending limits for as far ahead as we can foresee. That means that the Government can fulfil their early election pledges—such as those on class sizes and hospital waiting lists, which they have failed to fulfil in their first 13 months in office, that they have little prospect of meeting in the next 13 months in office and which they may or may not meet in the lifetime of this Parliament—only by raiding national lottery moneys to fund education and health spending, which, in the normal course of events, should be funded by the taxpayer. That is one agenda pursued by the Bill, and it would be limited by new clause 2.

There is another agenda, however, which is addressed by amendment No. 4, in the name of my right hon. and hon. Friends. Clause 7, as drafted, would allow the Secretary of State to set out initiatives that would apply throughout the United Kingdom or in one or more areas.

The Minister for Sport is listening carefully to one of his hon. Friends, but I believe that he has a direct and personal interest in the possible use of the new opportunities fund in one particular part of the United Kingdom. He represents a London constituency, and London is doing extremely well out of the national lottery. As we all know, the Minister for Sport may have another rather more personal political agenda relating to a certain political post in London. If the new opportunities fund could be used to benefit London, perhaps to the disbenefit of other parts of the United Kingdom, but to the great joy and happiness of the citizenry of the metropolis, the Minister for Sport might feel that the citizenry of London would reward him for his part in that, by electing him to the post of lord mayor.

The Minister knows that he has tough opposition. Lord Archer has made it clear that were he to be elected lord mayor of London, he would never write another book, and that makes it a tough electoral platform for the Minister for Sport. He will find it extremely difficult to come up with a platform policy to beat that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We really cannot have a diversion about what may happen in the future election of the mayor of London.

6.45 pm

Mr. Collins: I apologise for that, but it relates to why the new opportunities fund and the provisions that amendment No. 4 would strike out—enabling the new opportunities fund to benefit one particular area of the United Kingdom—are so important. There should not be even a suspicion of doubt that the Government or any Minister within it might seek to use lottery funds to benefit a particular geographical area within the United Kingdom. If I cannot refer to London, for reasons that you rightly pointed out, Mr. Deputy Speaker, perhaps I may touch on the prospect of the provisions that would be struck out by amendment No. 4 being used to benefit areas that happen to be represented by members of the governing party.

It is worrying that the Bill grants such enormous discretion to the Secretary of State to direct moneys to enormously popular projects relating to education and

[Mr. Collins]

health, wherever and for whatever reason he or she deems fit. My hon. Friends who served on the Committee tell me that, throughout the discussions on the Bill, Labour Members were enormously excited by the prospect of lottery money being spent on projects in their constituencies, having been directed there by the Government.

Mr. Fraser: I am sure that my hon. Friend will agree that in Committee the high aspirations of Labour Members resulted from the knowledge that the Government could deliver on those aspirations.

Mr. Collins: My hon. Friend makes his point extremely clearly. If amendment No. 4 were not accepted, we would risk the Government being able to use lottery funds in the pursuit of pure party political advantage.

Mr. Banks: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. First, may I remind the hon. Member for Mid–Dorset and North Poole (Mr. Fraser) that he should not get up to make a point while clutching a brown envelope?

I remind the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins) that I receive letters from hon. Members of all parties asking, "Why hasn't scheme X in my constituency received more money?" It is perfectly valid for hon. Members to lobby on behalf of organisations. Hon. Members of all parties have been present when large cheques have been handed over from the lottery or the Millennium Commission in the presence of the press. No one ever claims that the hon. Member managed to get the funding or that the Government provided it. It is a form of publicity in which all hon. Members have indulged.

Mr. Collins: I bow to the Minister's expertise on public relations initiatives and stunts, but his analogies relate to the Millennium Commission, which is an arm's-length body. There is no question of any Secretary of State being in a position to instruct the Millennium Commission as to how it spends its money. Amendment No. 4 would strike out the provision that

"the New Opportunities Fund shall comply with any directions given to them by the Secretary of State."

That is what causes concern, not just among Opposition Members, but among bodies that supported the principle of arm's-length responsibility in respect of the distribution of lottery funds and which are extremely worried by the way in which the legislation is moving towards hands-on control by Secretaries of State who currently serve under a Labour Government. In future, they may be of a different political party, but, in any event, they should not be directly involved in such decisions. That is why our new clauses and amendments would return the national lottery to the principles that led to its creation, its great success and its widespread public support.

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford): I support the new clauses and amendments, which would save the Government from themselves. The Government believe that their policies will give them short-term popularity, but they will lead to long-term opprobrium when people realise the damage that is done to the national lottery, which has for several years supported many good causes which are valued throughout the country. Once the lottery is damaged and has lost the trust of the people, it will have great difficulty regaining that trust and will no longer be able to provide as much support for good causes as it has during its first four years.

The Government's warm words disguise their ill-intentions. The new clauses and amendments would restore the two principles that the Bill badly breaches: additionality and the arm's-length principle. All fair-minded people—certainly all those who have followed every kick of the ball in this match—agree that additionality has always been difficult to define, but the Government are clearly trying to sweep the principle away. Under the Bill, any spending could legitimately be funded by the lottery, and the current division between spending on what is essential, which should be funded from taxation, and spending on what is desirable, which the lottery has always funded, could not be maintained, unless the Government accept the new clauses and amendments—which I do not expect them to do.

There is nothing that would not be covered by the principles set out by the Government. The lottery could fund anything under the new system. Conventional public spending has always covered a wide range of activities. The level of public spending that society regards it as sensible to fund has gone up and down over the decades, but there has always been a clear core of services that are best provided from collective endeavour through taxation. That covers spending on defence, the police and, under the welfare system that we have had for most of this century, health and education.

Items of expenditure that would be funded by the new opportunities fund, such as information technology training for teachers and the healthy living centres on which the hon. Member for Crawley (Laura Moffatt) is so keen, would normally fall within those broad boundaries of conventional public spending without anyone blinking. If the Government announced that they proposed to spend public money on extra IT training for teachers, nobody would consider it remotely remarkable; it would be a reasonable use of conventional public spending. However, saying that this year's priority was a new set of opera houses or sports stadiums would be bizarre, particularly for a Government who claim to want to put pressure on public spending.

Although the theoretical boundary for what should fall under the additionality principle may be difficult to define, in practice the distinction between the essential and the desirable is clear. If the Bill is not amended, it will drive a coach and horses through that division and allow almost any expenditure to be funded by the lottery. We all know that the Government are doing that so that they can spend more money without appearing to raise taxes.

The people will see through that attempted dishonesty. The White Paper was predictably and drearily called "The People's Lottery". The Government seem to forget that the people are not dim and notice political dishonesty. We are witnessing such political dishonesty. The people will see that items that they expect to be funded from taxation are to be funded by the lottery. They will regard the Government as dishonest and cease to trust them. [*Laughter.*] Labour Members may laugh, but I look forward to seeing them in two or three years when their popularity has fallen. I am not greatly concerned about

the Government's popularity. I shall not lose sleep when they sink into unpopularity. However, I shall lose sleep over the fact that they will drag down with them the reputation of the national lottery, which is doing a lot of good for this country. When the lottery is seen to be a plaything for politicians who want to spend money while pretending not to raise taxes, people will be turned off and will stop playing the lottery, resulting in less money being available for good causes. Labour Members should regret that.

The most ridiculous defence that we heard in Committee was that anything that had not been funded before could legitimately be funded from the lottery. That argument supposes that the world stands still and technology never changes, particularly in health and education. Twenty years ago, IT training for teachers would have been meaningless because IT had not been developed. It is now essential for education, and should be funded from education spending. The Government have decided to fund it from money that should not be used for essential spending.

Additionality is not the only principle to be badly breached. The Government profess to support the arm's-length principle, but their actions belie their words. I am delighted that the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan) has returned to his seat, because I am about to say something nice about a Liberal Democrat—admittedly a long-dead one, who once famously said that in the long run we are all dead. Lord Keynes was a Liberal who invented the arm's-length principle when he set up the Arts Council. The Government are doing their best to destroy that principle.

The new opportunities fund destroys the arm's-length principle in many ways. We have already heard about the problems with geographical distribution. I assure my hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins) that Labour Back Benchers eager to persuade Ministers to divert money their way for political reasons were heard not just in Committee: every Labour contribution on Second Reading was designed to elicit extra money. As the Minister for Sport has said, that is entirely legitimate, and we all do it. However, it is not legitimate to give the power of distribution directly to Ministers, because that will result in their indulging in straightforward pork-barrel politics. That will damage public confidence in the lottery and reduce people's willingness to play it, cutting the money available to good causes.

We have heard about healthy living centres. Again, short-term popularity will contrast with long-term political opprobrium for the Government, because they will be available only in the 20 per cent. of the country regarded as most deprived. The general practitioners in West Sussex who are desperately hoping for such centres will not get any. They will be hugely disappointed and the hon. Member for Crawley will have a lot of explaining to do to her GPs in the coming years. With their budgets permanently under pressure, health authorities will decide not to spend money on such centres because they will know that lottery money is going to them. The existing health service budget will be diverted away from such desirable spending.

The new opportunities fund will also have an incredibly elastic definition of the environment. It can mean absolutely anything. The Department of the Environment has grown beyond all recognition in the past 10 years. Over the next 10 years, the definition of the environment in the Bill will also grow greatly and will be seen as another piece of straightforward pork-barrel politics.

My overall reason for supporting the new clauses and amendments is that, without them, the sum of the mass of detail in the Bill will bring the lottery into severe disrepute and greatly concern hon. Members on both sides of the House. In its four or five years, the national lottery has done enormous good for the country. The Bill that damages it will harm the country enormously. Without the amendments and new clauses, that is what the Bill will do.

7 pm

Mr. Andrew Tyrie (Chichester): I well remember discussion about a national lottery first arising when I was in the Treasury in the late 1980s. We thought about whether we should make a serious proposal and worked quite hard on it. As everyone knows, in the end, Mrs. Thatcher ditched the idea. The crucial problem with which we grappled was exactly the subject of this debate—additionality. The problem was how to get money to causes that could be seen to be quite distinct from core Government responsibilities that were funded from general taxation.

Whatever we hear from Ministers tonight, I am absolutely confident that everyone in the country understands the fundamental distinction between spending on, for example, capital infrastructure for the arts, sports and heritage, and core funding in, for example, education and health. People will grasp over a run of years that the creation of the sixth good cause has blurred that distinction. They will realise that, in a world in which some things are clearly black and others clearly white, this area is grey, and that that greyness is enabling the Government to use lottery funding slowly but steadily to substitute spending from general taxation.

The national lottery has been a great success, partly because the Conservatives succeeded in finding a way of creating a lottery in which there was such a clear distinction. People want to participate in something that is not just a ramp for the Government to get hold of extra tax revenue but has a sense of excitement that is derived partly from knowledge of where the money will go. That will be eroded by the Government's proposals, but it will be put right if the amendments and new clauses are accepted.

The Prime Minister has made it perfectly clear that he agrees with the principle of additionality. I shall not bother to quote his words, because they have been cited on many occasions. It is clear that one of Labour's manifesto pledges will be partly funded by the sixth good cause, even though anyone who read the manifesto when it was published would have understood that the pledge would be funded from general taxation. There has clearly been a breach of principle, and people will gradually grasp that.

The sixth good cause represents not only additionality but—to coin an even worse term—subtractionality. It will subtract money from the other five causes. It is no good people saying that the five causes will continue to receive exactly the same funding. It is absolutely clear that they will receive less money than they otherwise would have done.

The creation of the shadow account almost certainly breaches the law. When I asked the Minister for Arts about that in February, he said that the statutory authority for

[Mr. Andrew Tyrie]

setting up the shadow account was the National Lottery Bill. If that is not a clear case of retrospection, I do not know what is. It must be a retrospective action to pass a law to justify an act that has already been executed. If the Minister wants to explain why that is not retrospection, I shall gladly give way. I see that he does not.

The Government have browbeaten the five good causes into accepting the proposal. They know that such retrospective action is challengeable in the courts, but they will not embark on a legal challenge because they need a relationship with the Government. The Government have escaped what should be, and easily could have been, an extremely embarrassing event.

The Minister for Arts is looking at the clock as I speak, so I shall conclude by asking him a few questions. What will he do when lottery fatigue sets in? Will he allow receipts that go to the sixth good cause to fall to protect existing funding of the five good causes? What will happen when people become accustomed to the flow of funds to core activities in education and health but lottery fatigue sets in and resources fall?

Mr. Banks *rose—*

Mr. Tyrie: If the Secretary of State wants to say something, he is welcome to do so.

Mr. Banks: I am not the Secretary of State; I am a humble sports Minister. Does the hon. Gentleman play the national lottery?

Mr. Tyrie: Yes, I have played the national lottery. In fact, not long ago, I won about £80, so I am feeling particularly happy about the lottery. Perhaps the Minister will tell me how he is doing. Perhaps I am collecting some of his losses.

If it becomes clear that the funds for the sixth cause to which bodies initially became accustomed are no longer available, will the Minister for Arts be prepared eventually to use general taxation to plug the gap, or will he allow funding for the sixth good cause to fall? I support the amendments and would very much like to hear answers to my questions.

Mr. Prior: My hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie) spoke of lottery fatigue. Looking at the face of the Minister of Sport, I know exactly what he means: there is a distinct sign of fatigue on the Labour Benches.

We must remember that the lottery has been a huge success and has raised a huge amount of money for the good causes because of the two key principles that underlie it: the good causes identified are in addition to normal public spending and the funds are distributed at arm's length from the Government.

The new opportunities fund will have an extremely broad remit. From the preliminary guidance provided by the Department, it seems that the fund will also be highly prescriptive. We are told:

"The Fund shall, by September 2002, commit funds to projects that, between them, should establish or develop healthy living centres accessible to around 20 per cent. of the population".

We are told:

"The Fund shall commit funds to out of school hours education projects which taken together should provide regular activities involving at least half of all secondary schools".

Proposed section 43C of the National Lottery etc. Act 1993 makes it clear that the new opportunities fund shall comply with the Secretary of State's wishes.

Let us compare that with a brochure that came through the post this morning from the National Lottery Charities Board, which has just distributed £133 million to 1,306 organisations to help the homeless, animal projects, village and community centres and projects to develop the voluntary sector. Most of us know that additionality is a difficult concept to define, but we all know when it is breached. If you cast your eye down the list of projects in your constituencies, you will know exactly what is—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman, but I remind him that he is addressing the Chair and must use the third person.

Mr. Prior: I apologise. It is clear to most of us when the concept of additionality is being broken.

I wish to refer to a point made by the hon. Member for Crawley (Laura Moffatt). I agree with what she said about healthy living centres, and we are not opposed to them. However, we believe that they should be funded through normal, general taxation.

The problem with the Bill is that clause 13 erodes the arm's-length principle for all the other good causes, and makes it clear that all other distributing bodies must produce a strategic plan that must comply with the wishes of the Secretary of State. That extension of Government control is over not only the new opportunities fund, but all other funds. That goes to the heart of our objections to the Bill. It is no longer a people's lottery, any more than the former Governments of eastern European countries were people's Governments. It is now a Government lottery. It is in danger of losing the support of the people, and the ultimate losers will be the good causes.

Mr. Peter Brooke (Cities of London and Westminster): First, I declare an interest. Within the past month, I have won two £10 prizes, which have encouraged me to continue; it was some time prior to last month that I last won. Secondly, as the Minister for Sport has been accusing the whole House of writing him begging letters, I am sure that he would acknowledge that I have never written him one—not least because I pay him the compliment of assuming that he would have nothing to do with the decision. Therefore, I might as well save my ink.

The hon. Member for Crawley (Laura Moffatt) said that she had been listening to a repetition of the Committee debates on Report. That is not true in my case—partly because I was not on the Committee and partly because I want to allude to remarks made earlier today. The hon. Lady did not speak in Committee apart from one intervention—which I have checked—of which she was proud. I cannot tell whether, in her remarks about additionality today, she was implying that she did not believe in the principle of additionality—contrary to her party's previous position—or whether she did not believe in its relevance to the Government's proposals. I mention the matter because it is of some importance to the debate.

I wish to refer to an exchange I had earlier today with the Minister for Film and Tourism at Question Time. I am sorry that he is the only one of the Secretary of State's ministerial team who is not present. I will not say anything hostile about him; I shall just describe what he said. The Ministers present will recall a remarkable definition of additionality given by the Minister on 21 July 1997, which I quoted on Second Reading.

The issue of additionality arose this afternoon when I asked the Minister—as a supplementary question, following a question from the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) about local authority initiatives in tourism—whether the lottery would be paying for English tourism in the future. I do not have access to the Minister's precise reply and we will have to wait for tomorrow's *Hansard*. However, he said that it was not possible for him to say anything about that matter because, as I would understand, a comprehensive spending review was going on and he could not say who would pay for English tourism in future.

The Minister did say that the issue of whether the lottery should pay for English tourism or not had been discussed. The Minister for Arts shakes his head—

Mr. Fisher *indicated dissent.*

7.15 pm

Mr. Brooke: When we look at *Hansard* tomorrow, we will see what the Minister for Film and Tourism said. My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole (Mr. Fraser) was sitting next to me—

Mr. Fraser *indicated assent.*

Mr. Brooke: My hon. Friend nods his head in terms of his recollection of the reply. The implication is that a policy or a principle amounts to a prefabricated decision—a standing fact of Government affairs.

If the lottery will not be substituted for spending on English tourism, the Minister for Film and Tourism did not need to make any allusion to it, or to the comprehensive spending review. He could simply have said that lottery funds will not be used on English tourism. He did not say that. I said that I would not be derogatory about him, but a reasonable description—and not an evaluation—would be that his answer rambled a bit. We will see tomorrow precisely what he said, but he certainly did not rule out specifically the lottery paying for English tourism. Against that background, I am left with concern that the principle of additionality is further eroded by the Government.

The Secretary of State corrected me on certain things I said about the consultation when the hon. Member for Forest of Dean (Mrs. Organ) spoke on Second Reading; it was a helpful intervention. All of us are agreed that fewer than 100 individuals contributed to the consultation. The Secretary of State knows that most of the 600 responses came from organisations. It can be no surprise to anyone that organisations would have said that they were in favour of lottery money being spent on what they do. It would be odd if they had not done so, for the very reason that the Minister for Sport gave when referring to begging letters. I am left distinctly uneasy about where the principle of additionality stands this afternoon.

I wish to refer briefly to the arm's-length principle. The hon. Member for Crawley said, effectively, "All power to the Government's elbow. We hope that they spend any money they wish on things of which we approve." I do not want to sound like Nestor. I have said previously that I was not the architect of the national lottery legislation; one could produce a decent-sized architectural practice from those who said that they were that. I simply had a subordinate job in the master mason's department.

The hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry), to his credit, has sat through the debate today, and he will recall our debates in the Chamber, in Committee and elsewhere when the legislation was forged. As my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) said, one of the principal reasons why this is the best lottery in the world is that the money does not go to the Treasury, and we have avoided it doing so.

The hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde will recall our debate about charities, and their fears that they would be disadvantaged by the fact that they would get only 20 per cent. of the money going to good causes. The only evidence we had to engage in that debate was the experience of Irish charities. It was clear that the problem in Ireland, in effect, had been that the money was going back to the Government for the Government to decide which charities should do better. Some said that they had done very well out of the Irish lottery, while others said that they had done badly; it had depended totally on the Government's whim. Au fond, that is why the Opposition are uneasy about what the Government are about.

Mr. Fisher: For these remaining stages of the Bill, it has been good to have the right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke)—the former Secretary of State for National Heritage, who introduced the original legislation in the House—here to contribute to our deliberations. All hon. Members recognise that we have had enormous benefits from the national lottery, and that is in no small part—despite his modest denial of any role in the architecture of the legislation—due to the right hon. Gentleman. His seeing it through in the first place has given great pleasure and benefit to the people of this country. His speech was, by a long way, the shortest, most intelligent and most interesting contribution from the Opposition Benches. Before he gets too carried away by my compliments, however, I should add that, given the quality of some of the contributions of his colleagues, that remark is modest.

The right hon. Gentleman asked for clarification on what my right hon. Friend the Minister for Film and Tourism said. My right hon. Friend did not mean to imply that the lottery would ever provide a substitute for Government expenditure on and support for tourism through the English tourist board or the British Tourism Authority. He was referring to the fact that, as the right hon. Gentleman will appreciate, tourism-related matters, such as the arts and heritage—piers at our great seaside resorts, for example—have benefited from the lottery, which has been for the good of tourism and of communities. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, we are examining arts and heritage as part of the comprehensive spending review.

Mr. Brooke: As the answer of the Minister for Film and Tourism to my question was long, it is a little

[Mr. Brooke]

surprising that he did not enter the same grace notes as the hon. Gentleman has, with which I have no problem—they were part of the discussions that we had on Second Reading of the original Bill.

Mr. Fisher: I have explained the position of my right hon. Friend and the Government, so perhaps we can move on.

I welcome the hon. Member for East Surrey (Mr. Ainsworth) to his role as shadow Secretary of State. It is good that he is listening to our debate—I hope that he will contribute to discussions later this evening. However, I hope that he has to wait a long time before he succeeds the right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster in introducing legislation—he will do well if he introduces legislation that is as constructive and well respected. We shall do our best to ensure that he has a long, patient wait.

It struck me that, the longer the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring)—who led for the Opposition—spoke, the less he had to say. Despite the fact that, amazingly, he spoke for 44 minutes, he did not seem to add much to the interesting speeches that he had made before—strangely, he seems to be taking a long time to grasp that the Government support the principle of additionality every bit as much as the Opposition do. He is obviously yearning to oppose us, but he cannot find much to oppose, as we all agree on additionality. We have supported the principle, which the previous Government introduced, both in our manifesto and in everything that my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State have said for extremely good reasons of clarity and, as Mr. Peter Riddell said—he has been much quoted in our deliberations—to prevent the Treasury and other Departments from raiding the funds.

It is important that we maintain additionality and arm's-length principles—I make it clear that the Government are committed to the principle and practice of additionality. Our manifesto said that lottery funds should remain strictly additional to Government expenditure, and the Prime Minister said:

> "We don't believe it would be right to use Lottery money to pay for things which are the Government's responsibilities."

That could hardly be clearer, but, despite the fact that we said it time and again in opposition and say it again tonight, the Opposition are slow to recognise it.

In our deliberations on the 1993 Act, on the White Paper and on the Bill, we have all agreed that it is extremely hard to define additionality. That is why both this Government and the previous Government decided that it would be sensible not to attempt to define it, but to create a principle to which we could all subscribe and which could be kept in practice. We can argue the toss—we did so in opposition, as some hon. Members have said—but we learned over the years in which the previous Government ran the lottery that that was the most pragmatic way in which to proceed. It is very difficult to find a definition in law that would stand up and bear the necessary test of pragmatic implementation, so, like the previous Government, we believe that the common-sense test is the best.

I can say little more on the subject. We have clearly failed—the failure is mine—to persuade the Opposition that we believe in additionality. I believe that our actions, and the actions of the arm's-length bodies that distribute lottery funds, demonstrate that belief. I do not think that the people are in any doubt that the sums are in addition to, and do not replace, Government expenditure—the people are under no misapprehensions; they know that, even if the Opposition do not.

The hon. Member for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie), who is no longer in the Chamber, asked what would happen if there were lottery fatigue and the flow of funds dried up. I think that he misunderstands how the lottery funds work—they are project funds for short-term, specific initiatives; not core funding for any of the activities. If he understood that, he would understand why his question was inappropriate.

We have clearly not succeeded in convincing the Opposition, although I believe that we shall persuade the House, as we have persuaded the people. The Government believe in additionality and in the arm's-length principle; we ask the House to reject the proposed measures.

Mr. Spring: I agree entirely with the Minister on one thing: he has totally failed to convince the Opposition or to respond to our points. It is a great disappointment that, instead of dealing in general terms with the arm's-length principle or with additionality in practice, the Government are failing the national lottery and the people's confidence in it.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 121, Noes 276.

Division No. 287] **[7.27 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gibb, Nick
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Major, Rt Hon John

Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John M. Taylor and
Mr. Stephen Day.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Austin, John
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Bennett, Andrew F
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Cabom, Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell–Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Connarty, Michael
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Fyfe, Maria
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mowlam, Rt Hon Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Salter, Martin
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*

Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Kevin Hughes and Jane Kennedy.

Question accordingly negatived.

New clause 4

WINDING UP OF FUNDS ALLOCATED UNDER SECTION 22(3)(c)

'( ) In section 30 of the 1993 Act (winding up of funds allocated under section 22(3) (e)) after subsection (3) there shall be inserted:

"Within one year of exercising its powers under section 28(1) the Secretary of State shall—

(a) prepare a report containing an assessment of the performance of the bodies which distribute money under section 25(1) of the 1993 Act;

(b) set out the criteria governing the reallocation of sums held under section 22(3)(e); and

(c) consult any body which distributes money under section 25(1) and other interested bodies".'.— *[Mr. Maclennan.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Maclennan: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 8, in clause 6, page 7, line 23, leave out from beginning to end of line 10 on page 8 and insert—

'(1) In relation to any sum that is paid into the Distribution Fund under section 21(2) of the 1993 Act after 31st December 2000, section 22(3)(e) of that Act shall have effect as if for "on projects to mark the year 2000 and the beginning of the third millennium" there were substituted "on or connected with education, environment and public health, including children's play.".

(2) Section 30 of the 1993 Act (winding up of fund allocated under section 22(3)(e)) shall cease to have effect.

(3) The Secretary of State may by order substitute a later date for the date that is for the time being specified in subsection (1).'.

No. 1, in page 7, line 43, at end insert—

'(6A) In section 28 of the 1993 Act (power to amend section 22) in subsection (2)(a) for "5 per cent." there shall be substituted "13½ per cent".'.

Mr. Maclennan: I have pleasure in moving the new clause and I shall be brief. It is designed to enable the Minister to give some indication of what the Government propose following the winding-up of the Millennium Commission in respect of the substantial expenditure involved. There is anxiety, particularly in the voluntary sector, that the money is in a sense floating money, which could be diverted from good causes to other, no doubt desirable, public spending objectives—I can candidly declare that the new clause was suggested by the National Council for Voluntary Organisations. There is also concern that the very fact that that shift will take place might impact on the ability of voluntary organisations to attract funding and it is certainly appropriate to raise those fears well in advance.

The Government should be able to give undertakings that they will consult widely with the voluntary organisations and the other good causes about how best to utilise the money, bearing in mind the Government's expressed commitment to the additionality principle, which was underlined in the previous debate and which I do not call into question in general.

The new clause also suggests an appraisal of the work that has been done by the existing distributing bodies, which must be appropriate and sensible when considering how best to deal with moneys that will not be spent in the future. Of course, it is difficult to predict what the volume will be by that time and whether it will have peaked and be on a downturn, but that would only make that course of action more urgent. I hope that the Government will find the new clause helpful and that it will enable them to give us some glimmerings into their thinking.

Mr. Spring: We have listened with interest to the comments of the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan). I was not clear whether he would press the new clause to a Division. I hope to secure your permission, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to separate amendments Nos. 8 and 1, which we have tabled, from the new clause if necessary.

The amendments in this group deal with the Government's raid on the original good causes and the need to protect those causes. The reason for the raid is simple. The Government made a series of promises in opposition that were incompatible with the tight control of public expenditure. Indeed, once a week we have had the sight of the Prime Minister having to defend the fact that those early pledges, particularly on health and education, have not been borne out in practice and that, in fact, the reverse has happened. That is part and parcel of the problem. Given the Chancellor's views on public expenditure, Ministers are scratching around for alternative sources of cash to pursue the political agenda that is inherent in the new opportunities fund. As a result, the lottery, which was set up as a fund to pay for projects that would, in the words of the 1992 Conservative manifesto,

"restore our heritage and promote projects which will become a source of national pride",

is, if Royal Assent is obtained, to turn into the milch cow for Ministers to supplement their departmental budgets by raiding it for that express purpose, through the generosity of the Secretary of State.

7.45 pm

Even under the Government's original plans, the good causes would have lost out. The National Lottery etc. Act 1993, which was enacted under the former Conservative Government, provided for the Millennium Commission, which finances projects to mark the millennium, to be wound up once the celebrations are over and the projects

all paid for. That money would have been re-allocated to the other good causes. However in 1996, the Labour party in opposition decided that it would not reallocate the money to the original good causes but would set up its own fund to subsidise the budgets of other Departments.

Let us be clear. Under a Labour Government, the original good causes were always destined to lose out; it was only a question of when. None of the amendments would prevent the Government from setting up the new opportunities fund. They deal with the fundamental problem of the Government's smash-and-grab raid on the lottery.

Amendment No. 8 deals with whether the new opportunities fund should replace the Millennium Commission, as was promised in Labour's manifesto, or whether it should simply elbow its way to the front of the queue as a sixth good cause. In view of the threat to the lottery, we also want to establish a minimum percentage below which the share of the proceeds of the lottery allocated to the original good causes will not fall. We are concerned that the Government will try to take an increasing percentage of the proceeds of the lottery for their own new good cause and we were not at all assured by the so-called assurances of the Minister for Sport in Committee. I hope that this evening he will give us further assurances, as they have not thus far been satisfactorily forthcoming.

In respect of making the new opportunities fund a replacement for the millennium fund, amendment No. 8 would give the Government the opportunity to honour their manifesto commitment on the lottery. I remind members of the Standing Committee that we had the truly appalling sight on a number of occasions of Labour Members voting against their manifesto commitment—a ludicrous situation. Accepting the amendment would restore to the original good causes some of the money that they will lose under the Government's plans.

In its manifesto, the Labour party gave a commitment to create a new millennium fund—what is now called the new opportunities fund—to replace the existing fund. Indeed, the 1997 manifesto, "New Labour, because Britain deserves better", stated:

> "Labour has already proposed a new millennium commission to commence after the closure of the Millennium Exhibition, to provide direct support for a range of education, environment and public health projects, including those directed at children's play, currently excluded from the lottery".

The Opposition's amendments would give effect to that commitment.

Perhaps the House would care to reflect here on the irony of the Government, barely a year in office, facing the embarrassment of being held to implementing their manifesto commitments by the Opposition. I accept that this may be small beer compared with the appalling travesty as regards the early pledges, which have simply not been carried out—the growth in waiting lists and the difficulties in education—but it is a principle of considerable importance for the continuation and success of the national lottery.

We are giving the Government another opportunity to consider their over-hasty raid on the lottery and the damage that the Bill will do to the original good causes by depriving them of money that they had expected. We ask the Government to think about the damage that they are doing to the lottery by turning it into a form of voluntary taxation from which to subsidise general public expenditure on health, education and the environment. The Government have brought forward the creation of the new opportunities fund to let them get their hands on the lottery as soon as possible.

The Bill will mean that the arts, charities, sport and the heritage will lose one sixth of the proceeds of the lottery until the Millennium Commission is closed, and a fifth of the proceeds thereafter. That results from the Government's decision to introduce their own good cause before the Millennium Commission is wound up. The new opportunities fund, to which we object in principle, was conceived as a replacement for the millennium Fund, not as an additional sixth good cause.

The Government are so hemmed in by the embarrassment arising from their failed pledges and their performance on health and education, and by their self-imposed public spending constraints on the Chancellor, that they are desperate for cash. The lottery is the ready source. As has been said, the real lottery winner will be the Chancellor, at the expense of good causes up and down the country.

Labour announced its decision to set up the new opportunities fund before the closure of the Millennium Commission only during the general election campaign. There was no mention of the effects that it would have on the good causes, or on the lottery. It was not made clear then, and the Government have persistently failed to admit it since, that the original good causes are losing as a result of the switch. Sums in the region of £140 million to £150 million will be taken from the good causes and put into the so-called shadow account for distribution after Royal Assent.

The good causes would, of course, have lost out anyway. They had previously expected the Millennium Commission's share to be divided among them when it was wound up. When the decision to bring forward the new opportunities fund was announced, Labour claimed that it had been made possible only by the Wednesday draw. That was complete nonsense, and they knew it. The only reason why the original estimates of about £9 billion rose to about £10 billion was the spectacular success of the first year of the operation, which far exceeded expectations. A midweek draw was always planned, as well as scratch cards and the other games that have been introduced. The Wednesday draw was not an unexpected windfall, and it is nonsense to suggest that it generates a finite sum.

The fact is that the Government wanted to get their hands on the lottery money as soon as possible and were prepared to set up a new good cause to do so, even if it meant taking from existing good causes. In Committee, the Minister acknowledged for the first time that the Government had brought forward their raid on the arts, charities, heritage and sport by saying:

> "when we first proposed the new good cause in our manifesto and in the lottery documents published before the election, we anticipated that it should follow the running down of the Millennium fund. We have had second thoughts, however, which is perfectly reasonable. We were surprised and pleased at the strength of support for the new good cause. As it was so widely welcomed, it seemed perverse and unnecessary to delay it for several years. As it was supported by the public . . . we feel that if the content is right we should go ahead now, be decisive and get on with it."

The Minister could offer no credible justification for why the Government should have brought forward the date of their raid, except political expediency. He was not

[Mr. Spring]

prepared to admit that they simply wanted to get their hands on the money. He claimed, unconvincingly, that the proposals were popular—though he presumably did not mean popular with the new causes, which do not share his view. The Minister refused to make public the details of consultation with existing good causes. I asked him to do so, and he talked about some sort of seamless flow. I fear to say that that was not a particularly satisfactory answer.

The Minister has claimed that the distributing bodies agreed. However, he was not so definite in Committee. There was no suggestion then of agreement. He said:

"We have running discussions and consultations with all the distributing bodies. They are fully aware of the plans and happy with them. Consultation is not an exercise, but a continuous process . . . It has always been made clear that the other distributing bodies will receive £1.8 billion each, and they have accepted that. That was the understanding on which they planned . . . The distribution bodies have always accepted that figure; it is the basis on which they have been able to plan. The important thing was the amount of money that they were to receive—£1.8 billion. They will still receive precisely that sum."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 28 April 1998; c. 45-46.]

What a contrast those assertions make with the responses to the Bill made by the original good causes. Many people who have an interest in this subject because of their involvement in the distributing bodies—for example, Lord Gowrie and Lord Rothschild—make a very different interpretation. It is absurd to suggest, as the Minister does, that they are delighted and pleased that traditionally under-resourced parts of our economy that are always put at the back of the Treasury queue will once again be hit severely by this raid.

Labour Members should be grateful to have the opportunity to make sure that the Government keep at least one of their promises. The amendment will let them clear their consciences by doing that. By accepting the amendment, the Minister would ensure that the original good causes continued to get the percentage of lottery proceeds that they were originally promised, rather than the reduced percentage that will result from the premature creation of the new opportunities fund.

Amendment No. 1 deals with the setting of a minimum percentage share for the good causes. The great fear of the original distributing bodies is that the Bill is the beginning of a remorseless chipping away at their resources. They are concerned that the Government plan to take a growing percentage of the proceeds of the lottery to pay for their own new good cause. The bodies fear that this is the beginning of a series of raids.

The Bill is specifically designed to ensure that that happens. Despite being pressed on Second Reading by a number of my hon. Friends—including my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major)—and being pressed again in Committee, the Government have failed to undertake to adhere even to the reduced new percentage allocations contained in the Bill. I extend to the Minister, once again, the opportunity to give that assurance, and I should be delighted if he did.

In Committee, the Minister claimed that it was absurd of the Opposition to want to amend our own National Lottery etc. Act 1993. He was being somewhat disingenuous; he knows that no Government would have had any incentive under the 1993 Act to divert money from one distributor to another. It is different now. The Secretary of State is, in effect, setting up a political fund under his own direct control. He is introducing sweeping powers that will enable him to gerrymander the distribution of lottery money. He is changing the very basis on which the lottery operates and on which it has been such an enormous success. The Government now have an incentive to vary the percentages even further to favour their own good causes, and that is why existing good causes are worried.

I have repeatedly said that it is dangerous to set a precedent for future Parliaments by entrenching in legislation the opportunity for some future Secretary of State to abuse the lottery for political reasons and to change the balance of the lottery in a way that is deeply destructive to the lottery and the under-resourced good causes. The Government are not prepared to offer genuine reassurance to the good causes, and that is why we are resisting the Bill.

As so often with this Bill, it is not the introduction of a single power but the combination of powers, a sort of block building of centralisation of control, that puts a dangerous amount of control in the hands of the Secretary of State. The apparently harmless power to vary the percentage allocation to each good cause in the original Act can be combined with the creation of the new opportunities fund to allow, in theory, the diversion of up to 75 per cent. of money for good causes, and eventually 80 per cent. to the Government's own good cause.

The Government repeatedly resisted this amendment, which was tabled perfectly reasonably by Conservatives and Liberal Democrats in Committee. They combine lukewarm assurance of their good intentions to the good causes with an abject failure to give them statutory effect. They have failed to commit to a percentage for the good causes but say only that the good causes would get £9 billion if the proceeds reached £10 billion. They will not commit even to the reduced percentage share in the event of proceeds exceeding £10 billion, as Camelot confidently predicts that they will. Will they commit to percentages in the Bill today? We await an answer.

8 pm

The Government also made it clear that, in the event of a shortfall, the original good causes will lose out, meaning that there is a possibility of a further fall for them. As Conservative Members have noted, there is always the risk of lottery fatigue, which has been seen in other countries. What assurances can the Minister give against the possibility of revenue shortfall for the good causes, including sport, that are so genuinely concerned about the matter? The Government will not even give a commitment that the original good causes will continue to receive any money at all after the current licence expires in 2001. Will they give clear assurances today?

This is an opportunity for the Government to show good faith and to set a percentage floor below which the good causes will not fall. The minimum share that we propose would not have been necessary without the creation of a new good cause under the direct control of the Secretary of State. The Bill centralises far too much power in his hands.

The new good cause is radically different from the previous ones. The 1993 Act sets out the five areas to be supported by the national lottery on an equal percentage

basis: the arts, sport, national heritage, charity and the millennium. The money was to be drawn on by distributing bodies to make grants to such projects as they chose to support, within their terms of reference. The Secretary of State had no power to tell them what projects to support. The new opportunities fund is to have no such freedom.

As the Government's note on clauses 6 puts it:

"rather than providing general support to its sectors as the other distributors do, it will support a rolling programme of specific initiatives. These will be determined by the Secretary of State."

The first three initiatives are to be IT training for teachers and librarians, out-of-school-hours activities and healthy living centres. The Government claim that such initiatives are consistent with the arm's-length principle. They are not. The new opportunities fund will simply be a Government agency with limited operational autonomy. What is to stop the Secretary of State diverting more and more lottery money to the new opportunities fund at the expense of other good causes? We have not had a satisfactory answer.

We have already been told that the new cause's share will rise to 20 per cent. in 1999 as millennium spending tails off. Why not 25 or 50 per cent? There is nothing in the Bill to stop it. The existing percentages can be varied by ministerial order, and it would be tempting to do so. To set a precedent and give a future Secretary of State the opportunity to do that in an unscrupulous way would be a terrible legacy of our consideration of the Bill.

The sums involved are not negligible. The distributors have so far had about £5 billion. The good causes can expect another £5 billion over the next three years. The Secretary of State is at liberty to channel up to £3.75 billion out of the expected £5 billion to the new opportunities fund. He does not have to give the five other distributors more than 5 per cent. each of the total. That minimum of 5 per cent. was put into the 1993 Act before this voracious new cause made its appearance. That is at the heart of the difficulty.

In view of the changed nature of the national lottery and of the composition of the good causes, we believe that the percentage is too low. It does not sufficiently curb the Secretary of State's political appetite, now or in future. To put it simply, we wish to raise the minimum percentage for all the causes to 13.33, the present percentage allocated for the new opportunities fund. The effect would be to ring fence £3.3 billion of the £5 billion for the five original good causes, as opposed to only £1.25 billion under existing legislation. The Secretary of State would still have the flexibility to give the new opportunities fund more than the others, but not nearly as much flexibility, with all its inherent dangers, as now. I ask again whether the Minister will give a binding undertaking that in this Parliament, he will not reduce the level below 16.67 per cent.

The arts, sport, heritage, the charities and even the millennium fund should have such protection. It is with that protection that the distributing bodies have carried out their work effectively and won the confidence of so many recipients of lottery money. The Bill, with its centralising powers and the ability given to the Secretary of State to interfere in the smooth working of the lottery, demands that if the lottery is to continue to be the success that it has been in the past and should be in future, the good causes need proper protection. The Bill as it stands makes that more unlikely. The minima required to make it work are something that we urgently wish to raise once again for the Government's consideration, in the hope that, even at this late stage, they will think again.

Mr. Fraser: I wish to confine my comments to the protection of the good causes, as mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring). We all accept that the national lottery has so far exceeded expectations. The original good causes had expected to benefit from public enthusiasm and support and to receive their fair share of the £1 billion excess projected over the first seven years of the lottery's operation. Not least, they expected the Government to keep their general election promise that the new opportunities fund would be introduced to replace the millennium fund. There is now a sixth good cause, as well as the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts. Everyone's relative share can only fall. That means that the original good causes will inevitably lose out.

The White Paper is worth quoting. It says:

"Although the existing good causes will be receiving a smaller share of Lottery revenue, the success of the Lottery means that they can still plan on receiving the same amount in total as was envisaged when the Lottery was set up".

The Secretary of State is telling the good causes that they will get less in future. They will get the same amount as was predicted when the lottery was set up as a paper concept. They are being told to forget the years of success and not to worry that the Government will not establish a minimum percentage below which their share of the proceeds will not fall. They must press on and be grateful for what they can get.

Our amendments give the Government the opportunity to honour their manifesto promise that the new opportunities fund should replace the millennium fund. As the Bill stands, the Government have brought forward the creation of the new opportunities fund so that they can get their hands on the lottery money as soon as possible. The Treasury is, after all, desperate for cash that only the lottery can provide.

Public awareness of that grab-for-cash policy is growing. Hon. Members may have seen newspaper reports that the Treasury will take 20p on every lottery ticket when the sixth good cause is introduced. Independent research was carried out by David Wornham, senior lecturer at Bristol business school, and quoted in *The Daily Telegraph* on Monday 25 May. The article stated:

"Mr. Wornham said: 'One of the most disturbing findings is people's assumptions of where the money goes. The public believes that between 15p and 20p in the pound finds its way to charities.

In reality, the figure is less than 6p—and that doesn't take into account how much charities have lost from a drop in charitable contributions since the lottery began. To find out where the money is going,' he said, 'you need look no further than the Exchequer.

Once direct and indirect taxation is taken into account, together with the use of lottery money to replace public expenditure, the Government's "cut" upon realisation of the new sixth cause will turn out to be over 20p in the pound, not the published figure of 12p.'"

I could go on, but that illustrates my point and provides confirmation, if confirmation is needed, that the real lottery winner is the Chancellor of the Exchequer. To rub salt in the wound, the Government continue to dispute that the existing good causes will lose out, which is quite incredible when one considers the evidence. If public

[Mr. Fraser]

confidence in the lottery starts to fall, not least because of newspaper reports such as the one I have just quoted, they will really start to feel the pinch.

The fact that the Secretary of State can involve himself completely justifies the concern expressed by my hon. Friends. The Secretary of State will involve himself and decide on the scope and direction of his involvement at a whim and a fancy. Having recognised that as a dead certainty, we seek through our amendments to limit the powers of the Secretary of State and to limit the amount of money he can divert into the Government's new opportunities fund at the expense of the original good causes. To guarantee them an allocation of 13.33 per cent. offers them a future, albeit a lean one; at the moment, they fear for the future and face the prospect that the Government plan to take an ever-increasing percentage of the proceeds for their own salvation.

The current model of awards is transparent and free from accusations of political gerrymandering. Ministers cannot tell us how that positive characteristic will be safeguarded in future—I hope that the Minister will answer that question this evening. If they believe that there should be safeguards, the Government should be happy to give an undertaking to the original good causes, which they currently cannot and will not do. Instead, the Government have every good reason to vary the percentages even further in future to the benefit of the new opportunities fund as the economic situation inevitably worsens and the calls for health, education and environment spending increase.

The Government have made it clear that, in the event of a shortfall, the original good causes will lose out. The Government's apparent lack of support for the good causes increases the concern felt by those good causes and poses the question: what does the future hold for the good causes? I suspect that their future is not particularly rosy, given the wide range of opportunities for Government interference offered by the Bill. They do not even have the comfort of an assurance that they will continue to receive money after the current licence expires in 2001. I should like the Minister to give an assurance today on the future of the good causes.

Mr. Green: I shall speak mainly to amendments Nos. 8 and 1, but I shall first briefly address new clause 4. I regret the absence of the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan) in more than the usual formal sense in which those words are used in the House, because I am genuinely unsure about whether I have completely understood what he wants to achieve with his new clause. As I understand it, he wants to constrain the behaviour of the Secretary of State after the millennium fund has been wound up. That seems perfectly sensible and there is much to be said in favour of such a course of action, but, in a form of argument that will be familiar to those of my right hon. and hon. Friends who have attended debates at the Conservative party conference, I disapprove of the new clause because it does not go far enough.

8.15 pm

If it is sensible to restrain the behaviour of the Secretary of State after the winding up of the millennium fund, it would be equally sensible to do so now, especially in the context of the Bill which brings so much power over distribution under the Secretary of State's purview. One of the principal objections to the Bill has always been that it involves the nationalisation of large parts of the lottery distribution mechanism, turning it from a national lottery into a nationalised lottery. That lies at the root of many of the Opposition's objections to the Bill. One of the purposes of amendments Nos. 8 and 1 is to retain some independence for those bodies distributing to the good causes that have done so well over the past four years.

I am sure that the Minister will advance once again the specious argument that we heard several times in Committee; that the cake has got bigger, so it does not matter that the percentage of the cake that the existing good causes are to get is being reduced, as they were planning to receive only that amount of cake anyway. There are two reasons why that is an invalid and specious argument. First, if it can be done once, it can be done again. All the good causes will rightly realise that they have become a target for Ministers of this and future Governments—that they are seen as a convenient way of relieving public spending pressures in almost any circumstances. That will have a direct effect on the way they act from now on. The danger is not merely a theoretical possibility for the future, as many of the things the good causes do involve long-term planning; if they are less sure of the level of funding they are to receive for many years ahead and if they are to act prudently, as most do, they will not commit themselves to large projects or long-term revenue funding. That in itself will be damaging.

Secondly, the good causes are being cheated out of money. They recognised that the cake was growing faster than was originally forecast and planned accordingly. It is undeniable that the demand for bids has improved both in quantity and in quality over the years, as more bodies have got used to the methodology of bidding and worked out how to put together a successful bid. All the distributing bodies say that they would like to pass a higher proportion of bids now than they did two or three years ago, simply because they are generally of better quality, but the result of the Bill is that they will be able to pass only a lower percentage than before, which will be extremely damaging.

The ability to plan ahead will be particularly affected, and that will be increasingly harmful. In the past, large capital projects have been funded, but we all accept that, in future, lottery funding will move towards revenue funding. If the good causes feel that they have to cut off revenue funding after two or three years, future artists and athletes may not be given the opportunities that they deserve and that they could be given under the lottery as currently constituted.

Existing good causes will know that the new opportunities fund is open ended and can be expanded to almost any extent. The Bill would allow expansion to continue, so the good causes would be right to be even more fearful about the future as the opportunities for political manipulation introduced by the Bill become ever more attractive to future Secretaries of State.

The present division is crude but fair. Nobody would argue that there is any great science in deciding that five good causes should each receive 20 per cent. of the money. We could have had endless arguments about whether charities were more worthy than the arts and

whether sport was more worthy than heritage. The simple method—which has, as far as I know, received barely a murmur of protest—of dividing the cake five ways by giving 20 per cent. to each cause is seen to be perfectly fair. In this case, complication is the enemy of trust in the long term. By introducing complication into the distribution mechanism, the Government are eroding the trust that exists between them and the distributing bodies. That is likely to damage the bodies' morale and the amount of good that they can do.

I urge the Government to accept the amendments, which are in no way wrecking amendments. They would not stop the Government setting up the new opportunities fund or taking any of the significant measures in the Bill. If the House has a surprising burst of sanity and accepts the amendments, it will enshrine protection for the existing good causes so that although the Government could set up the new opportunities fund, that would not cause the collateral damage to the good causes that the Bill will inflict. I urge the Minister to have a last minute change of heart and accept the amendments.

Mr. Prior: It is rather sad that we have to debate amendment No. 1, which would increase the minimum allocation from 5 to 13.33 per cent. We should not feel obliged to do so. We are debating it because Conservative Members are genuinely concerned about protecting the good causes. The lottery has been a tremendous success, as has the distribution of lottery funds, but, over the past few months, in Committee and in debates in the House, many Conservative Members have come to feel that we can no longer trust the Government to ensure that the money is spent properly.

We do not trust the Government because we are not convinced by their defence of the additionality principle. We are convinced by the Bill's wording that the lottery can no longer be described as being at arm's length from the Government. The combination of those two aspects of the Bill makes us feel the need to increase the minimum percentage allocation to protect the good causes.

What leads me to distrust the Government is the fact that they are legislating retrospectively and have been fiddling around with shadow accounts. There was no need to do that. If they had been honest, they could have increased the percentage to the new opportunities fund later, but they did not want to. They deliberately made the Bill retrospective to make it appear as if the percentage was less. That was a deeply unnecessary and reprehensible act. The Government will grab as much money as they possibly can to use for their own purposes. That was not the intention behind the lottery; it was not even the intention of the Government when they were in opposition, when they fought strongly for the additionality principle.

It is vital to protect the interests of good causes, first, for the sake of the lottery. As long as people see that the lottery is independent and that the money goes to good causes, not mainstream public spending, they will continue to play it. The danger of lottery fatigue setting in will be greater if the Bill is implemented.

We are anxious to protect good causes, secondly, for the sake of good government. It is important that taxation is transparent. The taxpayer and the electorate should know where the money comes from to finance public spending. This is sleight of hand—the Government are taking money from good causes to fund their pet projects. I do not necessarily disagree with the projects that they are spending the money on, but it is wrong that the money is being taken from the lottery.

The third reason why it is important to protect good causes is for the sake of the causes themselves. If lottery fatigue sets in and, over time, the causes that are supported by the distributing funds spend the money on revenue rather than capital, it is essential that they have a longer and longer time horizon. If there is in the background the permanent threat that the Government may take more money away from the good causes, that will undermine the causes in the long run.

For those three reasons I support, with some sadness, the proposed increase in the minimum allocation from 5 per cent. to 13.33 per cent.

Mr. Brooke: I declare an interest as the chairman of a trust involved in archaeology and ecology in the Andes, primarily in Peru, which has made an application to the National Lottery Charities Board. I see concern written on the face of the Minister for Sport; I give him a categorical assurance that I shall not communicate or correspond with him about it. I mention that body because, as the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry) will recall, it was the charities' concern about their allocation in the original Act that occasioned a fair amount of debate between us.

There was a recognition that, as the Millennium Commission money ran out with the coming of the millennium, there would be an opportunity to consider the reallocation of the money and whether the charities should receive more. At that stage, we would know how they had spent the money so far. In that respect, I agree with new clause 4, which has been tabled by the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan) as it relates to the purpose of a review.

I have not had a briefing by the National Lottery Charities Board, which is my constituent. In the fourth sitting of the Standing Committee, on 30 April, my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) referred to such a briefing. I am not in any way acting on behalf of the board. I apologise for some unfamiliarity with the narrative. When I was a child, my mother taught me at her knee what I always believed to be a verse from the Old Testament: man look not back at the furrow ploughed by thee. I have never been able to find it in holy writ, but I have not given up hope. I do not spend much time revisiting my past and, if I am unfamiliar with any detail, I apologise.

My recollection is that the Home Office was originally responsible for the National Lottery Charities Board. I was conscious that my right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Surrey (Mrs. Bottomley), who was then Secretary of State for National Heritage, received into her Department the voluntary activity that had previously been looked after by the Home Office. I do not know whether she took responsibility for the charities fund at the same time, but I am conscious that the Government have moved the voluntary activities back into the Home Office. If the Government are creating a new good cause, it is a little illogical to spend money on issues that have nothing to do with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport when they criticised the earlier movement of voluntary activity to the Department of National Heritage.

[Mr. Brooke]

I say, as a bystander, that there has been a lack of coherence in the development of the Government's thinking. There was a Stephen Leacock character who jumped on his horse and rode off in four directions at once. There has been an element of that in the transmogrification of the Government's policy, which has been curious in view of the emphasis that they have placed on strategy and their criticism that there was a lack of strategy in the previous thinking.

I believe that the Minister for Sport will reply to the debate, and I welcome the opportunity to hear from him more precisely what the Government's intentions are. I do not know whether, in his responsibility for heritage buildings, he has been high over the nave in Wells cathedral, but if he has he will have seen etched on the floor the design work of the masons in the middle ages, which is still visible 500 or 600 years later. We shall see the Minister for Sport set out such markings, and we shall have an opportunity to verify them over the next five years. I had profound sympathy with the observation by my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) that complication is the enemy of trust in these matters. The simpler the Government can make what they intend to do, the better it will be for the lottery.

8.30 pm

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): I should like to add to my considerable reputation for parliamentary eccentricity by saying that I was always doubtful about the whole concept of the lottery. I felt that it would damage existing charities and drain from them funds that would otherwise go directly to them. My outlook was probably soured by the brilliance of George Orwell's description in "Nineteen Eighty-Four" of the effects of a lottery in a totalitarian society. He said:

> "The Lottery, with its weekly pay-out of enormous prizes, was the one public event to which the proles paid serious attention. It was probable that there were some millions of proles for whom the Lottery was the principal if not the only reason for remaining alive. It was their delight, their folly, their anodyne and their intellectual stimulant."

I thought that, with such a start, the lottery could only be a somewhat corrupting force in society. The Bill shows that it is also corrupting the Government. Effectively, the Bill is the second stage in the Government's attempt to make good their promise to try to keep their spending and tax-raising targets at Conservative levels. The first stage of that attempt was the raid on the pension funds and the second stage—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. We are debating the new clause and the amendments. We are not worried about possible inequities of the lottery. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman could hang his jacket on that peg.

Dr. Lewis: The amendments seek to ring fence the amount that will be available for good causes. Good causes were nominated to enable money that formerly went to charities to continue to be spent on such activities. There is an attempt to get away from the safeguards that were provided for the lottery. That is part of a general, corrupting strategy to enable the Government to get their hands on money that, had the lottery not been created, would have gone to charity. That charitable money will be used for Government expenditure. I predict that this is not the last time that such an unethical sleight of hand will be employed.

Mr. Banks: The hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) described himself as eccentric. That is a middle-class word for loony, and he adequately proved his case. The lottery has been a great success and the hon. Gentleman was wrong to oppose it. People go in for the lottery because they want to win oodles of cash. I do not wish to strip away all the talk about good causes, but that is why I go in for it. So far, I have been unsuccessful, apart from a few tenners here and there, but I dream about the big one coming along, as do many people. As I fail, week after week, to win the biggie, I have the consolation of knowing that money is going to good causes. It is clear that people do the lottery to try to win prizes.

The right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke) spoke about Wells cathedral. I have never been high in the nave of that cathedral—I have never been high anywhere—but I was interested to hear that the right hon. Gentleman will not spend much time revisiting his past. According to the interests that he declared, he will spend some time in Peru.

The Opposition amendments demonstrate two matters. First, they show the Opposition's inability to decide their position on the new good cause. As my hon. Friend the Minister for Arts said, in Committee and on Second Reading, the Opposition argued that there was something intrinsically wrong about spending lottery money on health, education and the environment. However, amendment No. 8 accepts the idea in principle, merely postponing it for a few years. Secondly, the amendments demonstrate the Opposition's failure to recognise that we are not harming the existing good causes. They are receiving the £9 billion that everyone expected them to receive when the lottery started.

Perhaps it is rather odd to say in this place that there comes a point when we ought to try to trust each other. *[Interruption.]* I knew that Opposition cynics would not accept that. They have described my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State as if he were Josef Goebbels. Somehow, there was an evil manifestation sitting next to me and planning all sorts of dire happenings to the existing good causes. My right hon. Friend is a perfectly sweet, decent honourable gent who does not have a vicious thought in his mind. The House should trust him.

The Liberal Democrat new clause 4 gives us a chance to explain our approach to the reallocation of the millennium stream, which seems to have worried people.

Mr. Brooke: I greatly enjoyed the Minister's reference to his right hon. Friend. In his capacity as Chairman of the Select Committee on National Heritage, the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) once said to me, "Of course I trust you Secretary of State: it is the ones who come after you about whom I am worried."

Mr. Banks: I do not know anything about impending reshuffles. There has been one in the Opposition and we constantly read about them in the Government. Whoever is Secretary of State—and I know that it will be the present incumbent for many years—can be accorded the same trust as my right hon. Friend. Why should we want

to destroy the existing good causes? It offends me somewhat that Opposition Members should feel that we have ulterior motives—that we are somehow intent on destroying the existing good causes and the national lottery. On Sunday, the front page of *The Observer* stated that the Chancellor of the Exchequer had squirrelled away £50 billion. That is a great deal to squirrel away, but I think that we can rely on our Chancellor to manage the economy in good order and to make sure that there are sufficient funds for our spending priorities.

The right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan) apologised to me for the fact that he would not be here for the winding-up speeches. I thank him for that and for his short speech. I assure him that when the time comes for us to decide how to reallocate the millennium share, we shall carefully consider what the lottery distribution bodies have achieved and the case for giving each a higher share. There is no assumption that it should go to the new opportunities fund. If that happens, it will be because we have concluded, after looking at all the good causes, that it is the right thing to do. We shall obviously take account of the representations by hon. Members and others on the merits of each good cause and, to address one of the issues in the amendments, we shall explain the basis on which we have decided the allocation.

When deciding what to do with the millennium share, we must try to ensure that each body has the potential to achieve at least as much as it has already achieved. We have adequate arrangements in place to ensure that we can evaluate the effectiveness and performance of each body. As the right hon. Gentleman will know from his membership of the Public Accounts Committee, the Department is accountable to Parliament for the effective use of national lottery distribution funds. As part of its normal sponsorship activities for the lottery overall and for individual distributing bodies, the Department is continually engaged in reviewing the performance of those distributing bodies. We will look very carefully at what has been done by each of the bodies and what can be achieved in future. That is the way in which we shall assess the performance of those lottery bodies, but, before reaching any final decision, we shall, of course, listen to what the lottery distributors and others have to say about the case for increasing the share of each good cause.

The hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) effectively said that the Bill goes beyond the manifesto. The manifesto, covering as it did the whole range of Government's responsibilities, dealt with the lottery only briefly. We did publish, as he acknowledged, during the election campaign a policy document, "The People's Money", which set out in more detail our plans for widening the benefits of the lottery. It fleshed out our plans for the new good cause and made it clear that the lottery's success enabled the new good cause to be established while the millennium stream was still continuing. Who could object to that? If having such a new good cause is a good idea, why not do so as soon as it can be afforded without damaging the other good causes?

"The People's Money" received wide and favourable media coverage, and we all know the result of the election that followed a week after its publication. The ideas in "The People's Money" are, in all essentials, the same as those that were put forward in our White Paper last July, which nine out of 10 respondents supported. I fail to see why it is not perfectly legitimate for us to base the Bill on ideas that we put forward so clearly before the election and which were so comprehensively endorsed by the British people.

The hon. Member for West Suffolk is completely wrong to imply that there is some fundamental difference between the new good cause and the existing good causes. Is he saying that arts, sport and heritage are not core Government responsibilities? That may be his view, but it is certainly not mine.

I turn to the matter of damaging existing good causes, which was raised by the hon. Members for Ashford (Mr. Green) and for West Suffolk. The Opposition have returned to the most tired argument that has been used throughout the passage of the Bill—that we are taking money away from the existing good causes. That is simply not true. The Bill reduces the percentages that the arts, sport, heritage and charities will receive, but the greater than expected success of the lottery means that those are smaller percentages of a bigger total—in terms of hard cash, which is surely what matters to everyone, particularly the lottery distributing bodies, the existing good causes will receive £1.8 billion each during the current licence period, exactly the same as was forecast when the lottery started.

The other point that was made was that the good causes were counting on the extra income. The Opposition, when in power, never guaranteed that there would be no changes in the good cause percentage. They must have envisaged the possibility because they included in the 1993 Act provision to change the percentages by order. They never made it clear how they might use that power.

Mr. Brooke *rose—*

Mr. Banks: I will give way to the right hon. Gentleman, who knows a great deal about the 1993 Act. He can explain why no guarantee was given in that Act that there would be no changes in the good cause percentages, and why a 5 per cent. minimum was put in. That meant effectively that, for the five good causes, the amount could have been reduced to 5 per cent. and that could have been done by order in the House, if the present Opposition had been in government. Seventy-five per cent. could have gone somewhere else. We are giving far more of a guarantee to the existing good causes than the previous Government ever gave during their period in office.

8.45 pm

Mr. Brooke: I was seeking to intervene to make a point that flows out of the exchange between us. Given that the original intention was that we should ideally have a debate in each Parliament, with the ability to change the percentages by order thereafter, having listened to the opinions of the House, would the Minister, when the time comes, be prepared to recommend to the business managers the possibility of having just such a debate at that stage, so that the House can contribute to the discussion of the allocation?

Mr. Banks: The chief business manager—my right hon. Friend the Chief Whip—is sitting next to me whispering sweet nothings in my ear. I am sure that he heard what the right hon. Gentleman said and will be seized of the good sense of his suggestion.

[Mr. Banks]

Let me finish on the commitment to the existing good causes. This is very important and it is where the trust element must come in. Time and again throughout the passage of the Bill, here and in another place, the Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Minister for Arts and my noble Friend the Deputy Chief Whip in the other place have made our position on future changes on allocations abundantly clear and I am happy to repeat them.

First, barring the extremely unlikely circumstances in which lottery income for good causes is less than £10 billion in total, we will ensure that each of the existing good causes receives by 2001, when the present licence expires, the £1.8 billion expected at the time that the lottery started. Secondly, the Government have taken no decision on how any returns beyond £10 billion might be allocated—there is no assumption that they automatically fall to the new good cause or any other. Thirdly, the Government have no plans beyond those that they have announced already—the reduction in the millennium share to 13 per cent. and the increase in the new good cause to 20 per cent. in autumn 1999—to alter the funding of the existing good causes. That applies both to 2001 and beyond. That is fairly clear; one cannot be more explicit about that.

There is no way that the Department for Culture, Media and Sport is setting out to ensure that culture and sport do not receive money beyond 2001. I cannot make it any clearer than that and I hope that the hon. Member for West Suffolk will accept that point. I reject both the amendments.

Mr. Spring: With the leave of the House. The reassurances that the Minister has sought to give are wholly unsatisfactory because, as he knows, the new opportunities fund is a creation which involves a massive centralisation of power in the hands of a Secretary of State, which makes this completely different from the other good causes. Therefore, to protect the good causes, we seek to ensure that the minima are changed. As Lord McIntosh accepted, this is a radically different situation. Therefore, we will concentrate on amendment No. 1 to put down a clear marker to those who are concerned—the recipients of the lottery and those in the distributing bodies. We want to ensure as best we can that the smash-and-grab raid on the lottery does not continue and worsen.

Question put and negatived.

Clause 6

THE NEW GOOD CAUSE AND THE RE-ALLOCATION OF LOTTERY MONEY

Amendment proposed: No. 1, in page 7, line 43, at end insert—

'(6A) In section 28 of the 1993 Act (power to amend section 22) in subsection (2)(a) for "5 per cent." there shall be substituted "13½ per cent".'.—*[Mr. Peter Ainsworth.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 120, Noes 277.

Division No. 288] **[8.48 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
May, Mrs Theresa
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John M. Taylor and Mr. Stephen Day.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Ashton, Joe
Austin, John
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Bennett, Andrew F
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel

Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell–Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, Yvette
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Fisher, Mark
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Salter, Martin
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Jamieson and Mr. Jim Dowd.

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 17

OBJECTS

9 pm

Mr. Spring: I beg to move amendment No. 5, in page 17, line 36, leave out from 'potential' to 'and' in line 40.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss amendment No. 6, in clause 27, page 22, leave out lines 8 and 9.

Mr. Spring: In the course of the past few days, I have read the Secretary of State's book "Creative Britain".

[Mr. Spring]

In it, he describes the huge increase in our exports of radio and television material, the increase in employment in that area and the massive rise in sponsorship of the arts and in the number of cinema admissions. On behalf of my hon. Friends, I thank the right hon. Gentleman for so generously applauding the Conservative Government's 18 years in office. It was precisely the conditions created by that Government which led to the explosive increases so graphically set out in his 27-page introduction.

As we have made clear in respect of the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts—NESTA—we are not against the setting up of a national fund for talent; there is considerable merit in the idea. Indeed, it is based on a Conservative concept. It builds on the well-established and admirable philanthropic tradition of this country. We entirely support the principle of a fund that supports individual talent.

We are fortunate in having many people of considerable talent who have contributed to our national life and won so many Nobel prizes. Our success compares extremely favourably with that of any other country, especially given our small population.

The sad truth, however, is that the Government have missed an important opportunity. Elements involved in the establishment of NESTA in the form suggested in the Bill put at risk the success of the whole venture. We greatly regret the fact that the Government have chosen to establish it in this form. I appeal to the Minister even at this late stage to persuade the Government that NESTA's objectives are incompatible with the sort of body that we believe could successfully nurture our national talent. We are deeply sceptical of the idea of setting up a quasi-governmental body, some of whose objectives will be overtly commercial.

We know now why the Government have determined not to set up NESTA as an independent charity, despite the clear commitment given before the election to do so. As the Minister explained, the Government have decided to graft a commercial remit on to the original concept for NESTA, which, by definition, loses it the advantages of charitable status. The amendments are designed to remove the commercial elements and turn NESTA into the genuine trust for talent that the entire country would applaud. To set up a national endowment with true nobility of purpose would secure the support not only of the House, across party political lines, but of the whole country, desirous of enabling talented individuals to realise their talents to the full.

We accept the advantages of establishing a body such as NESTA as an independent endowment, but, regrettably, NESTA, as proposed, will not be fully independent of the Government. As a consequence, it risks not being able to attract money from independent sources, which is a crucial element in the long-term success of NESTA. That is the crux of our concern about the establishment of that body.

As I said on Second Reading, people simply do not quickly volunteer to give money to Government bodies—even Bernie Ecclestone, I dare say, might find it difficult to be so persuaded.

I remind the House of the Labour party's commitment to NESTA:

"Our immediate objective would be to have NESTA-supported ideas earning copyright revenues by 2001. The National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts would be a national trust for talent, helping to turn bright ideas into successful and innovative businesses. It will be constituted as an independent charity."

I stress those last few words. Labour continued:

"NESTA will invite successful figures in the arts, technology and science to contribute part of the value of their copyrights and patents to help the young talent of tomorrow. These contributions will go into a permanent endowment fund. To give NESTA an initial boost, limited contributions will be set aside from the new Lottery fund to add to this endowment".

That commitment is to be found in the Labour party document of 23 April 1997.

The Prime Minister reiterated those proposals before the election. In a press release on 27 April, he said:

"We propose to give a Lottery-aided launch to our proposal for a national talent fund—a National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts. NESTA will be an independent charity which will encourage successful people in the arts and sciences to donate part of the proceeds of their talent to an endowment fund which will foster new talent for the future".

Those words are to be applauded.

The amendments would remove the commercial aspect of the objectives set out for NESTA. They would give it a proper coherence and a real opportunity to acquire the national support that it deserves. In effect, they would make it work. There is a danger that the initial endowment of £200 million will be put at risk because NESTA, as currently constituted, will not attract the additional funding over time.

As I said in Committee, we broadly support the aims of NESTA and would support the idea of just such an independent body dedicated to nurturing talent, especially in the arts. Indeed, the Conservative manifesto of 1997 included the following pledge:

"We will encourage the use of Lottery money to train young athletes and artists, with revenue funding for bursaries, concessionary tickets to professional performances and support for young people's organisations and productions."

Therefore, there was considerable cross-party support, which the Government have unfortunately now put at risk.

NESTA was in fact the development of an initiative first announced in April 1996 by my right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Surrey (Mrs. Bottomley), to whom I pay tribute.

It was always the view of the Conservative party that the lottery would evolve. That view was reinforced as the popularity of the lottery grew among those playing it and the communities that benefited from lottery grants. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) said on Second Reading:

"there is the prospect of moving rather more from capital funding to revenue funding, which was always envisaged at the outset and, again, is perfectly sensible. The only points at issue are the specific details of what is proposed and the timing."—[*Official Report*, 7 April 1998; Vol. 310, c. 187.]

I am happy to congratulate the Government on following the path set by the previous Administration, but they are risking the very success and popularity of the lottery by using it to fund areas that it was not originally set up to finance. Potentially, that could damage the image of the lottery and could end in failure.

In Committee, we learned of the Government's continuing determination to use the lottery to supplement public expenditure on health, education and the environment—I use those definitions in the broadest possible terms. The amendments simply highlight another unexpected and unwelcome departure in lottery funding under Labour.

We debated in Committee the unfortunate decision—which I believe will be regretted—to place NESTA under the control of the Secretary of State rather than to make it a genuinely independent body, as was at least the Government's original stated intention. We debated the disturbing funding arrangements for NESTA, which show that the Government have no faith that it will ever perform as an independent, self-financing body or that it will ever manage to attract significant contributions from independent sources. The evidence, as we shall see, is the scope for the Government to raid the original good causes to pay for NESTA.

We are also concerned about the requirement placed on NESTA not merely to encourage talented individuals in the fields of science, technology and the arts and to contribute to public knowledge and appreciation, but to seek out and sponsor commercial success in those sectors. It is simply the latest incarnation of Labour's long-standing desire to pick winners, as the previous Labour Government sought to do so unsuccessfully. It is a further sign of Labour's inexhaustible faith in Government rather than the private sector.

As we look back on the development of the venture capital industry in Britain, we must recognise that, although we have had many successes, more could be done. There is certainly an argument that many of the most important British inventions have been commercially exploited elsewhere. However, we recognised that when we were in government, in the considerable changes to the tax regime for venture capital. We sought to encourage and secure seedcorn capital, by the tax changes introduced by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke). That is the way forward. If the dynamics of the small business sector, particularly the seedcorn, are to be nurtured and encouraged, it is through the tax mechanism and not by the Government picking winners. We have been there before, and I believe that once again it will be a considerable failure.

A similar amendment was proposed and rejected in another place, when my noble Friend Lord Skidelsky said:

"The contention seems to be that we are very good at inventions but banks or others are reluctant to back them, so they end up being exploited overseas. The argument that our innovators have suffered from lack of venture capital is an old one, but it is very hard to prove. Surely, whatever the case, NESTA should not seek to become a venture capitalist or business angel in its own right. We should have learned by now that government agencies should not try to second guess the private sector. In the end it is the taxpayer, or in this case other National Lottery initiatives, who suffers the losses of bad decisions."—[*Official Report, House of Lords, Grand Committee*, 29 January 1998; Vol. 585, c. 108.]

The difficulty about establishing that objective for NESTA is that in practice it may well embody the very worst kind of corporatist second-guessing. It is an ominous precedent which I wish to highlight again.

By adding that specific aim to NESTA's remit, the Government are establishing a further call on the lottery in an area that should be the responsibility of the Department of Trade and Industry—if the Government have any role, other than via the clear tax incentives that my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe introduced in the latter years of the previous Government. The Minister should reflect on that. If it is necessary or desirable to amend the tax regime, something should be worked out between the Treasury and the Department of Trade and Industry that would satisfy the integrity of NESTA. We should be happy to support such a policy, which would be separate from the commercial remit being given to NESTA.

9.15 pm

The conventional new Labour wisdom is that the British economy is blighted by short-termism that prevents the British people from fulfilling our true potential; that we do not have a sufficiently vigorous or flexible enterprise culture to take advantage of all our talent for innovation. It was clear from the comments of Labour Members in Committee that the private sector was an alien and mysterious world to them, because so few had any practical experience of it.

The aim of the clause is return to the state-sponsored enterprise for which there is no evidence of success in this country over a long period. If a market for an idea or project cannot be found in the private sector, it is folly for the Government to imagine that they know better. It is regrettable that the Government have chosen to saddle NESTA with that objective. We urgently ask them to reconsider, even at this late stage. If they were prepared to do so, we should happily support the establishment of NESTA.

We discussed all the issues comprehensively in Committee, but the Government rejected outright any amendment that we proposed. At no stage did they even consider looking again on Report at any of the points that we had raised. That is unprecedented in the experience of many and shows the insecurity of Ministers. How much better it would be if NESTA were set up as a charitable trust—as the Government originally intended—along the lines of the National Trust, which was established by a series of Acts of Parliament and commands the support of millions throughout the country, or the Prince's Trust, which makes grants to businesses, but does not take on commercial risks. The Government are proposing a beast that is neither fish nor fowl. It is not charitable in its aims, so it cannot benefit from charitable status and will not attract the general public support that a charity enjoys, but it will not make any money either. Instead of attempting to be a venture capital arm of the Government, NESTA should act as a real endowment for talented individuals.

Governments have a miserable record of picking winners in this country. There is no reason to suppose that that will change. I ask the Minister once again to consider the great potential that NESTA has. A clear message of bipartisan support could be sent out from the House. Creating a widely appreciated national endowment for talent is within the Minister's gift, but he must accept that the commercial element contains the seeds of NESTA's destruction and its lack of public acceptance.

I hope that the Minister will reflect on what I have said today and what my hon. Friends said so often in Committee. He should return to the assurances given when the Prime Minister, then Leader of the Opposition, set out the original concept. If the Government returned

[Mr. Spring]

NESTA to what was originally envisaged, even at this late stage, real hope would be offered to those talented and successful individuals who would enjoy the benefits of the endowment from the national lottery that NESTA offers.

Mr. Tom Pendry (Stalybridge and Hyde): I had intended to make a lengthy speech on Third Reading, but as my hon. Friends on the Front Bench have been so forthright and clear in their answers on Report, I am left with just one narrow point that relates to amendment No. 5. It follows a point that I made on Second Reading which does not appear to have been acted on in Committee. My hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Murphy) made a similar point. It relates to NESTA and our promise—which I wrote—in the sports election manifesto. Page 10 of that document states:

"The endowment will not focus solely on excellence. It will be inclusive in its approach, encouraging access and partnership across the whole range of sciences, humanities, sports and the arts."

On Second Reading, I suggested that the Government might see a way in which to develop a useful sporting role for NESTA in, for instance, sports science or sports information technology—both of which are crucial to developing world-class sport in the UK. Unfortunately, the Government seemed unable to move on that point in Committee. They appeared reluctant even to acknowledge the omission. I am sure that it was merely an omission and that the Minister for Arts was right at the time. Perhaps he is saving his best card until tonight, and will give sport—and me—some encouragement in the concept of NESTA at this very late stage. I congratulate my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench on their handling of the Bill.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): I am grateful for the opportunity briefly to add to the excellent remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) in pursuit of acceptance of amendments Nos. 5 and 6. I want to add to his remarks, not least because his reference to the Labour party's desire to pick winners struck a great chord.

When I entered the civil service way back in 1979, one of our tasks in what was then called the industrial planning division—it seems a rather archaic title now—was to start to dismantle some of the measures that the previous Government had implemented precisely to pick winners. The National Enterprise Board, which was very like what the Labour party proposes, went about the task of trying to put public money into industrial and commercial enterprises with the objective of making money for the country and the taxpayer. Of course, it failed to do either.

I say that as somebody who was once responsible for the science and technology budget in the Department of Trade and Industry. I disposed of £440 million. I shall elaborate briefly on the interesting debate on which my hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk briefly touched. He criticised the Labour party's desire to move towards the market in proposing that NESTA should provide resources, take stakes in companies and acquire property to pursue commercial exploitation of an invention, new product or process.

In moving towards the marketplace, one must realise that one is not behaving in the same way as one would in a genuine market. There is a conjunction of two principles—one of exploitation close to the marketplace and one of additionality. I found when working on the science and technology budget that, when one moves public money for the purposes of subsidy closer to the marketplace and at the same time applies the principle of additionality—I shall be interested to hear whether the Minister says that that is not to be applied in this context, although I suspect that it will be—one ends up with projects right at the margin of commercial exploitation. The market itself is quick to leap on those products, processes and inventions that have readily exploitable commercial potential. It leaves to the publicly funded or publicly subsidised body those projects that are not obviously commercial or will not obtain a full return. The net result is that the market says that the publicly funded operator can have all the projects that are right at the margins where the returns are doubtful.

To reinforce what my hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk was saying, Ministers should not be sanguine about the possibility of the project bringing forward returns to the taxpayer or NESTA for subsequent reinvestment. On the contrary, my hon. Friend was right to emphasise the value of the endowment in relation to talented individuals. That is precisely where the public sector—at some distance from the marketplace—does not necessarily exploit the potential.

I hope that we have learnt not to seek to direct subsidy close to the marketplace in substitution for commercial judgments. I hope that we have learnt that there is a role for the public sector through the subsidy of research that is essentially some distance from the marketplace. There are significant externalities to the United Kingdom economy from subsidising that research because not all the benefits of that research can be appropriated to a particular project or the promoter. That is why the public sector puts funding and subsidy into projects further from the marketplace.

Interestingly, there are precisely the same potential externalities available if one subsidises individuals who have talent—and I say that with a constituency interest. It is highly probable that many individuals in the area around Cambridge are precisely those who have the talent to bring their projects, products, processes and inventions to the marketplace. What they do not lack is the commercial exploitation around Cambridge. What is important to them is the process of bringing them out of some of the world-class research institutes in Cambridge university and giving them a start.

That start will often be focused on their talents as individuals, demonstrated in the research environment. It will not necessarily be in relation to a particular project, but it will be in relation to their broader talent. In just the same way as public subsidy should be directed towards blue-skies research, the endowment should be directed toward people who can look to the blue skies but who are not necessarily close to the marketplace. On that basis, I support the new clause.

Mr. Prior: I wish to make two points in support of my hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring). First, NESTA is mixing its drinks—mixing thoroughly laudable charitable aims and commercial aims. The great risk is that the almost inevitable failure of its commercial objectives will ultimately overwhelm its sensible charitable ones. I entirely agree with my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) that

the history of Government organisations in terms of picking winners is a bad one. When they pick losers, it casts a shadow over the worthwhile charitable objectives.

I am glad to see the Minister for Small Firms, Trade and Industry in the Chamber, as I wish to refer to the myth that there is a shortage of capital in the United Kingdom for decent ventures. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire that, at an early stage, potential entrepreneurs, scientists and artists need help, encouragement, training and education. However, a lot of capital is available in the commercial market and, in Cambridge, there are venture capital groups that specialise in science and high-tech firms. I ask the Government not to delude themselves into thinking that there is a shortage of capital.

9.30 pm

Mr. Fisher: I am glad that there is a measure of agreement that NESTA is fundamentally a good idea and that the United Kingdom is good at invention, design, engineering, science and medical and artistic innovation. Despite one or two comments from Opposition Members, I think that there is also general agreement that we are not so good at developing ideas in the private sector or at developing ideas and bringing them to the market.

In framing NESTA, the Government have been guided by three important reports: the 1997 Confederation of British Industry report "Breaking the Growth Barriers for Technology-Based Small and Medium Sized Enterprises"—a snappily named document—which identified the need for early-stage finance and seedcorn investment; the 1997 House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology report "The Innovation-Exploitation Barrier", which identified the need for management of innovation, highlighting the importance of intellectual property; and the 1996 Bank of England report "The Financing of Technology-Based Small Firms", which called for partnership between the public and private sectors.

All three reports identified a weakness, which is not to say that there is no good work. It was encouraging to hear from the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) that there is, perhaps inevitably, a clustering in and around a great university such as Cambridge, which means that many good ideas will be produced and brought to market. However, Cambridge is perhaps better placed than some other areas to benefit from seedcorn investment; it will not be alone, but success there may not be reflected throughout the country. The belief that we are failing in some respects has led the Government—with, I think, the general support of the Opposition—to press forward with the idea that, good though we are at innovation, we are less good at developing ideas and bringing them to fruition; it will often be for the private sector to take on those ideas, products and services.

There is some confusion about what NESTA will do. It will not be a rerun of the Industrial Reorganisation Corporation—it will not be a Government company sponsoring new ideas. It will do specific things: it will provide limited seed capital; it will provide guidance on the protection of intellectual property rights; it will raise awareness among banks about technological entrepreneurship; it will support networks for creative individuals; and it will provide a one-stop source of information. Those are practical ideas, which cluster around the problem—we do not intend that NESTA will replace the market.

In his short but helpful speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry) asked whether NESTA would also support sport. He will appreciate that the projects that NESTA backs will be a matter for its chairman and board, who will be appointed very soon. However, there is no reason why sports products and services should not be supported, particularly where new technologies can help to improve performances, training or the medical understanding of sport, for example—it is easy to see where there may be interesting and fruitful conjunctions between technology, innovation and sport. I am sure that my hon. Friend will work with those organisations that will present interesting new ideas to NESTA.

There is some confusion about whether NESTA will operate on the margins and whether it will duplicate the private sector. Although we appreciate that there are some dangers that it could do so, it is not our intention that it should. The hon. Member for North Norfolk (Mr. Prior) said that there was plenty of venture capital; I agree that there is plenty for some good ideas, but we should not ignore the 1995 report of the European Venture Capital Association, which identified the fact that, in that year, only £23 million was available for small and early-stage businesses, amounting to only 1 per cent. of the venture capital activity in this country. That suggests that there is not the scale of capital that there might be—which probably accounts for why we have been losing the benefit of the development of some of the innovations and techniques with which we have benefited other countries.

Labour Members consider this a good, constructive, practical idea, and we commend it to the House. We think that amendments Nos. 5 and 6 would knock out the core of the development of products and services, the importance of intellectual property and the economic realisation of what NESTA is intended to foster and nurture, and we therefore hope that the House will reject the amendments if they are pressed to a vote.

Mr. Spring: The Minister made a point about the possible lack of venture capital in this country. The subject is debatable and arguable, but let me make another point to him again.

The Minister fails to understand that if the Government indeed believe that there is a shortage of venture capital as seedcorn investment potential in this country, this is not the way to address the problem. It should be addressed by means of tax and other incentives. We should not put at risk an endowment, thereby depriving it of its charitable status. The Government are responsible for a total confusion of opportunities, which I very much regret. I cannot for the life of me understand why the Government are adopting such a means of dealing with a problem that they think exists.

Mr. Fisher: The hon. Gentleman is being unusually doctrinaire. We are not talking about alternatives. Of course there is room for the tax system and the private sector, which perform their task very well and will continue to do so. They are not alternatives: we need them both. We believe, however, that there are gaps and

[Mr. Fisher]

weaknesses, and that our proposed system can work along with the existing tax incentives and seedcorn capital from the private sector and strengthen this important area.

Mr. Spring: I am afraid that that does not answer my point. The simple truth is that the system will not work. It has never worked in this form before, and it certainly will not work now.

The most important aim of the national endowment was to secure a charitable status. It was an endowment which all of us could have been happy to support. It is a great shame that the Government are so determined to affix this particular commercial remit to the whole concept of NESTA. The House could have sent out the clear message that NESTA has an important role to play, across party divisions, as a national endowment body. Adhering to the old-fashioned and long-past idea that Governments can pick winners and impose a commercial remit destroys the value of NESTA in its entirety.

I do not want to press the matter further, but we want to put on record our fear that NESTA—which has so much potential—is put at risk by the way in which it has been constructed in the Bill. I think it a great shame that the Government have moved away from their original commitments, which we would have been happy to support.

Amendment negatived.

Order for Third Reading read.

9.39 pm

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr. Chris Smith): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

Let me first give a warm welcome to the hon. Member for East Surrey (Mr. Ainsworth) in his new capacity as shadow Secretary of State. In my dealings with him here over a number of years, I have always found his approach both courteous and constructive, and I look forward to fruitful and robust debate with him across the Floor of the House. He seemed to spend most of this afternoon and this evening reading my book. I recommend it to him as a somewhat more productive exercise than reading the fulminations of Mr. George Walden on the subject.

The Bill has been the subject of much interest both inside and outside the House. It has also been subject to thorough scrutiny by the House. I place on record my thanks to members of the Standing Committee and especially the hon. Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale) and my hon. Friend the Member for Bootle (Mr. Benton) for their excellent chairmanship. The Committee was thorough in its scrutiny, and all the issues were debated thoroughly—indeed, so thoroughly that reading the proceedings of the Committee it seemed to me that the same speech was made on different occasions by several Committee Members. On some occasions, it appeared to be repeated several times within the same speech.

I must also thank my colleagues the Ministers for the Arts and for Sport for their sterling work both in Committee and on Report. Nor should I neglect to mention my noble Friend the Deputy Chief Whip in another place and my noble Friend Baroness Ramsay of Cartvale for their careful stewardship of the Bill in that place.

We have never sought to argue that the lottery as introduced by the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) and his colleagues was anything other than a basically good idea. I appreciate the sincerity with which the right hon. Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude), the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) and their colleagues sought in discussions on the Bill to preserve what they see as fundamental aspects of their vision of the lottery. My only regret is that we have not been able to persuade them that we agree with them on more than they realise and, where we disagree, we are improving on what is there already, not spoiling it.

I also thank the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan) and the hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Fearn) for their contributions from the Liberal Democrat Benches. I am grateful for their support on many issues and their intelligent probing on others.

Last, but definitely not least, I should thank all my colleagues on the Labour Benches who played a part in the discussions on Second Reading, in Committee and today. Their constructive and well-informed support, based on their knowledge of their constituents' needs, has been most welcome and has reminded us constantly of the rightness of what the Bill seeks to achieve.

The Bill delivers our clear commitments in our manifesto and pre-election documents to making something good even better. If the amendments agreed by the House find favour in another place, as I very much hope, this Bill will pass into law playing a significant part in achieving the four aims that we set out in our White Paper: first, widening the benefits of the lottery to health, education and in due course the environment; secondly, reforming the way in which lottery distribution works throughout all the existing good causes; thirdly, setting up the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts; and, fourthly, securing confidence in the way in which the lottery is regulated and operated. In connection with the last of those aims, I am particularly grateful that the House has agreed to important amendments to set up a National Lottery Commission and to open up National Audit Office access to the operator.

The Bill is delivering our commitments, but it is only part of a wider picture. I ask the House to note, in particular, that today I am issuing new policy directions, under my existing powers, to the Arts Council of England, the English Sports Council, the National Lottery Charities Board and the National Heritage Memorial Fund.

On Second Reading, I told the House that I was starting consultations on those new directions and it is particularly pleasing that they have been strongly welcomed by the distributary bodies and that they are being issued in final form with very little change.

The new policy directions for existing distributors will, among other things, shift the focus away from big spending on bricks and buildings towards ensuring that more lottery money goes to people and activities. They will acknowledge the developmental needs of children and young people. They will remove the requirement for significant levels of partnership funding, which will make it easier for less wealthy organisations and areas to benefit. They will, for the first time, encourage distributors to consider how their strategies will contribute to sustainable development, and will invite them to consider the contribution that they can make through the

good causes to reducing economic and social deprivation. They will ensure that all regions and parts of society can benefit from the lottery.

I want everyone to have confidence that the money for good causes is allocated fairly and goes where it is needed. That is a central strand in our reform of the lottery, and our new directions will help us achieve it. I am particularly pleased that our proposals have been strongly welcomed by the bodies concerned. The Bill will help lottery distributors to be more strategic and proactive in their use of lottery money. We are streamlining the distribution system and helping applicants to cut through bureaucracy to make it easier for small community groups to find out about the lottery and receive grants. In many cases, decision making can be pushed closer to the grass roots.

Taken together, the Bill and the associated directions open an exciting new phase in the lottery's existence. I commend the Bill to the House.

9.46 pm

Mr. Peter Ainsworth (East Surrey): I thank the Secretary of State for his kind words on my appointment. Our paths have crossed several times in recent years, and I hold the Secretary of State in considerable respect. One afternoon, I even had charge of his dog; we need not go into that now, but I can assure the House that the dog came to no harm.

It is a great honour for me to have slipped out of my stage management role of the past two years into playing a small speaking part at the end of deliberations on the Bill. I am well aware that the real stars were those who slogged through Committee. I pay tribute to them all, particularly to my hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) who guided the Opposition clearly and well. There were valiant contributions from my hon. Friends the Members for Mid-Dorset and North Poole (Mr. Fraser), for Ashford (Mr. Green), for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Simpson) and for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson). I pay tribute, too, to my immediate predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude), who brought his unique blend of elan and intelligence to his role in opposition. He is committed to listening to and speaking up for people whose lives are affected by the Secretary of State's Department.

I have considerable respect for the Secretary of State. It is a pity, therefore, that he has been crunched so early by pressure from the Chancellor of the Exchequer. On the back of his finely decorated book, there is a picture by Damian Green—[HON. MEMBERS: "Damien Hirst."] I mean Damien Hirst; I apologise to my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Mr. Green). The painting is titled, "Beautiful snail crunching under the boot painting", and it reminded me of the Secretary of State crunching under the boot of the Chancellor.

The previous Government set up and handed on the most successful lottery in the world. I hope that all hon. Members agree that that is some achievement, but we would never have claimed that the lottery was perfect. There are ways in which it can be improved. There are some welcome measures in the Bill. We have, for example, no fundamental objection to the clarification of the regulator's powers. We would support any sensible measure to improve the workings of the lottery, such as the introduction of better ways of handling smaller grants or removing bureaucratic impediments.

As my hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk said, we support the principle of the creation of the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts, but we do not support it as a quasi-venture capital outfit controlled by the Secretary of State. Conservative Members warned of the dangers of a Government trying to pick winners. In particular, we will continue to support measures that would increase the funds available to the arts, sport, heritage and charities. Our first objection to the Bill is that far from assisting those good causes, it damages them.

In answering that charge, the Government have sought to claim that the changes that they are making will benefit other good causes, such as out-of-hours activities in schools, health, the environment, science and technology. Those are indeed good causes, but that is not the point. If such causes are to be funded, they should be funded from central Government receipts, not by a raid on the arts, sport, heritage and charities.

The Government also tried to argue that the good causes will not suffer because the lottery is so successful that it is providing more money than originally expected. This is utterly bogus. The extra money may or may not be forthcoming. My hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk mentioned lottery fatigue, which has occurred in other countries. I am glad that the Minister for Sport is not suffering from lottery fatigue and that his lust for the lottery remains unabated, even if the bills are getting onerous.

In any case, expectations have been built up by both the recipients and distributors of lottery proceeds. The Bill puts those expectations at risk. The distributing bodies know that and the Secretary of State knows it, too, as he acknowledges in his book. I have not read it all the way through, but I have read some of the reviews; it is a cruel world. He says:

"the distributing bodies have adjusted their expectations upwards to reflect the success of the lottery."

The Bill is a semi-veiled attack on the arts, sports, charities and heritage. Unease about the Government's ability to deliver their pre-election nods and winks is turning into real concern and anger.

Our second objection to the Bill involves a fundamental breach of the principle of additionality. We have heard much about that today and throughout the course of the Bill. I was on the Standing Committee in 1993 that considered the Bill that introduced the national lottery. My two clearest memories are first, that if the Liberal Democrat spokesman had had his way, we would not have had a national lottery at all; and secondly, I recall the immense pressure brought to bear on the Committee, especially by the arts world and the sports world, to ensure that money from the lottery was safeguarded against any attempt by the Chancellor of the Exchequer to pilfer it to support central Government funding in other fields. Labour members of the Committee voiced their vociferous support for the principle of additionality.

The undertaking on additionality was given, and adhered to, by the previous Government. Despite the promises made by the Prime Minister and others at the general election, that undertaking has been broken by the Bill. Those lottery promises are due to join the mounting heaps of broken promises that the Government seem determined to leave behind.

Our third objection is that the Bill ignores the clearly established principle that lottery money should be distributed by bodies that operate at arm's length from the

[Mr. Peter Ainsworth]

Government. As the sorry story of the Bill has unfolded, it has become increasingly clear that the Government intend to use the new opportunities fund to divert money to its own favoured projects. The new opportunities fund and NESTA will be directly under ministerial control. We do not and cannot accept such a massive increase in political control over lottery players' money. The reason for that, once again, is contained in the Secretary of State's colourful book, although there is a sad lapse from his normal eloquence, so I shall torture the House only briefly with his grammar. He says:

"In a very real way, lottery players think of lottery money as 'their' funds far more determinedly than they do with taxation."

That is exactly the point—it may not be well expressed, but it is perfectly reasonable.

Finally, the original national lottery was based on an understanding that it would be used to support local initiatives by local people with local support. The Bill undermines the principle of local support by introducing an unwelcome and subversive centralisation of power. The distributing bodies will, for the first time, be given explicit powers to solicit bids for money, and who is it has the power to appoint members of the distributing bodies? It is none other than the Secretary of State, who can also give them directions as to how they should distribute the proceeds. For the last time—

Mr. Chris Smith: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ainsworth: I was just about to quote again from the Secretary of State's book, but I give way.

Mr. Smith: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. I am tempted to observe that the face may have changed, but the speech has not. He must accept that all the existing distributors in arts, sport, heritage and charities fall under exactly the same qualification of appointment by the Secretary of State and being subject to directions from the Secretary of State to which he has just referred.

Mr. Ainsworth: Will the Secretary of State deny that the Bill contains new powers that he can exercise in that direction? No, he will not deny it.

Mr. Smith: Let me make it perfectly clear: the new opportunities fund will operate in exactly the same way and under exactly the same rules as the other distributors. Parliament will have the power to introduce new initiatives from time to time, but the independence of the new opportunities fund as a body will be exactly the same as that of the other distributors.

Mr. Ainsworth: The fact is that the Bill and the measure to which I have referred, which the Secretary of State appears not to affirm, is a wholesale attack on the existing good causes and represents a major extension of the Government's control over the national lottery and those who are likely to benefit from it.

For the last time, I shall refer to the Secretary of State's book. [HON. MEMBERS: "More."] I have already referred to it almost as many times as the Secretary of State referred to it in his recent article in *The Spectator* and I do not want to give it any more publicity. In a sinister example of new Labour-speak, the right hon. Gentleman says:

"We now have the chance to reorient"—

I like that—

"the lottery so that it reflects more closely the people's priorities."

We know that, in new Labour-speak, the "people's priorities" are in fact the Government's priorities. The Government always think that they know best. The Bill takes away control from the distributing bodies and gives it to the Government; it takes money away from the arts, sports, heritage and charities and gives it to the Government; it breaks the principle of the arm's-length management and extends the dead hand of Government control to lottery procedures. That is the way to create, not a people's lottery, but a Government's lottery and a lottery for bureaucrats. That is a way to expand political patronage at the expense of the original good causes.

Throughout the debates on the Bill, the Government have failed to acknowledge those concerns and have resorted to the evasion and sophistry that are becoming their hallmark.

The Bill betrays not only the promises made by Ministers before the general election—we are used to that, although that would be bad enough—but the national lottery that we created. On those grounds, I urge my hon. Friends to oppose the Third Reading of the Bill.

Question put, That the Bill be now read the Third time:—

The House divided: Ayes 278, Noes 129.

Division No. 289] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Ashton, Joe
Austin, John
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Bennett, Andrew F
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Cabom, Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, Yvette
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew

Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Fisher, Mark
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Salter, Martin
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swinney, John
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Welsh, Andrew
White, Brian
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Jamieson and Mr. Jim Dowd.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David

McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
May, Mrs Theresa
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John M. Taylor and
Mr. Stephen Day.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed, with amendments.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 15 (Exempted business),

That, at this day's sitting, the National Lottery Bill *[Lords]* and the Late Payment of Commercial Debts (Interest) Bill *[Lords]* may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. Betts.]*

Question agreed to.

Late Payment of Commercial Debts (Interest) Bill *[Lords]*

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

Clause 6

RATE OF STATUTORY INTEREST

10.12 pm

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 4, line 1, leave out

'made with the consent of the Treasury'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 2, in page 4, line 10, at end insert—

'(c) avoid the risk that purchasers enjoying a dominant position in a market may seek to renegotiate payment terms to the disadvantage of suppliers in that market.'.

No. 3, in page 4, line 10, at end insert—

'(3) The power to make an Order under subsection (1) above is without prejudice to the making of a further Order varying the provision made under paragraph (a) or (b) of that subsection.

(4) No Order shall be made under subsection (3) unless any preceding Order under that subsection (or, as the case may be, an Order under subsection (1)) has been in force for at least six months.'.

No. 4, in page 4, line 10, at end insert—

'(3) The Secretary of State shall ensure that the terms of any order under this section are promulgated by such means as are calculated to bring them to the attention of businesses and other commercial undertakings as effectively and speedily as possible.'.

Mrs. Gillan: On 14 May, in Committee, I said that, due to the Minister's unsatisfactory responses, I intended to raise matters concerning the interest rate on Report. This group of amendments gives the Minister a chance to clarify the area that she dealt with so inadequately then.

I wish to deal first with the setting of the rate of interest and then the communication of that rate of interest to businesses and the speed and frequency with which the rate may change. In Committee, the Minister set great store by further consultations with business and others to establish the efficacy of the initial rate that was published in the draft order—the base rate plus 8 per cent. I hope that she can explain in detail how that can possibly work as it will be at least four years before some businesses can use the Bill against, for example, the public sector. Will they be excluded from the consultation process for the next four years? I presume that they will, but I hope that the Minister will categorically confirm or deny that point. If it is confirmed, a vast swathe of industry and business will be excluded from the consultation process that she has heralded.

Will the Minister explain in detail how, precisely, she arrived at the figure of 8 per cent? I believe that she initially favoured 4 per cent.—so she has doubled her original figure. That shows how wrong she was, so it is difficult to be reassured that she knows what she is doing.

The mechanisms in the Bill for setting the interest rate are similarly open to question, as the final rate will depend on the Minister's colleagues in the Treasury. Will she explain, in detail, how she expects the relationship

between her Department and the Treasury to work and how potential conflicts between the two Departments will be resolved?

There is no provision in the Bill to protect businesses from rapid rate changes at the whim of the Government. In Committee, the Minister failed to answer my questions, so I hope that she will now deal with them. How frequently could the interest rate be changed? Will it be weekly, monthly or biannually? Would it not be better to provide a minimum period so that businesses could have some certainty? It is feasible that, in times of highly volatile interest rates, the rate could change daily as a result of these measures. The Minister has had due time to consider these matters and I hope that she will come forth with the answers.

Businesses are confused about how they will be told about the changes to the rate. The Minister has said that she will distribute a free users guide to businesses. Perhaps she will elaborate on that. How many copies of the guide will be printed? Does she intend to send it to all businesses, or is this another burden on businesses, which will have to make efforts to find out what is going on? What budget will be set aside for this leaflet? Will it be reprinted every time the rate changes?

The amendments were tabled because of the Minister's poor performance in Committee. I hope that she will now provide the answers to these questions.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): I shall concentrate my remarks on amendment No. 2, which I hope will force the Minister to return to the issue that my hon. Friends and I raised on Second Reading and in Committee. We fear that the Bill would induce companies in a dominant position to renegotiate their terms of trade with their suppliers if the burden of interest set under the Bill were to become too onerous. The more onerous the rate of interest, the greater is the incentive for purchasers to renegotiate their terms of trade.

We have argued throughout that there will be a great temptation for a company that faces an unduly harsh penalty to reconsider its terms of trade instead of being content to operate on a net 30-day basis—admittedly with the possibility that the payments made could drift out beyond that period.

My hon. Friend the Member for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page) has frequently carried out his own expert analysis of the impracticability of a strict adherence to an over-strict payments regime. I hope that he will return to that argument, because I always enjoy hearing it. I would argue that it is certain that businesses, particularly when in a dominant position, will decide that if they are to be held strictly to an impractical 30-day payment regime, it would make a lot of sense to negotiate alternative terms of trade of 45, 60 or even 90 days with their suppliers to make the payment mechanism more operable and to ensure that penalties are not unnecessarily incurred.

The onus is therefore on the Minister to persuade us that such a response by a significant number of purchasers would be unlikely. If it is not, the whole argument behind the Bill will be shown to be fatally flawed. The amendment is a small but significant attempt to countermand such a natural response and inexorable process.

If what I fear actually comes about, it will make nonsense of the Bill. It has been said time and again during the Bill's previous stages that the purpose of the legislation, which I query, is to protect relatively small firms from being dominated or even exploited by larger ones. That argument is false because I suspect that as many late payment difficulties arise among small firms as between small and large firms. If the Bill succeeds in any of its objectives, it will thus end up penalising small firms as much as—perhaps even more than—large ones.

The amendment attempts to get round the dilemma thus:

"purchasers enjoying a dominant position in a market may seek to renegotiate payment terms".

Although I do not know to what extent it will be effective, it at least recognises the dangers that I have outlined and tries to prevent their coming to pass. I want to hear from the Minister why my fears are unfounded and hence why the amendment is unnecessary. If she fails to explain that, I can only assume that her logic—it is usually impeccable—will drive her to accept the amendment, which is a mild but realistic attempt to correct an imbalance that I fear may arise if the Bill is enacted unamended.

My argument has not yet been properly answered, on Second Reading or in Committee. I therefore welcome the fact that my right hon. and hon. Friends have re-presented it, in the hope of a fuller answer from the Minister. The Minister looks as if she is in a generous and compliant mood tonight. I hope that, having heard my speech and the one I sense we are about to hear from my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Hertfordshire, she may be prepared to accept our amendment. Before we proceed any further, we at least expect a proper answer to our points.

Mr. Richard Page (South-West Hertfordshire): Amendment No. 2 has about it the air of a hard commercial head butt. This is the amendment which shows why the Bill will be ineffective when it has to be implemented in the marketplace.

Despite what my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) said, I hope that he does not press the amendment to a Division. It would be impossible to implement, just as the whole Bill will be impossible to implement to the benefit of the small business sector for which it is designed. The Bill will have a marginal effect, which is one of the reasons it has not been introduced before.

I ask my right hon. Friend not to press the amendment because the Government have no answer to the question that lies behind it. He is absolutely right to ask for an answer. If a valid answer were forthcoming, it could revolutionise the approach to the Bill taken by some Conservative Members, but I strongly suspect that such an answer will not be forthcoming.

The amendment basically asks what is to stop a purchaser negotiating disadvantageous terms with a supplier. When a big boy is talking to a little boy, what is to stop the big boy negotiating terms that are disadvantageous to the little boy? In Committee, the Minister for Small Firms, Trade and Industry hinted coyly that certain things could be done to redress the balance. I should very much like to hear what could be done if the terms were felt to be unfair or out of kilter, but I strongly suspect that no response will be forthcoming.

[Mr. Richard Page]

The Bill will undoubtedly regularise credit terms, which must be welcome. Despite the blandishments of my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst, I shall not run through the credit cycle process for the third time. I have done so twice. When I read the record of my performance I was overcome by my brilliance, but a third time would be going too often to the well. However, I envisage certain phrases appearing in the arrangements made between companies, such as that payments will be made by X number of days after the monthly statement has been delivered. I envisage X being not 30 or 40, but 50 or 60, because companies will want to ensure that they cannot be caught by the statutory right to interest. I can see that number of days becoming a very comfortable cushion—a real protection against any possible charge of statutory interest.

The amendment aims to

"avoid the risk that purchasers enjoying a dominant position in a market may seek to renegotiate payment terms to the disadvantage of suppliers in that market."

The Bill reveals the Government's lack of commercial knowledge; many credit arrangements are at odds with each other. How many suppliers supply goods on terms that do not match the purchasing orders? As my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst said, the Bill was introduced to protect small businesses, but I can see it being used to their disadvantage.

I should like the Minister to tell us what happens when a dominant supplier or purchaser draws up terms that are "considered unfair" for the smaller company. What will be done to protect the small business, which is what the Bill was designed to do? The explanations offered so far show that the Bill is flawed.

If I catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, among all those who no doubt will be clamouring to speak on Third Reading, I shall explain how all the aims of the Bill could be achieved by another means in a fraction of the time and at a fraction of the cost. I look forward to hearing what the Minister says about how the Bill will protect a small firm against a dominant supplier.

10.30 pm

The Minister for Small Firms, Trade and Industry (Mrs. Barbara Roche): First, I congratulate the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) on her move to the shadow Foreign Office. Tonight's debate is almost her swan song in the role of shadow small business Minister. I have very much enjoyed our exchanges across the Dispatch Box and I shall certainly miss them.

I am not surprised, however, that the hon. Lady has been moved. After all, during one of her first interviews as shadow spokesman, in *The Sunday Times* on 30 November 1997, she was reported as attacking

"her own party for losing the small-business vote at the general election. In an extraordinarily candid interview with the Federation of Small Businesses she admitted the Tory Government got its small business strategy wrong. 'Mea culpa,' she said. 'We did not get it right in all areas.'"

That was surely the understatement of the year. I understand the hon. Lady's embarrassment.

I appreciated the speeches of the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) and the hon. Member for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page). The hon. Member for South-West Hertfordshire has always opposed the introduction of a statutory right to interest, as does the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst. Had his party been brave or foolhardy enough to do so, he would have voted against the Bill on Second Reading—but the Opposition dared not vote against it on Second Reading as they would have appeared to be anti-small business as well as lost the vote.

The hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham is in a very embarrassing position because, when she was first elected, she signed an early-day motion supporting the right to statutory interest. Not merely was she a signatory to it; she was one of the first six names.

I was startled when the Opposition tabled amendment No.1. After all, it was an Opposition amendment in another place that introduced the very words that it seeks to amend. However, we have come to expect U-turns from the shadow Trade and Industry team, and the hon. Lady has not disappointed us with her parting shot.

In another place, the Government were convinced by the arguments of Lord Home. In amending the rate of interest we shall take account of all views, if practically possible. Within the Government, we shall certainly wish to consult and be guided by the Treasury on any interest rate.

In view of amendment No.1, I should not be surprised by amendment No.2, but I am puzzled. It would oblige the Secretary of State to consider, among other factors, whether the rate would lead to dominant firms renegotiating their payment terms to the disadvantage of suppliers. To meet the new criterion wholly, it would be necessary to set the rate at 0 per cent; otherwise, theoretically, there may be the possibility of a dominant firm renegotiating a contract to avoid the interest rate. That is why it is entirely sensible for the hon. Member for South–West Hertfordshire to urge his party not to vote for the amendment tabled by its Front-Bench team.

Mr. Forth: The Minister seems to be arguing in a black and white way. We are talking about judgment. There may be an appropriate rate that could be applied and would be broadly accepted as reasonable, but if the rate became penal, dominant suppliers might be driven to renegotiate, as we fear. Surely the Minister will concede that somewhere between those two is the possibility of a rate that would work in most cases without driving companies to renegotiation. Her argument about a rate of 0 per cent. is too absolute. Will she not at least admit a balance of probability?

Mrs. Roche: I understand the right hon. Gentleman's argument. That is why we consulted and listened to the Bank of England. In a recent survey conducted by the Midland bank to be published next month, 79 per cent. of those surveyed supported the statutory right to interest, and 77 per cent. said that they would use it. Those who responded knew our proposal for the rate.

Taken to its logical conclusion, the amendment would result in policy following the lead of those who wanted to avoid its intent, which would be ridiculous.

Mr. Page: One reason why I urged that the amendment should not be put to a vote is that I know that my right hon. and hon. Friends appreciate its impracticality. Our aim is to ask how the Government are going to protect

small firms against a dominant supplier or purchaser if it is felt that the terms are becoming unreasonable. The hon. Lady is running around the park without addressing that fundamental question.

Mrs. Roche: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point. I am addressing the amendment, which was tabled by the Conservatives. Having studied the Bill closely, the hon. Gentleman will know that we have drafted it to protect small firms and prevent companies from contracting out of the legislation. The Bill safeguards the position of small businesses.

As I have said, I am puzzled by the amendment. In the other place, the Opposition Front-Bench team sought to ensure that the criteria for setting the rate of interest were not set in stone. We were persuaded that we should insert the words, "among other things". The hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham has reversed that policy.

Amendment No. 3 is unnecessary and unhelpful. There is no need to provide an order-making power to amend an order. The order to be made under subsection (1) can be amended simply by making another order under the same subsection. The proposed subsection (4) would prevent the Secretary of State from amending the interest rate for six months after making an order, regardless of any advice that she may have received from business and other representatives. That is not helpful.

I understand the concerns that have been expressed. It is important that changes to the interest rate are made known effectively and speedily. The Government have worked with trade associations, business representative organisations and the business links network to publicise the Bill and the likely interest rate. As part of the Better Payment Practice Group's campaign to improve the payment culture, we shall highlight the proposals through a publicity campaign.

Mrs. Gillan: I am pleased that the Minister has dealt with some of my points on this group of probing amendments. How often does she envisage the rate may change? Does she intend to go to the expense of republishing the leaflet every time it changes? For the sake of businesses listening to the debate, she should clarify the mechanism.

Mrs. Roche: I understand the hon. Lady's points. If she will bear with me for just one moment, I shall deal with them.

Following—I hope—Royal Assent, I shall publish a user's guide to the Bill, which businesses will be able to obtain free of charge. Members of the Better Payment Practice Group are committed to promulgating that guide. The Department will also write to trade associations and business links to ensure that they are aware of the guide and can inform their members of how they may obtain their free copies. By those means, we can effectively bring to the attention of business the initial interest rate.

Should it be necessary to change the rate—I am not going to predict at this stage how frequently it will change—we will use similar routes to inform businesses of the change. Incidentally, that same commitment to providing information applies to other orders made under the Bill, such as the commencement orders for the phasing arrangements.

For the first time, all business representative organisations are sitting down together to do something about improving the culture of late payment—something which the previous Government failed to achieve. I urge the House to oppose the amendments if they are not withdrawn.

Mrs. Gillan: I thank the Minister for her kind remarks at the beginning of her response to the group of amendments.

Mr. Clive Betts (Sheffield, Attercliffe): It did not last long.

Mrs. Gillan: I, too, will miss the Minister. I have enjoyed our exchanges across the Dispatch Box, although I have not enjoyed her hackneyed comments. Like my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth), I wish that she would get some new material; this audience is certainly very tired of it.

When I signed the early-day motion, I naively thought that statutory interest on late payment of debt might solve the problem and change the culture. It was only when I went into the matter in detail with Ministers in the Department of Trade and Industry, and businesses and trade associations, that I realised that the proposal was not a panacea, but yet another burden on business.

The Minister ought to be embarrassed because, in an interview in *Network*, she admitted that almost 60 per cent. of lobby groups representing smaller businesses were opposed to a statutory right to interest on late payment of debts. I have nothing to be embarrassed about, but the Minister should be ashamed that she is proposing legislation which, she admits, is not popular among smaller businesses.

The Minister has not addressed the questions that my right hon. and hon. Friends and I have raised; I am certainly not satisfied with the answers. She has ducked the question of how often the interest rate will change. Indeed, it seems that it could change daily. She failed to address the fact that many businesses will be excluded from taking any meaningful part in the consultation process, which she keeps going on about. Such businesses will not be able to exercise the protection afforded by the Bill, particularly against the public sector, so they can hardly be consulted on it.

The Minister has not even given any indication of how much money will be set aside in the Department to promote the rate of statutory interest for businesses. She says that she will produce the leaflet free of charge; I hope that she has the budget to produce a leaflet as many as 365 times a year. If interest rate changes demand it, that is what she will have to do. She said that she is writing to trade associations and businesses links. I must tell her that not all small businesses are either members of trade associations or have contact with business links. In other words, she is quite prepared to leave a large swathe of small businesses in ignorance or put them to the time, trouble and expense—which can hurt a small business—of finding out what her large Department is proposing.

It is clear that the Minister has not, and will not, respond well to the amendments. They were tabled as probing amendments to try to elicit decent and healthy responses, which have not been forthcoming. In view of

[Mrs. Gillan]

the lack of information from the Government, it is not even worth pressing the amendment to a vote. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 11

TREATMENT OF ADVANCE PAYMENTS OF THE CONTRACT PRICE

Mrs. Roche: I beg to move amendment No. 8, in page 5, line 37, leave out from beginning of line to end of line 43 and insert—

'.—(1) A qualifying debt created by virtue of an obligation to make an advance payment shall be treated for the purposes of this Act as if it was created on the day mentioned in subsection (3), (4) or (5) (as the case may be).

(2) In this section "advance payment" means a payment falling due before the obligation of the supplier to which the whole contract price relates ("the supplier's obligation") is performed, other than a payment of a part of the contract price that is due in respect of any part performance of that obligation and payable on or after the day on which that part performance is completed.'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Government amendment No. 9.

Mrs. Roche: Following the Committee, we reviewed the Bill to ensure that none of the amendments agreed to had inadvertently caused things to fall outside the Bill that we would wish to be covered. Amendment No. 8 picks up the one issue we have identified. Its purpose is to ensure that the Bill operates on stage payments—that is, interim payments in respect of work actually done.

During discussions in the other place, the Government tabled an amendment to clarify the operation of clause 4 on the period for which statutory interest runs. Inadvertently, however, that amendment has put stage payments into a state of limbo as they are caught by the definition of an advance payment in clause 11, although the clause does not stipulate from when interest will run.

10.45 pm

Rather than invent a rule in clause 11 for genuine stage payments, we think the best approach is to take them out of clause 11 altogether. That is achieved through amendment No. 8. The effect of the amendment is that stage payments, where the payments are for work already done, are dealt with under clause 4(3) and (5) as appropriate.

Amendment No. 9 is consequential on amendment No. 8. The new wording requires a change in the word structure in clause 11(4). It also serves to remove an element of ambiguity, as the obligation to pay the price is, in one sense, always present in a supply contract. These are technical amendments which improve the scope of the Bill and I commend them to the House.

Mrs. Gillan: I do not know how long the Minister has been working on the Bill, but she has had at least a year in government. At this late stage, she is still proposing changes under the guise of technical amendments.

In the other place, the Government tabled no fewer than 52 amendments. In Committee, another five were tabled by the Minister. Tonight, we have two further amendments, making a grand total of 59 amendments to what she claims is a well-researched Bill. What is she up to? How can anyone have confidence in a measure that still requires modifications at this stage? I am sick to death of hearing from the Government that everything is under review. Surely by the time they propose legislation, the Government should have made up their mind about what they want to do without having to introduce remedial drafting at every stage in both Houses.

I understand what the Minister wishes to achieve with the amendments, but what guarantees do we have that she will not find further flaws after the Bill has received Royal Assent? Nothing would surprise me. This is amateurish behaviour. In Committee, I had the impression that the Minister had finished hacking the Bill around. Tonight's performance indicates that, once again, she has decided to move the goalposts, a situation that is much to be regretted and which places another burden on businesses, which are trying to follow the passage of a Bill that has changed almost daily.

The Minister has said that businesses need a stable environment and a degree of certainty in which to operate. She has made a real pig's ear of the Bill, while failing to listen to any constructive suggestions from the Opposition. I hope that she can tell the House whether, finally, she is satisfied with the Bill or whether there are more surprises in store.

Mrs. Roche: Oh dear, oh dear! In Committee, I suddenly felt overwhelming sympathy for the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan)—for whom I have a great deal of time—because she suddenly seemed to suffer a severe memory lapse about what happened under the previous Government, of which she was a member.

The hon. Lady rightly wants to ensure that we get the Bill right. We believe that small businesses deserve nothing but the best, which is why we listen and consider. I remind her of what happened during consideration of the Gas Act 1995; on Report, the then Minister for Energy tabled 20 amendments.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I understood that the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) was making a preliminary remark before coming to the point. However, now that she has finished her preliminary remarks, which were not particularly pertinent to the amendment, we do not need to have another debate outside the scope of the amendment.

Mrs. Roche: I absolutely agree with you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, which is why I did not mention in my opening remarks the fact that, during consideration of the Education Act 1997, the hon. Lady, as a Minister, tabled on Report the widely criticised amendment No. 65—I knew that you would reproach me if I did.

I have tabled Government amendment No. 8 to improve the Bill and I commend it to the House.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendment made: No. 9, in page 6, line 9, leave out

'the obligation to pay it arises'

and insert 'is payable'.—*[Mrs. Roche.]*

Clause 17

SHORT TITLE, COMMENCEMENT AND EXTENT

Mrs. Gillan: I beg to move amendment No. 5, in page 8, line 5, at beginning insert

'Subject to subsection (2A) below,'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 11, in page 8, line 5, after 'force', insert—

'(a) as respects contracts where both the purchaser and the supplier employ more than 50 persons, at the end of the period of three months beginning with the day on which this Act is passed; and

(b) as respects any other contract,'.

No. 6, in page 8, line 10, at end insert—

'(2A) The power to make orders under subsection (2) shall not be exercised so as to provide for this Act to come into force, as respects contracts where the purchaser is a government department or a local or public authority, on different dates according to whether the supplier employs more than a prescribed number of persons.'.

No. 7, in page 8, line 10, at end insert—

'(2A) Where the power under subsection (2) to make different provision for different purposes is exercised by reference to the number of persons employed by a supplier, the Secretary of State shall publish—

(a) the criteria used in specifying that number and,

(b) the steps taken to ascertain whether that number is regarded as appropriate for the purposes of this subsection by persons representing businesses and other commercial undertakings.'.

Mrs. Gillan: Once again, the amendments have been tabled to allow the Minister to clarify her thinking and to reveal her views on an extremely important part of the Bill's enabling powers—the phasing-in proposals. Sadly, the Minister proposes to prevent a significant proportion of businesses from using the Bill against Government Departments and agencies—the public sector. Businesses employing 50 or more employees will have to wait for four years before they can use the measure in their dealings with Government. In Committee, the Minister gave me the impression that she could change the proposals if she wanted to. However, she then bottled out and ducked the issue, which was of great regret to Conservative Members. I hope that, in tabling the amendments, we have given her a final opportunity to make amends.

In my discussions with the Forum of Private Business—an organisation with which I know the Minister is familiar—I discovered that it felt aggrieved that she had not responded to my proposals or to its requests. There is a strong case for making the public sector subject immediately after the measure's implementation to payment of interest on all contracts. That is important both because of the trickle-down effect of better payment and because the public sector will largely escape liability until the final phase, as it principally trades with those business that the Minister defines as large—those with 50 or more employees. That does not seem to fit well with the Government's objective of leading the change.

In Committee, I cited a case in which the company Davall Relays had suffered at the hands of the Meteorological Office—the Meteorological Office withdrew a contract when the company asked it to pay within 30 days. I suspect that the Minister will say that the Meteorological Office was operating under the same terms and conditions that applied under the previous Government, but she must realise that the case I mentioned happened under the Labour Government, at a time when she was saying that no one should pay debts late.

The Minister has done me the courtesy to reply to my letter, although I received her response only at 8.30 pm. I was wondering whether I would receive a response before our considerations tonight, but she replied just in time, which is better than what happens when one writes to some other Government Departments, which take three or four months to reply. I raise the matter as I have yet to be satisfied that the Minister is not, yet again, protecting Government to the disadvantage of smaller businesses—certainly those with 50 or more employees.

The letter that I received confirmed that the Meteorological Office, when asked for a written undertaking that a payment be made within 30 days, "technically" thought that that constituted a counter-offer to its order, and therefore cancelled the order. The Minister wrote:

"I understand that the contracts used to purchase items with an order value less than £500"—

that applied to the order that we are discussing—

"had been in use for many years. It seems, unfortunately, that the Meteorological Office were reluctant to make an isolated change to the long standing standard conditions of their contracts. They therefore withdrew their offer."

That was at a time when the Government were legislating for statutory interest on late payment of debt, with all the warm words being issued by the Minister and her Department.

There was light at the end of the tunnel, however. The Minister's letter continued:

"I am pleased to report that the Meteorological Office has now, in anticipation of enactment of the Late Payment of Commercial Debts (Interest) Bill, changed the terms of their orders to expressly reflect that they will pay all valid invoices on orders less than £500 within 30 days of receipt of an invoice."

What of those over £500? Will the Minister tell us now whether she will insist that the Meteorological Office change its terms and conditions to apply to all contracts? If not, I think that business will see that this is a sham. It is appalling that a letter from a Minister who is taking legislation through at this stage should say only that it will apply to another Department for "orders less than £500". I am astounded.

Mr. Forth: I hope that I am not pre-empting my hon. Friend. Should not the Minister also reassure us that she has reassured herself—in detail—that the Meteorological Office is capable of fulfilling the undertakings given in the letter? Given the expert analysis that our hon. Friend the Member for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page) has made repeatedly, I wonder—and I suspect that my hon. Friend may wonder—whether the office is capable of meeting the very tight undertaking that it has given. If not, is that undertaking worth the paper on which it is written?

Mrs. Gillan: My right hon. Friend makes a valid point, with which I think the Minister will have to deal when she responds. If she does not, serious question marks will remain over the Government.

[Mrs. Gillan]

Equally important is the danger that, unless the measure is applied to all public sector debts, small businesses—as the Minister has defined them—may face discrimination in public procurement, as purchasing bodies avoid suppliers against whom they could face statutory interest. That is particularly pertinent in the light of the health service's record. More than 2 million bills are paid late by the health service alone, and it would, therefore, be in the interest of another part of Government to adjust its purchasing patterns for the next four years to avoid more expenditure in an area of Government that has already been grossly let down by the present Labour Administration.

I hope that the Minister will set some targets according to which she can measure the success of the Bill, which in my view is otiose. It has long been feared that the legislation will lead to longer payment periods. I am not aware of anything that will prevent purchaser companies with a dominant position in the market from renegotiating payment terms to run into, for example, 120 days instead of 40 days. That means that the vendor will not get his money more quickly if too high an interest rate is set. Will the Minister now confirm that she expects no supplier to be worse off under the Bill, and will she now undertake to set and monitor the criteria by which her progress can be charted and her warm words can be judged by real commercial standards? I await her response with interest.

11 pm

Mr. Brian Cotter (Weston-super-Mare): I rise to speak to amendment No. 11, tabled in my name and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey). As hon. Members will be aware, the Liberal Democrats have long argued for a statutory right of interest on late payment of debts, and we welcome the legislation. However, as is often the case, the devil is in the detail, and our amendment would rectify a glaring error.

At all stages, the Government have argued that the Bill is for the benefit of small businesses, and is intended to improve the crippling late-payment culture and to begin to put an end to the commercial exploitation of small firms by large firms. The Minister has also argued that the Government should give an example. However, as the Bill stands, large businesses are exempt from the right to charge statutory interest on other large businesses at the initial phase. In fact, large business will not be able to charge large business until the final phase of introduction. Why? Clearly, there is no economic rationale for that aspect of the phasing arrangements. In fact, the arrangements clearly contradict the intentions of the Bill, which are to improve the late-payment culture, specifically for small businesses, and will not enhance those objectives.

The Government are sending out the wrong message to small businesses in that they are not prepared to make large firms part of the initial phase. A better payment practice between large companies would also have a desirable trickle-down effect on the economy, as the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) said. The late-payment culture would be improved, and firms would be encouraged to use better credit management procedures, as was discussed on Second Reading.

Our amendment would also ensure that government, at all levels, would be liable to pay statutory interest to firms with 50-plus employees—the public sector will largely escape liability until the final phase is introduced. That does not seem to accord with the Government's intention, which was to lead the change, and does not provide the example that the Government should be setting. The Minister will acknowledge that she accepted during Trade and Industry questions that the Government's record on payment was not good, so it seems hypocritical of them to put businesses in a position in which they are liable to pay, when they are not prepared to put themselves in a similar position.

Businesses have had and continue to have problems receiving payment from government at all levels. A colleague produced one example, and I have been assured that the legal aid fraternity is not good at settling bills. I am also greatly concerned about local government. We know that it is under some pressure with regard to financial settlements and that there will be the temptation for it to find all the ways it can in which to hold up payments, with the effect that I described.

The wait-and-see approach that the Minister seems to be adopting is unsatisfactory. There is a general consensus in support of the phasing arrangements, but there is also a clear feeling that the Government should give an example. Feedback from various business organisations suggests that the current large against large arrangement, particularly the public sector aspect, is inadequate. The Forum of Private Business has conducted discussions on the issue, and seems to be well informed on the Bill. In discussions with representative organisations on the Better Payment Practice Group, it has found strong support for idea that the Government should be brought into the first phase.

If the Government are not prepared to accept the amendment, the Liberal Democrats will certainly monitor Government payment practice.

Mrs. Gillan: Oh gosh.

Mr. Cotter: We will, indeed. We will name and shame when the opportunity arises, in line with the Government's argument.

Our significant amendment would weigh the Bill in favour of small businesses. I ask the Minister to consider it seriously.

Mrs. Roche: As regards amendments Nos. 5 and 6, there was extensive discussion in Committee of possible extension of phasing arrangements to include claims by all businesses against the public sector. As I have said, however, support for the Government's phasing proposals was considerable, as 87 per cent. of the business respondents to our Green Paper who expressed a view supported phasing. The hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare (Mr. Cotter) would surely agree that all small businesses will be able to claim against the public sector immediately the Bill becomes law. What is important about phasing is the opportunity that it gives to small businesses, which suffer most from late payment, to take advantage of the Bill straight away.

Mrs. Gillan: How many businesses employing fewer than 50 people have contracts with the Government, and how many businesses employing more than

50 people have such contracts? What percentage of businesses fall into the Minister's categorisations of small and large businesses?

Mrs. Roche: I can see why the hon. Lady is moving to sunnier climes. Her question exposes her ignorance of the way in which the sector is structured. We are talking about not only direct contracts with the Government, but the whole contractual supply chain. That is why it is important that the phasing arrangements give small businesses the right to take action straight away.

We shall monitor carefully the effect of the legislation, not least through the payment observatory of the credit management research group at Bradford university, the establishment of which the hon. Member for Weston–super–Mare has welcomed. If there seems to be a need to extend the right to large businesses earlier than we intend at present, we can do so under clause 17(2), after consulting interested parties, including the Better Payment Practice Group. However, given the support for the Government's proposals, I do not feel bound to amend the Bill at this late stage. We shall keep the matter under review.

The same arguments apply to amendment No. 11, which seeks to extend phasing proposals to allow large businesses to claim against other large businesses from initial commencement. Should experience show that it is desirable to extend that right earlier than currently planned, the Government will do so. I made that clear in Committee, and I repeat it now.

Mr. Cotter *indicated assent.*

Mrs. Roche: I am pleased to see that the hon. Gentleman agrees.

As regards amendment No. 7, we fixed a threshold of 50 or fewer employees to define a small business, because a definition is needed for the initial transitional phases of the legislation, and it is important to small businesses that that definition should be transparent.

We have set the threshold at 50 employees, which catches all micro-businesses, because we believe that any company employing more than 50 should be able to employ someone to manage the payment of bills. In using 50, we have used one of the limbs of the definition of a small firm in the Companies Act.

The Government are pursuing other measures to ensure that small businesses, that is, those employing 50 or fewer staff, have the opportunity to develop the skills necessary to manage their payments. Reference has rightly been made to the Forum of Private Business. Its survey of its membership showed that only 29 per cent. of respondents opposed the size criteria.

I thank the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) for her kind remarks about my speedy response to her inquiry. I am delighted that, in anticipation of the Bill, we have been able to correct a payment practice that had existed in the office concerned for some years under the Government of which she was a member. That shows our commitment.

Mrs. Gillan: Will the Minister now get to the point and say whether she will insist that the Meteorological Office applies the same new criteria to all bills over £500?

Mrs. Roche *rose—[Interruption.]*

Mrs. Roche: Perhaps the hon. Lady would have the courtesy for one moment to let me answer; I know how impatient she is. She knows that all Departments are required to pay their bills within 30 days or as otherwise agreed. I am glad that she gave me the opportunity to point out, through the illustration provided by that case, that the thought of this legislation is biting already. It ill behoves someone who served in the Government of the former Deputy Prime Minister, who boasted about stringing along his creditors and set such a bad example to small business, to criticise this Government. If the amendments are pressed, I urge the House to reject them.

Mr. Cotter *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman cannot speak a second time. Only the mover of the lead amendment can do so.

Mrs. Gillan: I am shocked by the Minister's response. It is obvious that she is being blackmailed into her position by her colleagues. She says that she relies on the consultation, which showed that the phasing in was widely supported; but, of course, that consultation was deeply flawed. If she had asked all businesses, "Should all businesses be able to take the protection of this legislation from day one?" they would have replied with a resounding and overwhelming yes in dealing with the public sector. It is obvious that she is seeking to protect other Departments, particularly those with gross late payment records, which may incur large sums of interest by way of penalty. In particular, I am thinking of the Department of Health, which, by the Government's own admission, will pay some 2 million bills late.

I am very sad that the hon. Lady, who appeared to be cracking in Committee, has been forced back into this position. She is now introducing legislation that discriminates against all firms with more than 50 employees and cuts them off from the very lifeline that she has purported to extend to them. This is a gross abrogation of the duties that she took upon herself in taking on her ministerial duty. I am very disappointed. It is obvious that she cannot move her position, having been forced into it by other Departments—no doubt by Ministers in her Department as well as the Treasury. It seems pointless to ask the House to vote on the amendments, but it remains as my swan-song to this Bill that the Minister has proved to be a deep disappointment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is the hon. Lady asking leave to withdraw the amendment?

Mrs. Gillan *indicated assent.*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It would have been helpful if she had said so.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Order for Third Reading read.

11.14 pm

Mrs. Roche: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

It has given me great pleasure to have the honour to pilot the Bill through the House of Commons. As I have said all along, the Bill is a long-overdue measure—*[Interruption.]* I am sorry that the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope), who is to assume a position on

[Mrs. Roche]

the shadow Trade and Industry team, should laugh at the Bill, which has been warmly welcomed by small businesses. It does not bode well for his shadow ministerial career; however, I look forward to welcoming him to his new responsibilities at Trade and Industry questions, when he might be in a better frame of mind.

The Bill is a long-overdue measure to tackle late payment and the genuine harm that it does to small businesses. It is fair to say that small businesses are the lifeblood of the economy. I am happy to be able to provide to our small firms a statutory mechanism that they have wanted for a long time. Some in the House and elsewhere have wondered whether small businesses will be willing to use that mechanism and take up their new right when it becomes available. A recent survey by the Midland bank found that 79 per cent. of businesses support the legislation, and 77 per cent. of small businesses would use it. It is welcome that small businesses are looking forward to the legislation being passed.

The Bill will recompense creditors who are kept from their money through no fault of their own. It will move the uncertainty regarding cash flow that is usually faced by those who are paid late to those who pay late. The issue of uncertainty is important, and I share the view of the Forum of Private Business that the legislation provides uncertainty for the late payer of the debt. That uncertainty manifests itself in three ways. First, there is the possibility of late payers having to provide a contingent liability in their balance sheets. Secondly, late payers risk facing a demand for statutory interest from receivers of their former late-paid suppliers. Thirdly, those who are paid late will be able to claim statutory interest from notoriously late payers when they retire, or are no longer trading with them.

As a consequence, businesses will see that, should they pay late, they may be pursued by the creditor, a factoring company, or a debt collection agency that has been assigned that debt; and that that pursuit may take place at any point within the six-year statute of limitation, or other period in Scotland. That is a good reason to pay on time. I am sure that accountants in firms that habitually pay late would rather pay on time than carry such contingent liabilities financial year to financial year.

As I have stated all along, the Bill provides small businesses and, in the not-too-distant future, all businesses the opportunity to exercise a new right in the fight against late payment. However, the Bill in itself is only one plank of the Government's efforts in that respect. The Government are committed to continuing work in direct partnership with businesses and their representative organisations. We want to ensure, through the provision of quality information and support, that businesses can improve their credit management. We shall also ensure that Government Departments understand that they are to lead by example. That is why Departments will be required to pay within 30 days or as otherwise agreed and why we are committed to publishing payment timetables.

I pay tribute to my noble Friend Lord Clinton-Davis for his efforts in piloting the Bill through another place; and to all my right hon. and hon. Friends who on Second Reading and in Committee so ably assisted the passage of the legislation.

I take this opportunity also to thank all the business representative organisations that provided an input during the Bill's progress. I thank Stan Mendham of the Forum of Private Business, whose unflagging dedication has been evident to all, certainly to the House.

The Bill's time has come. It will be warmly welcomed by the business community, particularly small businesses, which are the backbone of our economy. I commend it to the House.

11.19 pm

Mr. Page: Despite the Minister's brave words just now, as the Bill made progress in Committee, we could see dawning on her face the appreciation that the Bill was slipping into the category of "It seemed a good idea at the time".

The weaknesses of the measure became more and more apparent and we could see why all but one of the small firms' organisations said no to the statutory right of interest. The one that said yes was the smallest and the noisiest. My right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) exposed on Second Reading why that organisation concluded that the Bill would be a good thing: the survey was carried out in such a way that the answer could only be yes, yes and yes. When those small firms realise that they will still have to go to court and plough through legislation, there will be a group of disillusioned small business men and women.

The Minister has behaved in a courteous and friendly fashion. Courtesy is not universally noted among the Ministers in the Department of Trade and Industry, but she is a pleasant exception. She has loyally plodded on, but she has dodged a number of questions. I do not blame her for doing so. If I were in her shoes and I were being asked those questions, I, too, would dodge them. However, even at this last stage, those questions should be put to her again.

Conservative Members asked about the methods for calculating the interest rate above the base rate. Having read clause 6, we were left with the image of the Secretary of State with a wet towel around her head, drinking black coffee and doing abstruse calculations to make sure that they picked the right figure. When we asked to see those calculations and the basis on which they were made, there was nothing—not a sausage. We discovered that the draft European Union directive being debated happened to use the figure of 8 per cent. above the base rate as the measure. That could well be a coincidence, and I would be prepared to accept that if we could see the calculations that led to that figure, which exactly matches that in the draft EU directive. That is a coincidence too far.

The Minister has dodged the request by my hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan), who has so ably led us in the proceedings on the Bill, for examples of how the Bill's success will be measured. Not a single idea has been put forward to explain how we will examine whether the measure has been a success. Of course, examples will be produced to show how company A took company B through the process and obtained a statutory right of interest. Apart from the fact that there will be a little more interest, that could, and would, have happened under the existing system.

I should be interested to see whether the Forum of Private Business, which has so valiantly championed the cause for a number of years, will be prepared in three or

four years to survey its members to discover whether they feel that the statutory right of interest has been of benefit to them. It should leave aside the fast-track procedures when they are eventually decided by the Lord Chancellor and the extra rate of interest and let them give an accurate answer to the question whether the statutory right of interest has been of advantage to them. I have a strong feeling that the boxes towards the insignificant end will be given most attention.

The Minister dodged the fact, which was covered in an amendment tabled in Committee by my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst, that the Scottish Parliament will be able to amend the legislation. It is worrying that, on each side of Hadrian's wall, legislation may be interpreted and operated differently. That is not the way to maintain a united kingdom. Does Labour want a united kingdom?

The Minister dodged the question why the Government should not give a lead. She gave some reasons for the Government's view, but they do not add up. The Government should lead by example. They should not cower behind and come in at the last possible stage. The Minister dodged two or three times the question of what the Government will do if perceived unfair terms and conditions are imposed by a dominant purchaser or supplier. There has not been a whisper from the Government about what they will do in such circumstances. The Minister will not have to dodge such questions for much longer, because the Bill is in its final stage.

The Minister used some fine words about the break point of 50 employees, but the reason for choosing 50 is peculiar, and the calculation that led to it is not clearly understood by all hon. Members, not least by me. Why will she not adopt the European draft directive which, in the case quoted, uses the sum of 20,000 euros as the basis for court action or for operating a statutory right to interest? That is a matter for the future.

We all agree that the Bill will regularise credit terms. However, even the Minister is starting to accept that it will not be surprising if credit terms for small businesses lengthen rather than shorten. All that the Bill tries to achieve could have been achieved by a better fast-track procedure in the small claims court, which is what has been promised. The Lord Chancellor is working on that, but he is rather like Dr. Who, because now and again he goes into the Tardis and comes out reborn and reinvigorated. The latest one popped out on 1 May and has promised that there will be a better fast-track procedure in the small claims court. That is the best way to help small firms to collect outstanding debts.

The Bill is unnecessary. Guidance could be given to a court on the amount to be charged over baseline interest, and the court could be told that it should be higher than the current 3 per cent. In time, small firms will realise that they still have to go through procedures and go to court and that the companies that they are pressing for late payment have a right of reply. The 77 per cent. of companies that say, "This is what we want, this is right and we support it," will rapidly dwindle to a much smaller percentage.

The Minister made an inaccurate statement, I am sure inadvertently, to my hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham. She chided my hon. Friend for a memory lapse, but I remind the Minister that the previous Government got all parties in the small business sector to sit down together. The previous Prime Minister launched at 10 Downing street "Your Business Matters". The list of attendees—I have been writing them down—is impressive. Apart from representatives of all the small firm organisations, the Governor of the Bank of England, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the President of the Board of Trade, representatives of the four clearing banks, several senior civil service officials and even the Minister for Small Business, Industry and Energy were there. After that, regional meetings were held throughout the country and a final meeting took place at the Queen Elizabeth II conference centre, where many measures to help small businesses in the payment sector were brought forward. I remind the Minister that this unity is not exclusive to her and to her Government. I was glad that all sectors of the business community combined to try to tackle the serious aspect of late payment.

What will go through today pales into insignificance against what has happened over the previous few years. What is being done to make Government set an example in payment on time is absolutely correct. Making large firms state payment policy and payment practice in their accounts is a positive move in the right direction. The endorsement of the prompt payment CBI code was again the right move. The British standard on payment policy has real teeth, the only real teeth that I can see. If a company that has signed up to the British standard does not pay on time, trading standards officers can go in. Apart from training through business links, on which I know the hon. Lady is working—I am glad that she is—the other matter on which the previous Government should be commended is the removal of the iniquitous pay-when-paid system. Many small businesses and subcontractors welcome the passing of such an iniquitous operation. That is a roll-call of honour of which every Conservative Member can be proud.

To sum up the Bill, I can do no better than quote one of the four clearing banks. When asked for its views, it said, "This won't work, but it might help to change the culture." Let us hope that it does, because this is a very expensive and tedious method of achieving very little.

11.32 pm

Mr. Cotter: I welcome the Bill and congratulate the Government on introducing it. Unlike my Opposition colleagues, I believe that, in the round, the uncertainty of late debt should be reversed following the Bill and that the culprits of the crippling problem of debt will find the boot on the other foot; so I congratulate the Government and, at the same time, hope that they have taken on board various points that have been made by me and colleagues nearby.

The American writer Dorothy Parker once said that the two most beautiful words in the English language were "cheque enclosed". We hope that that will be heard much more in future. The statement will have a powerful and, I hope, true meaning when the Bill is implemented. Many businesses will have the right to break free from the late payment millstone which has hung around their necks and, in many cases, ruined their businesses. Small businesses in particular depend on tight budgeting to realise investment and to advance their projects. The Bill will help to create a better payment culture, providing a stick as well as a carrot.

[Mr. Cotter]

Over the next few years, it will be exciting to see how the Bill progresses. In that connection, I welcome the Minister's commitment to monitoring and to accepting the need for the Government to produce annual reports on their record.

I am concerned about some local authorities. Many of them have clear guidelines and procedures for payment. Bradford council has a computer system that is programmed as a matter of policy to pay bills on time automatically. I hope that others will follow that example.

Concerns have been expressed by the Forum of Private Business. Discussions have been held in the past few days on the problem of parties sidestepping or avoiding paying interest as a result of subsequent actions. I understand that that has been considered carefully and that the Minister is satisfied that the issue will be covered. I hope so.

I should not like to conclude without referring to the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan), who has taken a strident part in the debate. I wish her much success in her new role. There was a worrying moment in Committee when she referred to fish being used for payment. I had an awful vision of fish being overdue and being dead and rather smelly. I was concerned about what state the fish would be in when it came to the two fish required to provide the interest.

Mrs. Gillan: Tinned fish.

Mr. Cotter: Tinned fish may be more acceptable. The hon. Lady threw fresh light on the expression COD—cash on delivery. I wish her well in the future. I also thank the Minister for ably conducting these proceedings and for courageously pushing ahead with the Bill, which I warmly welcome on behalf of the Liberal Democrats. I believe that it will provide a solution for small businesses, which has been long overdue.

11.36 pm

Mr. Forth: I am almost as worried about legislation by survey as I am about legislation by referendum. As my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page) said, it depends on the question that is asked. If people are asked, "Do you want a better life? Would you like life to be more pleasant? Would you like the Government or legislation to relieve you of your problems?" the odds are that they will say yes. According to the Minister, many bodies that claim to be representative have tended to say yes to these simplistic questions. I doubt whether their response would be the same if they were asked, "If penal rates of interest were to be introduced for late payments, would you like dominant purchasers to renegotiate their contract with you such that the payments would be even later than they already are?"

As ever, the answer depends on the question. Whether we are dealing with legislation by referendum or legislation as a result of a survey, the danger is that we may mislead innocent people into believing that a legislative wand can be waved over their problem to make it disappear. By asking the wrong question, we are likely to get the wrong answer and to legislate in the wrong way, resulting in disillusionment.

We have tried over and again to persuade the Minister of this danger, but she has not yet been persuaded. I suspect that we are unlikely to do so at this stage of the legislative process. I have this dream that she will rise at the end of Third Reading and seek to withdraw the Bill, but that is unlikely. The Government should take much more care, because they are increasingly resorting to the seductive technique of survey or referendum. They ask simplistic questions and receive, unsurprisingly, positive answers. They then cite that as proof positive that the legislation has widespread support and will therefore succeed.

I will not try to emulate the analysis offered by my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Hertfordshire of how this impractical legislation is supposed to take effect. We have already heard this evening undertakings to the effect that public bodies will make payments of invoices within 30 days. I doubt whether anyone, public or private, has the mechanisms to guarantee that. How many organisations of any size, public or private, have in place the procedures to enable them to pay at that speed? The danger, then, is that—without a renegotiation of terms of trade—nearly everyone will become liable to the penalties specified in the Bill.

Herein lies the danger: we are threatening to penalise people for acting in a perfectly normal and respectable way. That means running the risk that a number of businesses will seek to renegotiate their terms with their suppliers to avoid the penalties introduced by the Bill. That, in turn, will mean even later payments than are the norm now. I sincerely hope that that backlash will not follow enactment of the Bill; I fear that it may, however.

Mr. Page: My right hon. Friend is powerfully putting the point that no company can run a monthly credit system for each individual article purchased during the month. To do so would wipe out the whole purpose of a monthly account.

Mr. Forth: I agree, of course: my hon. Friend understands how business works. Regrettably, all too few of those involved in drawing up the Bill share his understanding. It is impossible to imagine businesses completing each and every invoice as an individual item, with no cut-off point, standard procedure, or mechanism of the kind that any efficient business must have.

My hon. Friend and I both know—it would seem that no one in the Government does—that the assumptions underlying the Bill are quite impractical and will ultimately lead to the destruction of its aims.

For reasons not yet satisfactorily explained—very little about the Bill has been—we are asked to accept that Government Departments will be treated much more leniently than the private sector; there is also an arbitrary cut-off point for numbers of employees. That, too, will lead to anomalies in the implementation of the legislation. We have made that point time and again and received but scant explanation in reply.

There has been little understanding—uncharacteristically—by the Minister. We are left at this late stage of the Bill's progress with a large number of unanswered questions which are germane to the purposes and effects of the measure. Because those questions have not been answered, doubts must have been sown in the minds of those involved in business—large or small, representative or practising—who must by now be extremely concerned lest the Bill prove to be counter-productive.

Far from protecting the interests of small businesses, this legislation could harm businesses in general, and possibly small businesses more than most. It would be tragic if that were to be the outcome of the Bill's passing into law.

I give these warnings not with a sense of joy but with a sense of foreboding. I hope that I am proved wrong, but I fear that if the Government persist in basing legislation on answers to fatuous questions asked in superficial surveys, this is the kind of legislation that will result. If, during the legislation's passage through this House and the other place, we do not receive satisfactory answers from Ministers, perhaps it is because we are failing in our purpose—perhaps we have not kept the Minister here long enough, grilling and questioning her, or perhaps we have not tabled sufficient amendments, probing and substantive. If that is the case, we may have learnt our lesson this time, and perhaps next time we shall be much more rigorous in our approach. In any event, there are lessons to be learned by all of us.

I hope that, even at this late stage, we may have got the Minister to think rather more carefully about the approach that she and her Department will take to legislation, and that the lessons learned from this Bill are not borne by the very businesses that it was designed to help.

11.45 pm

Mrs. Gillan: We have certainly had an interesting Third Reading debate, and I have no intention of repeating the excellent points made by right hon. and hon. Friends.

I make it clear at the outset that there is no difference between Conservatives and the Government in so far as we do not support the late payment of debt. However, the Minister has not justified the legislation or even thought it through sufficiently. I think that she latched on to what she thought was a good idea to validate her new business-friendly credentials and pursued legislation that she herself has admitted was not supported by 60 per cent. of the organisations representing small businesses. Indeed, just before the Government came to power, I believe that the current Prime Minister received a letter from the Confederation of British Industry, the Institute of Directors, the Association of British Chambers of Commerce and the Federation of Small Businesses outlining their opposition to the measure.

During the Bill's passage, the Minister has failed even to refer to the remedies introduced by the previous Government in an attempt to change the culture of late payment. Instead, she has sought to gain notoriety from legislating, rather than putting in a sustained effort. In short, she has manoeuvred the legislation to provide excess protection for her friends in other Departments.

I do not know whether you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, or the Minister are familiar with the Anglo-Irish poet Jonathan Swift who, in 1709, wrote:

"Laws are like cobwebs, which may catch small flies,

but let wasps and hornets break through."

However, during the Bill's passage, the Minister has certainly taken Swift to heart by allowing the Government, or the hornets and wasps, to remain a protected contractor for four years, while condemning the small flies—businesses with 50 or more employees—to the wilderness, without the protection of this legislation to fall back on when they deal with the public sector.

It was a Conservative Government who started the publication of Government Departments' payment records. Although the Minister tried to make cheap points in Committee, it was under a Conservative Government that improvements in the timeliness of payment by the Government were evidenced. Just as the minimum wage was not set during the passage of the National Minimum Wage Bill, thus hampering discussion on that Bill, the results of payment records under the present Government were not made available to the House to enable us to judge the progress that they have made. How much better it would have been if those records had been available and if the Minister could have persuaded her colleagues to guarantee timely payment to all suppliers, thus leading by example.

It does not surprise me that the records were not made available. The responsibility of the Government is to govern and, in those terms, we do not seem to have a Government at all. When they are not delegating to others—for example, decisions on interest rates or the level of the minimum wage—they are pretending to be sympathetic to everyone and saying that they will carry out a review. Many of those reviews have been outstanding for more than 12 months.

In this case, however, the Government decided to govern. They promised to establish interest on late payments. What do we find? They have tabled amendments to their own Bill at every stage. We have to be sceptical about the effects of this convoluted legislation, which is hardly likely to be understood by the small companies that are to benefit. So much was admitted by the Minister, who will be sending out explanatory leaflets, but we did not expect the Government to have second, third and fourth thoughts about their own measure.

We are not confident that the Bill will produce the benefits that the Minister claims, but of course we hope that it does not cause the damage that we have outlined and for which there is so much potential. The House will appreciate that if one payment period is extended, the Minister will have failed.

The Conservative party believes in supporting small businesses, so we shall not oppose the Bill at this stage. In summary, the Government make a lot of sympathetic noises towards businesses, but continue to heap greater burdens on them. Businesses already face a tax bill of more than £25 billion during the lifetime of the Government. In addition, they have to contend with the minimum wage, the working time directive, union recognition, paternity leave, works councils, the introduction of the euro and the fact that manufacturing industry is now officially in recession. Like a leopard, the Government never change their spots.

It is with great pleasure that I hand over the mantle for this brief to my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope). I am sure that he will continue to argue, as I do, that all Labour Governments are bad for business.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed, with amendments.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Thursday 4th June, the Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motions in the name of Mrs. Ann Taylor relating to Modernisation of the House of Commons not later than Ten o'clock and such Questions shall include the Questions on any Amendments selected by the Speaker which may then be moved.—*[Mr. Betts.]*

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 119(9) (European Standing Committees),

Fisheries Monitoring Under the Common Fisheries Policy

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 6123/98, a Commission Communication on Fisheries monitoring under the Common Fisheries Policy; also notes that the Communication builds on an undertaking given by the Commission to the Prime Minister at the Amsterdam European Council in June 1997; and endorses action being taken by the Government to secure more effective and consistent standards of enforcement across the Community.—*[Mr. Betts.]*

Question agreed to.

HUMAN RIGHTS BILL [*LORDS*] (PROGRAMME)

Resolved,

That the following provisions shall apply to proceedings on the Human Rights Bill *[Lords]*.

Committee of the whole House

1. (1) The remaining proceedings in Committee of the whole House shall be completed in four allotted days and shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion six and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Bill on the fourth of those days.

(2) On each such allotted day, paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 15 (Exempted business) shall apply to proceedings on the Bill for any part of the period of six and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Bill which falls after Ten o'clock.

Business Committee

2. Standing Order No. 82 (Business Committee) shall apply to proceedings on the Bill.

3. No Motion shall be made to alter the order in which proceedings on consideration of the Bill are taken, but the resolutions of the Business Committee may include alterations in that order.

Conclusion of proceedings

4. For the purpose of concluding any proceedings which are to be brought to a conclusion at a time appointed by or under this Order:—

(1) The Chairman shall forthwith put the following Questions (but no others):—

(a) any Question already proposed from the Chair;

(b) any Question necessary to bring to a decision a Question so proposed;

(c) the Question on any amendment moved or Motion made by a Minister of the Crown;

(d) any other Question necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded.

(2) Proceedings under sub-paragraph (1) shall not be interrupted under any Standing Order relating to sittings of the House and may be decided though opposed, at any hour.

(3) If two or more Questions would fall to be put under sub-paragraph (1)(c) on amendments moved on Motions made by a Minister of the Crown, or under sub-paragraph (1)(d) in relation to successive provisions of the Bill, the Chairman shall instead put a single question in relation to those amendments, Motions or provisions.

(4) On a Motion made for a new Clause or a new Schedule, the Chairman shall put only the Question that the Clause or Schedule be added to the Bill.

(5) If on an allotted day a Motion for the adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 24 (Adjournment on specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration) stands over from an earlier day or to Seven o'clock—

(a) the bringing to a conclusion of any proceedings on the Bill which under this Order are to be brought to a conclusion after that time shall be postponed for a period equal to the duration of the proceedings on the Motion, and

(b) paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 15 (Exempted business) shall apply to proceedings on the Bill for the period after Ten o'clock for which sub-paragraph (a) permits them to continue.

Supplementary

5. If a Motion is made by a Minister of the Crown to amend this Order and if an effect of the Motion would be to provide a greater amount of time for proceedings on the Bill, the Question on that Motion shall be put forthwith and may be decided, though opposed, at any hour.

6. If a Motion is made by a Minister of the Crown to supplement the provisions of this Order in respect of further proceedings on the Bill, the Motion may be proceeded with, though opposed, at any hour and proceedings on the Motion, if not previously concluded, shall be brought to a conclusion three-quarters of an hour after they have been commenced.

Interpretation

7. In this Order "allotted day" means any day on which the Bill is put down on the main business as first Government Order of the Day.—*[Mr. Betts.]*

Strathclyde Police (Racism)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Betts.]*

11.51 pm

Ms Sandra Osborne (Ayr): I welcome the opportunity to represent my constituent, Mr. Lawrence Ramadas. I also believe that the issues that I am about to raise have wider significance in relation to the race relations policy of Strathclyde police and the message that the general public can take from the case.

Thirteen years ago, Lawrence Ramadas joined Strathclyde police and was proud to be a police officer. He believed that he had a great future with the police. His ambition was to join the traffic department, but, despite passing sergeant and inspector promotion exams within four years of becoming a police constable, producing consistently good results in his annual appraisals and continually applying for positions, the extremely promising young officer was never transferred off the beat despite applying six times to the traffic department.

Lawrence Ramadas is a personable, intelligent and articulate young man who would be a credit to any force, but instead, 13 years after joining the police, he is homeless, jobless, virtually broke and his health has suffered. At one point, Mr. Ramadas lost his self-respect, but he has certainly gained my respect and that of many others in his tireless quest for justice.

On 11 February 1997, an industrial tribunal found that Lawrence Ramadas had been subjected to one of the worst forms of discrimination. He was discriminated against by Strathclyde police—and by Superintendent Gordon Macpherson in particular—because of the colour of his skin.

Many people may believe that if Strathclyde police were serious about their much-vaunted race relations policy and determined not to tolerate racism in the ranks, they would have apologised to Mr. Ramadas immediately and compensated him for his trauma and for the destruction of every facet of his life. Instead, Strathclyde police appealed and lost. Their lawyers applied almost immediately to overturn the ruling on the technicality that the claim was brought after the legal deadline.

Racism cannot be confined to individual acts. It is a process whioh leaves victims disabled, disempowered and vulnerable. That is not well understood in the tribunal or police procedures. I ask the Minister to consider the time bar. It is not easy to determine when an episode of racism began or ended.

A few weeks ago, the tribunal ruled

"with a considerable amount of regret"

that the time bar ruling applied and that no compensation could be awarded to Lawrence Ramadas. It added that the treatment meted out to Lawrence Ramadas was

"extremely serious with devastating effects"

and "an abuse of power". It concluded:

"It is frustrating for the tribunal to be unable to compensate him adequately."

Those on the tribunal could hardly have been more damning in their condemnation or have expressed their views more clearly. That there had been racism was established without doubt.

Alas, the almost gloating reaction of the chief constable of Strathclyde, as reported in *The Scotsman* on 10 April, was:

"By virtue of the tribunal's adjudication upholding the time bar argument, the force has averted any award of damages from the police budget impacting on front-line service to the public."

That statement constitutes blatant and institutional racism. It is an insulting response which almost beggars belief. Strathclyde police remain guilty of racism, but managed to avoid recompensing a man whose life they have ruined because of a technicality—and they believe that they should be congratulated for so doing.

The chief constable pontificates that he will not tolerate racism, while in the same breath condoning proven racism, the tackling of which figures low in his priorities given his comments about saving public money. I wonder how much public money the police have spent to date on defending the indefensible.

After the findings of the first tribunal, the deputy chief constable, Mr. Richardson, announced that he had commissioned an independent inquiry into a breach of police discipline regulations. On Wednesday 26 February, Mr. Ramadas was interviewed by the investigating officer of the inquiry—Assistant Chief Constable MacKay—in the presence of his solicitor. At the outset, he was informed by Assistant Chief Constable MacKay that his sole remit was to investigate breaches of the police discipline regulations and that it had nothing to do with the industrial tribunal. I concur with that view.

However, Mr. Richardson deferred making a decision on possible disciplinary proceedings until the outcome of the employment tribunal was known, in spite of the police inquiry's recommendation that there was a case to answer. Mr. Richardson seems to want to have it both ways.

Surely the police discipline code and industrial tribunal legislation are quite separate entities under the law. The fact that Lawrence Ramadas has sought recourse to justice from an industrial tribunal surely does not absolve Strathclyde police of their responsibility as employers. In this case, however, Strathclyde police appear to have shirked their responsibility to make a decision on the independent report that they commissioned, and it appears that the decision whether to proceed with a discipline case is dependent on the outcome of an employment appeals tribunal.

Such a course of action cannot be correct or justified, and, in practice, means that the progress or otherwise of a discipline case is, de facto, being decided by an employment appeals tribunal. What if the employment appeals tribunal had decided that racist discrimination had not occurred? After some considerable time, would Strathclyde police have also decided that there was no case to answer? It is not surprising that Lawrence Ramadas believes that, by continually deferring a decision on the independent report, Strathclyde police were hoping that the whole sad episode would simply go away or be quietly forgotten, and that the perpetrator of the abuse would remain in a highly paid job and retire on a substantial pension, while the victim of his abuse is jobless, homeless and almost penniless, and cannot get another job the moment that he explains why he left the police service.

After various false starts, a date has been set for a disciplinary hearing. Apparently, the hearing was set for 4 February 1998, but was delayed until April at the

[Ms Sandra Osborne]

request of the perpetrator's solicitor, who has sought a judicial review, challenging the competence of the chief constable to raise disciplinary proceedings. That has meant, of course, that the whole process has again ground to a halt, and it may be September before a disciplinary hearing is heard—depending on the result of the judicial review. The Tayside report recommending action was published in May 1997.

I have here a copy of Strathclyde police race relations policy. According to the chief constable, it is written with a view to dealing with racially motivated incidents that breach the criminal, not the civil, law. In other words, if the racially motivated incident is in-house, it will not be brought to public attention. If that is so, can any officer subject a colleague to racism with impunity because it is a civil and not a criminal offence?

The Lawrence Ramadas case is a clear example that the system is not working. It neither reflects an understanding of the structural causes of racism nor demonstrates a coherent practice based on sound equal opportunities policies for dealing with it. Nor is it equitable in giving access to witnesses and documentation—both of which were denied my constituent's solicitor. I therefore call on the Minister to initiate an investigation, outwith the police authorities, on the handling of the case, to consider where procedures can be improved and to ensure that justice prevails for Lawrence Ramadas. He seeks an acknowledgement of guilt, an apology and compensation for loss of earnings after 12 years' service in the police, damage to health, homelessness and the hurt, distress and trauma caused by the horrendous process.

I am not alone in my belief that the outcome to date has been unsatisfactory. I shall quote Mr. James Wylie, who was until recently office manager of the Scottish Police Federation in Glasgow and formerly a police officer for 30 years:

"I have worked for the Police for the last 39 years and generally thought highly of the service and the way in which it was run. This case has almost completely destroyed my faith in the service (at least at a senior level) and I would earnestly reiterate that some form of independent inquiry should be set up to examine the actions of Strathclyde Police senior management in this case. Surely someone, somewhere must be able to make Mr. Orr and his force accountable and responsible for the racism perpetrated against Lawrence Ramadas or does justice grind to a halt at the entry doors of Police Headquarters in Pitt Street?"

A petition is circulating in Scotland calling for compensation and a resolution to this case.

Lawrence Ramadas was a model police officer and an example to others. It may interest the House to know that there is still an appalling lack of representation from the ethnic minority community as far as police recruitment is concerned. In 1996, Scotland's eight forces had 40 ethnic minority recruits, only two of whom have been promoted to sergeant. Of 9,187 workers in the Strathclyde force, 33 officers and 17 support staff come from ethnic minority communities.

The race relations policy of the force states:

"Recruitment of police and force support personnel from black and ethnic minority communities will continue to be a priority of Strathclyde Police, which, as an employer, seeks to create a harmonious and productive working environment by adhering to a well-established and continuously reviewed equal opportunities policy."

This did not work for Mr. Ramadas.

Mr. Ramadas was a model police officer and an example to others. On numerous occasions, he was paraded for the cameras and the press as an example of the positive measures Strathclyde police were taking to tackle racism and to recruit more officers from ethnic minority communities. However, Lawrence Ramadas now has no job. He had no equity and he had no justice. Strathclyde police have won an Investors in People award. Mr. Ramadas is not impressed by that award.

Strathclyde police, as a public service, represent the state and, in particular, the upholding of the law as part of the criminal justice process. They also have a duty to uphold a moral and civil message that racism is not acceptable. I look forward to my hon. Friend the Minister's comments, and I urge him to look at the situation as a matter of urgency.

12.6 am

The Minister for Home Affairs and Devolution, Scottish Office (Mr. Henry McLeish): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ayr (Ms Osborne) on her success in securing this debate and on the manner in which she has outlined her case. The House will, I am sure, agree that racism should have no place in the Scotland of today, least of all in the police. We must value the unique contribution made to our society by each individual, regardless of background, race or creed. Any incident with a racist element—wherever or whenever it happens—is a matter for deep regret, and we must do everything in our power to prevent such incidents from occurring. When they do occur, any alleged wrong must be confronted and firm action taken.

The incident concerning my hon. Friend's constituent, Mr. Lawrence Ramadas, took place almost six years ago. The industrial tribunal that considered his case did not suggest that the force as a whole was racist; its conclusion related to the actions of one officer, Superintendent Gordon Macpherson, for whom the force was held responsible.

As soon as the tribunal announced its decision in February 1997, the deputy chief constable commissioned an independent inquiry by Mr. James MacKay, assistant chief constable of Tayside police. I hope that my hon. Friend will agree that such prompt action does not suggest any complacency on behalf of the force.

Strathclyde police also decided to appeal against the tribunal's decision, on legal advice, on the basis that given the complexity and length of the evidence presented over 12 days, the industrial tribunal's reasoning did not, in the force's view, support its conclusions. Mr. MacKay's report was completed in May 1997, but no action was taken pending the appeal.

The appeal was rejected in December 1997. Following the outcome of the appeal—and in the light of the recommendations in Mr. MacKay's report—Strathclyde police initiated disciplinary proceedings against Superintendent Macpherson in December 1997, with a hearing being scheduled for February 1998. At that point, however, Superintendent Macpherson began legal proceedings in the Court of Session to prevent the hearing. A judicial review of the deputy chief constable's decision to pursue disciplinary proceedings against Superintendent Macpherson is to be heard in July.

Subject to the outcome of the judicial review, Strathclyde police have made a provisional arrangement for the disciplinary hearing to take place in September. The deputy chief constable of Strathclyde police has arranged for Queen's Counsel to present the case against Superintendent Macpherson, and the chairman of the disciplinary hearing will be the chief constable of Lothian and Borders police, Mr. Roy Cameron.

As the incident took place several years ago, the discipline case will be taken under the Police (Discipline) (Scotland) Regulations 1967, as amended—the procedure which was current at the time. It will be for the disciplinary hearing under Mr. Cameron to determine whether Superintendent Macpherson was guilty of an offence under the 1967 Regulations. A variety of punishments, ranging from caution to dismissal from the force, may be imposed. The procedure includes a right of appeal to the Secretary of State against the finding and against any punishment imposed as a result of the outcome of the disciplinary hearing. I regret that, in the circumstances, I cannot comment further on the case—to do so could prejudice the role of the Secretary of State in any appeal.

Although I understand my hon. Friend's frustration, I do not think that it would be fair to blame Strathclyde police for the fact that the case has been so protracted. It is important that the proper procedures are followed. I am satisfied that current police disciplinary and conduct arrangements in Scotland are working. A major review of the complaints and discipline system in Scotland was conducted in 1996, resulting in new conduct regulations. The new regulations provide more flexibility in the way in which misconduct by officers can be dealt with and increase the range of disposals available. I am, of course, aware of the recent Home Affairs Committee report on police disciplinary and complaints procedures in England and Wales. I shall consider, in consultation with the police, whether any of its recommendations that we have not already covered need to be introduced in Scotland. My hon. Friend makes a valid point in saying that we should carefully consider any ways in which we can improve procedures.

Having referred to the case of Mr. Ramadas and explained why I cannot comment more fully in the light of the proposed disciplinary hearing, I shall set out in more general terms the approach of the Scottish police service to ensure fair treatment and opportunities for all its officers. I hope that I shall be able to demonstrate to my hon. Friend's satisfaction that significant strides have been taken in the past five years.

I assure my hon. Friend that the police in Scotland are very conscious of their responsibility to avoid racism within the service and to promote equal opportunities. In 1993, Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary carried out an inspection of equal opportunities in the Scottish police. The report of the inspection concluded that all forces were taking the issue of equal opportunities very seriously. The inspectorate continues to examine equal opportunities during its regular inspections of police forces. The most recent report on Strathclyde police, which was published only last year, found that the force upheld its commitment to promote equal opportunities throughout its internal procedures.

In 1987, Strathclyde police launched their race relations policy, which was aimed at enhancing the already good relations between black and ethnic communities and the force. In July of last year, the chief constable of Strathclyde police published an updated race relations policy. Work on the revised policy took nearly a year to complete; it took account of a number of points of good practice that had been raised by local black and ethnic community representatives, and included consultation with police forces south of the border.

The policy mainly concerned the force's relations with the public. However, it also confirmed the force's commitment to equal opportunities for all its staff. That makes it clear that Strathclyde police are committed to equality in employment and service. Freedom from harassment or victimisation on racial grounds is an important part of the policy. All officers in Strathclyde police are expected to demonstrate their commitment to those equal opportunity principles in their relations with their colleagues at every level. In addition to that strengthened commitment, the force re-emphasised the importance of its programme of racial awareness training for its officers.

Strathclyde police's race relations policy states clearly that the force is opposed to racism. As my hon. Friend said, that is right, and I reinforce her comments. It goes on to say that the force will prepare its officers to provide a quality service to ethnic minority communities. The force records and monitors reports of racially motivated attacks to ensure that they are investigated thoroughly. Strathclyde police are committed to working with ethnic minorities to develop a mutual understanding of concerns. The force seeks to inform minority communities of its commitment to equality of service and encourages them to seek the assistance of the police with confidence. The police also undertake to enhance community safety. Progress in ensuring equality of service is monitored at the highest level in the force, and action will be taken to resolve any difficulties that emerge.

In 1996–97, 206 racial incidents were reported to Strathclyde police; in 1997–98, the number rose alarmingly to 481, an increase of 233 per cent. I believe that, in large part, that reflects the public's increased confidence in the reinforced procedures that the force has adopted.

I do not think that those figures reflect a force that is prepared to tolerate racism in its ranks. To do so would hardly be consistent with the force's overall aim of delivering the highest possible standards of service to the people of Strathclyde. More generally, the force places great emphasis on the quality of its personnel policies. As my hon. Friend said, Strathclyde police force received the prestigious Investors in People award, and was the first police force in Britain to do so.

Strathclyde, like all Scottish forces, is keen for its officers to be drawn from all sections of society and has taken steps to encourage applications to join the force from members of ethnic minorities. In 1994, it was one of the first forces in Britain to develop and implement a strategic framework for action aimed at increasing the number of black and ethnic minority recruits. Specifically, the framework for action provided a target to increase the number of officers from black and ethnic backgrounds from 0.2 to 0.5 per cent. of its strength over a five-year period. By the end of 1996–97, the number of ethnic minority officers in Strathclyde stood at just under 0.5 per cent., with another two years to achieve its five-year target.

[Mr. Henry McLeish]

All applicants from ethnic minorities are allowed to sit the entrance test for appointment to the force. Access courses are provided at further education colleges to help ethnic minority candidates to prepare for their application to sit the standard entrance test. The innovative policy implemented by Strathclyde police was recognised by the Commission for Racial Equality and was commented on in the 1996 report on race and equal opportunities in the police service.

Overall, the Scottish police service has a good record in policy and practice on equal opportunities, although, as my hon. Friend says, that is never a matter for complacency. If there can be an improvement in the quality of service given to the community—and, indeed, in internal procedures in the service—that must always be a high priority for the chief constable.

In the Scottish police service, training in racial awareness is provided for all new recruits at the Scottish police college at Tulliallan. It continues both at the college and in forces as officers progress to the senior ranks. Race relations policies are increasingly being developed in consultation with local racial equality councils. Forces also cover race relations policy in their community safety strategies, and throughout Scotland there are various examples of good practice.

I reiterate my and the Government's view that racism cannot be tolerated in the police or elsewhere in society. Strathclyde's chief constable and his seven colleagues in Scotland share that view. While it is impossible to be sure that isolated incidents will never take place, I believe that the Scottish police have made substantial efforts to develop a culture that minimises racial discrimination.

The Government believe that Scotland benefits from being a multicultural society and that we should cherish our ethnic diversity. The Government have a clear commitment to racial equality and to taking steps to ensure that it is at the heart of Government policy.

We do not underestimate for one minute the problems that racism poses for society, and we are taking steps to address it. One of those steps is the action that we are taking to combat racist crime. The Crime and Disorder Bill, which is in Committee in this House, will introduce a new offence of racially aggravated harassment. It will also require the courts, when sentencing an offender who has committed a racially aggravated crime, to treat that racial aggravation as an aggravating factor when deciding on sentence.

Those measures were decided on following consultation involving many organisations representing victims and possible victims of racist crimes. The measures will improve the protection of the public and reinforce the right of all people in Scotland to live a life free from crime. They will address all levels of racist crimes. In every case where a racist element is proved, the courts must take that into consideration when sentencing. It is important that everyone—victim, police, public and offender—is left in no doubt that racist crimes are wholly unacceptable in Scotland and that perpetrators will be dealt with accordingly.

The Government have given their firm commitment to a fair and just society in which all individuals, whatever their race or ethnic origin, have equal rights. Racial discrimination is manifestly harmful and unjust to its victims and to Britain as a whole. The Government are fully committed to eliminating racial discrimination, whether in the police service or anywhere else.

My hon. Friend will understand my inability to go into further detail about the personal case she has raised, but I wanted to extend my discourse to show that we deplore racism, which is an abhorrence in our society and I repeat that, whether it be in the police or in society, this Government want to stamp it out.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty minutes past Twelve midnight.

House of Commons

Tuesday 2 June 1998

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

HEALTH

The Secretary of State was asked—

Health Services (Worcestershire)

1. **Mr. Peter Luff** (Mid-Worcestershire): What representations he has received from community health councils in Worcestershire about the provision of health services in the county; and if he will make a statement. [42174]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. Alan Milburn): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has received letters from Kidderminster and district and Worcester community health councils on the subject of Worcestershire health authority's strategic review. The health authority has now agreed an extension for the consideration of responses to the consultation. I know that negotiations are progressing and given the spirit of co-operation that we are seeking to encourage in the NHS and the progress made so far, I hope that a local agreement can now be reached about the future of local health services.

Mr. Luff: I sincerely hope that the Minister's optimism is borne out by experience. If a decision falls to the Secretary of State on this matter, will the Minister ensure that he is reminded that the proposals have the full support of the larger community health council in Worcestershire, the Worcester and district health council, Bromsgrove community health council, the Worcester Royal Infirmary trust, Wychavon district council, Malvern Hills district council, the ambulance trust and—perhaps most significantly—the community trust, which recognises that only proposals such as these can safeguard the community hospitals of Worcestershire and enable a fine hospital such as Evesham to develop its services in a cost-effective manner to serve the people of South Worcestershire into the next millennium?

Mr. Milburn: I understand the hon. Gentleman's concerns, and the concerns of the local community about the future of community hospitals. I hope that the decision does not come to Ministers. It would be far better if the situation could be resolved locally and amicably. Given the progress that has been made so far, I am optimistic that a local consensus will be achieved.

Mr. David Lock (Wyre Forest): My hon. Friend will appreciate the anger of my constituents, who are the net losers in these proposals, as they see their hospital—which received a charter mark last year—decimated by the proposals of the health authority. Does he accept that that anger was aggravated when the 12,000 local people who took to the streets were dismissed out of hand by the health authority? Will he ensure that the health authority knows that the Government think that local opinion is important in making health care decisions?

I am grateful that my hon. Friend referred to the negotiations in which, as he knows, I have been involved. Will he ask the health authority to go the extra mile, to improve its offer and—most of all—to clarify its proposals so that the volunteers on the community health council, who all do valuable work for nothing, know precisely what is, and what is not, on offer to the people they represent?

Mr. Milburn: I pay tribute to all those who have been engaged in the negotiations locally, including my hon. Friend and other hon. Members from both sides of the House. There are difficult decisions confronting the health authority in Worcestershire. I understand that progress is being made and that further meetings have been held this week. It is important that everyone concerned does everything in their power to reach local agreement so that patient services in Worcestershire are protected and we get the best health care for the county's people.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): There are some important decisions to be taken about the future of Worcestershire's hospitals, but, in the meantime, their waiting lists are growing. The royal infirmary's list is longer; Kidderminster's list is longer; the Alexandra's list is longer. The people of Worcestershire are learning fast about the people's waiting lists. Will the Minister offer this House a simple guarantee—that, in his panic to put right the waiting list betrayal we have seen from the Government, we will not see any other NHS performance indicator pushed in the wrong direction instead?

Mr. Milburn: I welcome the hon. Gentleman to his new responsibilities. I hope that he has more success in his new role than in his last one, when he was charged with the responsibility for shoring up the Conservative party's fortunes following its election defeat on 1 May. Given his track record on that issue, I am sure that my hon. Friends will wish him a long tenure as Opposition health spokesman.

I will not—no Labour Member will—take any lectures from the hon. Gentleman on waiting lists. Under the previous Government, waiting lists rose year after year. Under this Government, waiting lists will come down—not only for one year, but year after year.

I tell the hon. Gentleman that the Government have made a good start. Now—for the first time since hospital records have been collected—no one is waiting more than 18 months for hospital treatment. We have also decreased—for the first time in two years—the number of people waiting 12 months. I guarantee him that, in one year, waiting lists will be lower than the record level we inherited from the previous Government.

Mr. Michael J. Foster (Worcester): The Minister will be aware that the six options under consideration in the health review conducted in Worcestershire all include

provision of a new district general hospital. Will he reassure both me and the people of Worcestershire—who, after all, have now been on a promise for 40 years—that he will do his utmost to deliver a new hospital? May I also express to him the gratitude of the people of Worcestershire for the extra £2.8 million recently announced to deal with waiting lists in the county?

Mr. Milburn: I hope that we will not keep the people of Worcestershire waiting for too much longer, if it has been 40 years. I also pay tribute to my hon. Friend for the role that he has played in assiduously campaigning for a new hospital in Worcester. As he knows, progress has been made on the private finance initiative.

I urge all those concerned, including the private sector consortium, to meet the very tough deadline that the Government have imposed. It is important that that deadline is met, and I am sure that it will be. Worcester is a very important part of the new hospital building programme that the Government have announced, and has the biggest new hospital building programme that the national health service has ever seen. The programme also symbolises our commitment not only to investing in the national health service, but to modernising it.

Cancer Deaths

2. **Mrs. Marion Roe** (Broxbourne): If he will make a statement on the Government's target to reduce the death rates from cancer, as set out in the Green Paper on public health. [42175]

The Minister for Public Health (Ms Tessa Jowell): There are three ways of reducing deaths from cancer, the first of which is by better prevention and reduction of preventable deaths. The Green Paper sets a target of reducing the death rate from cancer among people under 65 by at least a further fifth by 2010. If achieved, the target would annually save approximately 6,000 lives in England.

The second way is by improving early detection and by better treatment—for example, through the national service frameworks, and implementation of the Calman-Hine approach.

Finally, we will make an impact on reducing death from cancer by implementing the Government's commitment that, by 2000, anyone with suspected cancer will be able to see a specialist within two weeks of referral for any cancer.

Mrs. Roe: As waiting lists are a major concern to patients, will the Minister confirm that the Secretary of State promised a two-week wait to see a cancer consultant, and immediate surgery? We have not heard very much about that pledge. Has it been forgotten? If it has not, what action has been taken to fulfil that pledge?

Ms Jowell: The fact is that, in dealing with breast cancer, £10 million was allocated to implement the pledge. By April 1999, any woman who has suspected breast cancer and whose general practitioner thinks that it should be investigated urgently will be seen by a consultant within two weeks of referral. By 2000, that pledge will apply to all patients with suspected cancer. We promised that that was what we would do, and that is what we will do.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): I welcome my hon. Friend's comments, and her team's commitment to ensuring that we really tackle the problem of cancer. In 1997 alone, more than 70,000 men died of cancer. Many of them died of lung cancer, but many others died of prostrate cancer. I therefore welcome the concentration on early detection, particularly among men. For whatever reasons, men neglect their health and the early signs of cancer, and try to avoid tackling the problem.

Will my hon. Friend ensure that, once treatment is decided, those who have signs of cancer are guaranteed high-quality treatment, regardless of where they live in the United Kingdom—rather than having to play some sort of lottery, based on where they live, that determines the quality of their consultant and treatment?

Ms Jowell: My hon. Friend is right. Rebuilding the certainty that a patient will be treated by cancer specialists with the competence to provide the highest-quality treatment regardless of where they live is what we mean in practice by discharging our pledge to patients to rebuild a modern national health service.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): Is the Minister aware of the increasing concern about the incidence of bowel cancer? How are the Government responding to the representations of the Cancer Research Campaign to give greater priority to the problem?

Ms Jowell: We have invested a further £10 million to investigate screening for bowel cancer. The pledge that patients will be seen within two weeks of referral will be effective from April 2000. Bowel cancer is a major cause of preventable death. We believe that lives can be saved, and we are investing to save lives.

Suicide (Young People)

3. **Mr. David Hanson** (Delyn): What steps he intends to take to reduce suicide rates among young people. [42177]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Paul Boateng): The Green Paper "Our Healthier Nation" sets out the Government's proposed mental health target to reduce the death rate from suicide by at least a further sixth by 2010 and proposals for concerted action to achieve that target, including a reduction in the suicide rates among young people.

Mr. Hanson: Will my hon. Friend confirm that suicide is one of the biggest causes of death among men under 24? I welcome the targets that have been set in the White Paper. What practical steps do the Government intend to take to ensure that suicides are prevented, so that families such as that in my constituency who had a young boy who committed suicide can be secure in the knowledge that it will not happen again?

Mr. Boateng: My hon. Friend is right to highlight a particular problem among young men. Suicide is the second highest killer of young men between 16 and 25, after road traffic accidents. That damning statistic requires concerted action. My hon. Friend the Minister for Public Health has addressed that in her Green Paper. A White Paper will follow in the autumn. In the meantime, we are taking practical action, such as considering the size of packets containing drugs and the warnings on them; piloting projects such as the Manchester campaign against

living miserably, to work out how best to communicate with that hard-to-reach target group; and, importantly, ensuring that general practitioners are equipped to intervene early when the signs of stress and depression and the early stages of schizophrenia first appear. Those alarming figures can be brought down by such practical measures and by increasing public awareness.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): The Minister will know that, for a long time, the mental health authorities in Weymouth and South Dorset have been getting people back into the community by using landlords and landladies who have a supporting role for the mentally ill and those who are suicide risks. He will also know that, like their predecessors, the Government are examining how the project should be funded. It has not been properly funded for some years. People are falling through the net between health services and housing benefit. When will the Minister announce changes so that the excellent schemes that have been piloted in my area can continue?

Mr. Boateng: Only last month I attended a seminar on adult placements. We are working with the Local Government Association and the health authorities to ensure that such schemes are given the priority they deserve, because they have proved effective and need to be backed up by resources. We are giving urgent attention to the matter.

Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe (Bradford, South): Many of the young men who commit suicide are in prison. The Home Office is investigating the problem. What can the Department of Health do to help reduce the number of suicides in prison?

Mr. Boateng: My hon. Friend raises an important question. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is leading a group on that. We have identified a particular role for health authorities in the youth justice teams. So, for the first time, NHS representatives will be sitting alongside those from social services, the Probation Service, the police and others in order that we can work together in a concerted, multi-agency way to address the problems faced by that group of young people.

Health Trust Boards

4. **Mr. Stephen Day** (Cheadle): If he will make a statement on the composition of health trust boards. [42178]

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Frank Dobson): At the general election, we promised to make health trust boards more representative of the communities that they serve. We have kept that promise. I am proud to tell the House that, of the 1,000 people whom I have appointed to boards since 1 May last year, half have been women—for the first time in the history of the NHS—and the proportion of black and Asian board members has almost doubled.

Mr. Day: Given that the Secretary of State has appointed so many Labour councillors to trust boards, why has he threatened to sack them but not offered to resign himself, if his waiting list promises are not met?

Mr. Dobson: The hon. Gentleman, like every Tory and Liberal Democrat Member, as well as every Labour Member, was invited to nominate people to serve on boards in his area. He was either too idle or too careless to respond.

Audrey Wise (Preston): Will my right hon. Friend consider appointing to each trust board someone with special knowledge and understanding of the importance of carers to the NHS? Will he also study the 1990 Social Services Committee report on carers, which was unanimous and cross-party, except for the vote of the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe), who rejected and opposed the report on the grounds that she recognised no such thing as a carer?

Mr. Dobson: I share my hon. Friend's views. Of the various criteria laid down when judging who should be appointed to trust boards, involvement in caring is one of them. A substantial number of people are so involved. I should have thought that, generally speaking, most people would think that sensible.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): Has the Secretary of State any plans for marking the 50th anniversary of the NHS by extending democracy on NHS boards? Is not the problem the fact that, if people were chosen to sit on boards, from the people, by the people, rather than being dependent on the Secretary of State's patronage, the demand for more funding for the health service might become so loud, and Ministers so embarrassed, that they would be forced to recognise what everybody else knows: the NHS needs more money? The Government are the only ones who have not agreed with that.

Mr. Dobson: I am not entirely sure that either history or the future would bear out the hon. Gentleman's suggestion. My impression is that, generally speaking, the NHS does rather better from central Government funding than from local government, despite the fact that people deciding things in local government are elected. No party, as far as I know, has ever been committed to the idea of elected health authorities or trusts. The NHS is a national health service, and we must keep it that way.

Mr. Ivan Lewis (Bury, South): Is my right hon. Friend aware that he recently appointed—or reappointed—a certain Vera Stringer to serve for a further two years on Bury Healthcare NHS trust board? Not only does she frequently attack Government policy in the local media: she also happens to be chairman of the North-West Conservative party. I would have thought that the hon. Member for Cheadle (Mr. Day) would have been aware of that. Does not that show that the Government are serious about objectivity in appointments and reappointments to health trust boards?

Mr. Dobson: Yes, indeed.

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone and The Weald): Will the right hon. Gentleman answer the question so clearly asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Cheadle (Mr. Day)? Given that he has filled trust boards with his own choices, and that he has threatened to sack all of them if they do not implement some of his rasher promises, how much further must waiting lists rise,

and how much farther back must he put Labour's so-called pledges before he will consider it appropriate to sack himself?

Mr. Dobson: I welcome the right hon. Lady to her new post. She is the third shadow health spokesman that I have faced in just 13 months, and she and I are matching accessories in the sense that neither of us counts as being at the fashionable end of politics.

As my hon. Friend the Minister of State pointed out, our pledge is that, by this time next year, waiting lists will be down to the level that we inherited. We will then reduce them by another 100,000 before the next general election. In doing that, we will achieve something that the Tory party did not manage during its 18 years in office, and we will be proud of that achievement.

Miss Widdecombe: My question was terribly simple, but the right hon. Gentleman has failed to answer it. He gave us another raft of promises that will not go down well in the corridors of hospitals that have already been carpeted with the broken pledges of the Labour party. The question is not what he will keep on promising, but how much further the pledges must be broken before he will take responsibility. Last month, there was another rise in waiting lists. How much further must they rise, and how much farther back must he put implementation of a so-called early pledge before he will take responsibility and resign? Three times the question has been asked: how much worse must it get before he will resign?

Mr. Dobson: To set the record straight—*[Interruption.]* The parliamentary Tory party was so concerned about waiting lists that it did not manage to table a single question on the subject for this Question Time.

We will get waiting lists down, and by doing so, we will keep our promise. To those who ask me to take responsibility, let me say that this time last year I said that we would help the health authorities to get through the winter and would find extra funds to enable them to do so. I asked them to concentrate on dealing with emergencies, and I accepted that, if they did so, waiting lists would rise. I take responsibility for that, and for everything that I do. I do not blame the people who work in the health service, as all my Tory predecessors seem to do.

Dr. Phyllis Starkey (Milton Keynes, South-West): In making appointments to hospital trust boards, has my right hon. Friend ever knowingly appointed anyone who advocates chaining women prisoners to their beds as an aid to childbirth?

Mr. Dobson: No, but I work on the supposition that no one is perfect.

Tobacco Products

5. **Mr. William Cash** (Stone): If *(a)* the legal service to the European Council and *(b)* the legal advisers in his Department have provided written opinions on the EC draft directive on the advertising and sponsorship of tobacco products on which the Council has adopted a common position. [42179]

The Minister for Public Health (Ms Tessa Jowell): Legal advice to the United Kingdom Government and the Council must remain internal to those institutions. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that all advice was carefully considered by the Government in advance of the decision to support the common position. We remain content that the legal base is appropriate for this measure.

Mr. Cash: Will the Minister put the written advice in the Library of the House, and if not, why not? Is she aware that, only a few days ago, Commissioner Padraig Flynn admitted in the European Parliament that no economic impact study had been done by the European Union in devising the directive? It follows that there is no base on which the directive could legitimately have been made.

Ms Jowell: That was a nice try. No, I will not place the advice in the Library. As the hon. Gentleman well knows, the regulatory appraisal process operates once a directive has completed its parliamentary stages. I have a wonderful sense of nostalgia at today's Health questions. We have the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) back on the Front Bench, and we have Tory Cash for questions.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): Does my hon. Friend recognise that the real concern about the European directive on tobacco advertising is not its legal status, which has been agreed, but the need to assist in saving the lives of hundreds of thousands of people who die prematurely throughout the European Union from the use of tobacco products?

Ms Jowell: My hon. Friend is right about the importance of ending the 500,000 preventable deaths every year in the European Union from tobacco and smoking-related causes. The legal base is important. We are clear that it is secure and that this measure to harmonise the market in tobacco advertising is appropriately based on the relevant article, which carries with it an obligation to offer a high level of health protection.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Is it not ethically unjustifiable, when the European Union is rightly trying to ban tobacco advertising to save life, that it should subsidise the production of tobacco in Greece and other Mediterranean countries?

Ms Jowell: Yes, but the sort of amendment that we want to the common agricultural policy must be sought through negotiation and consent. We will continue to argue the case for reform.

6. **Dr. Nick Palmer** (Broxtowe): What progress has been made towards implementing the proposed European directive on tobacco advertising. [42180]

The Minister for Public Health (Ms Tessa Jowell): On 13 May, the European Parliament voted through unamended the common position agreed by EU Health Ministers last December. We hope that it can now be adopted during the UK presidency. The time scale for implementation of the directive in UK law will be set out in the tobacco control White Paper to be published later this year. This major achievement shows that we are

serious about co-operation with our European partners and about tackling smoking, and ends an eight-year stalemate on the issue.

Dr. Palmer: We spend so much time on trivial political points that we sometimes overlook major achievements. Will the Minister for Public Health accept my congratulations, and I think the congratulations of most hon. Members, on breaking the logjam and achieving this important step forward? Will she also accept, perhaps in contrast to the previous questioner, that we now need further advance on other fronts with our European partners to combat the scourge of tobacco, to harmonise tariffs on tobacco, and to work together to eliminate the deaths and illnesses that have plagued the continent for so long?

Ms Jowell: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that there is further scope for European action, especially on the labelling of cigarettes, tar content and combating smuggling. He is also right to say that, if we in this country are to deal with the previous Government's legacy of increasing numbers of children taking up smoking, we have to do many things; but what is absolutely clear is that we will not reduce the rate at which children smoke unless we ban tobacco advertising.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I join in welcoming the advertising ban, but does the Minister agree that the common agricultural policy needs to be reformed speedily, given that millions of pounds have been spent on producing tobacco and given how quick the European Union was to damage our beef industry when fewer deaths had resulted?

Ms Jowell: I agree that the common agricultural policy is in need of reform in that respect. I should like to place on record the Government's support for the worldwide initiative against tobacco started by Gro Brundtland, the new director of the World Health Organisation. It is by countries working together that we can begin to make a real impact on one of the major causes of preventable death affecting nations today.

Health Information (Men Over 40)

7. **Mr. Jim Dobbin** (Heywood and Middleton): What action his Department is taking to provide improved health information to men aged over 40 years. [42181]

The Minister for Public Health (Ms Tessa Jowell): On 11 May 1998, I launched a new men's health leaflet, "Life Begins at Forty". The leaflet provides health tips and general health information designed specifically for men over 40, and is aimed particularly at men who are less well off. A million leaflets have been printed and are available through working men's clubs, GPs' surgeries, public libraries and so on.

Mr. Dobbin: I should declare an interest, being quite near 40 myself—perhaps towards the upper limit. Does my hon. Friend agree that, in our efforts to spread information on improving and maintaining the health of men over 40, we have a responsibility to provide for those men and their families decent wages, decent housing, a decent environment and decent leisure facilities? Does she also agree that driving up standards in public health is the responsibility not only of her Department and herself, as Minister for Public Health, but of every Government Department?

Ms Jowell: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Only by working across Government and through partnership at local level can we begin, first, to achieve improvements in the health of older men—that is, men over 40—[HON. MEMBERS: "What about women?"] Women tend to look after themselves rather better. Secondly, only by such action can we start to tackle some of the awful inequalities in health that mean that a man in social class 5—an unskilled man—is six times more likely to die of lung cancer and seven times more likely to be injured in an accident than a man in social class 1. It is those inequalities that we have to tackle, and we shall tackle them by working across Government, as one Government.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley (South-West Surrey): As the Secretary of State is a man over 40, will the Minister consider having a task force to re-examine the health information that he receives? The right hon. Gentleman said that he would cut waiting lists; they have risen to record levels. He said that he would stop hospital closures; he has found that changing health care requires hospital changes. He abused health managers, only to find that they deliver the necessary changes. He said that he would abolish the internal market; he has re-badged it. Will the hon. Lady also ensure that her task force informs that gentleman over 40 that the NHS needs an average 3 per cent. real-terms increase a year to deliver quality care?

Ms Jowell: We shall take no lectures from the right hon. Lady on that subject. However, I am absolutely delighted that she rose to her feet on a question about the Government's new public health strategy. I draw her attention to a recent publication, "New Dynamics in Public Health", which concludes, about our new public health policy:

> "A healthier nation paves the way for much more effective application of core national targets and a much greater scope for multidisciplinary work in pursuit of targets at a local level."

That is very important in improving health for men over 40. That is an important new strategy and the evidence that we have suggests that it should succeed. The author is Tony Hockley, who was the right hon. Lady's special adviser.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): It is possible that I come into the category referred to in the question. What would be the position of such men, and indeed women, if, 50 years ago, the Conservative campaign to stop the national health service coming into being had succeeded? Is not the NHS one of the great blessings of our country? The last people to criticise it should be Conservative Members, whose party was against it in the first place.

Ms Jowell: My hon. Friend is, as usual, entirely right, and we shall take no lectures from the Conservative party on this matter. A Labour Government created the national health service; we will rebuild and modernise it and, in doing so, we will save thousands of lives. The action that we have announced today will result in a substantial reduction in preventable deaths in men over 40.

Multiple Sclerosis

8. **Mrs. Theresa May** (Maidenhead): If he will make a statement on the provision of services within the NHS for people with multiple sclerosis. [42182]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. Alan Milburn): The national health service provides a wide range of services to which people with MS have access, and such patients are seen within a wide range of hospital specialties. Patients can discuss the options available to them with their GP and appropriate hospital specialists. They may also request an assessment of their needs by local authority social services departments.

Mrs. May: The Minister's response skates over the reality of NHS provision of services for people with MS across the country. Is he aware of the Patients Association survey of neurological units throughout the country which showed that more than 90 per cent. did not have specialist MS clinics while one third said that their neurologists had no specific interest in MS, and 50 per cent. did not provide nurse-led clinics? How does that square with the Government's White Paper commitment to provide fair access to services across the country?

Mr. Milburn: It squares extremely well, because the White Paper was designed to deal with the problems—which the hon. Lady adequately outlined—that we have inherited from the previous Administration. The hon. Lady's party was in government for 18 years; we have been in government for one year. We are determined to set in place new mechanisms to ensure fairer access to services for people with MS and other debilitating conditions. That is why we shall have national service frameworks to outline to patients and professionals the range and quality of services that they can expect. We shall have a national institute for clinical excellence and, for the first time in the NHS, a watchdog body—a commission for health improvement. I hope that the hon. Lady welcomes those initiatives.

Mr. Robin Corbett (Birmingham, Erdington): I welcome what the Minister has said about aiming to achieve fair access for all users of our national health service. Will he tell the House the time scale to which he is working to try to achieve equal access to equal services for people suffering from MS?

Mr. Milburn: The national institute for clinical excellence will come into being next year; my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has announced a programme of national service frameworks; and, subject to legislation, the commission for health improvement will come into being during the 1999–2000 financial year.

Glaucoma

9. **Mr. David Heath** (Somerton and Frome): How many cases of glaucoma were recorded as having been treated through the NHS in 1997. [42183]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Paul Boateng): The information is not available in the form requested. In 1995–96, however—the latest year for which information is available—there were 25,274 finished consultant episodes involving the in-patient treatment of patients with glaucoma.

We are unable to say if any of those episodes were for separate patients or whether some patients accounted for more than one completed episode.

Mr. Heath: I am grateful for that limited information. Does the Minister agree that it is far better if glaucoma is diagnosed early, and preferably pre-operatively? Taking into account, in addition to cases of glaucoma, cases of the other retinopathies—diabetes and vascular disease—is there not an overwhelming case, which makes economic sense as well as good health sense, for reintroducing the free eye test?

Mr. Boateng: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says; he brings a special knowledge to this subject from his previous occupation. Of course early diagnosis is important, and we are ensuring that existing free NHS eye tests are taken up by those with glaucoma, their parents, their siblings and children aged over 40, because all the evidence shows that there is insufficient take-up among that group. As for extending free eye tests, that is a matter for the comprehensive spending review, but we must ensure that the existing free eye tests are taken up—at the moment, they are not.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): I am sure that my hon. Friend agrees that treatment of eye diseases, especially cataracts, is extremely good value for the national health service, and can transform the quality of people's lives. I hope that he will make that an immediate priority. While we are on the subject, may we do away with the absurd business of talking about "completed episodes" and start talking about the number of people who are treated, so that people can find out what is going on?

Mr. Boateng: My hon. Friend is a bit hard—I have just learnt to talk about completed episodes, but I shall do my best. I recognise the good sense that my hon. Friend always displays in this regard, but we must act on the recent advice of the British College of Optometrists, which has argued that visual field assessment in the examination of patients at risk from primary open-angle glaucoma is of enormous importance; the energies of the Department are, and will be, thus directed.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): Is the Minister aware, however, that for glaucoma, as for other illnesses, people in my constituency and throughout Leicestershire will have to wait on waiting lists that are 15 per cent. longer now than they were a year ago? That is a record. Will the Minister give those people some reassurance by telling them that waiting lists will be shortened more quickly than he says? In a year's time, waiting lists in Leicestershire will have shortened to what they were a year ago—no shorter.

Mr. Boateng: The hon. Gentleman ought to know that the public, with good cause, trust our Government with the NHS; they could never trust the Conservatives with it. The Conservatives sold the NHS down the river; we are saving it.

Health and Social Services (Co-operation)

10. **Ms Tess Kingham** (Gloucester): What action he is taking to promote close co-operation between health and social services. [42185]

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Frank Dobson): We have made a good start in breaking down the Berlin wall between the national health service and local social services. Last winter, the national health service coped better with emergencies than in any recent year, because of the close working relationship between health and social services, which we promoted, and funded by the extra £300 million that we provided. In Gloucestershire, that included more than £1 million—one fifth of which went on social services to provide, for example, improved out-of-hours service, respite care and holiday cover.

Ms Kingham: My right hon. Friend correctly alluded to Gloucestershire, where, last winter, health and social services teams worked closely together to avoid a winter crisis and to prevent patients from having to lie on trolleys in pain, waiting for treatment. However, in my surgeries I receive many representations from carers in the county—especially carers for sick children seeking respite care—who have been frustrated by the previous Government's introduction of fragmentation and competition within the NHS. Can my right hon. Friend reassure those carers in Gloucestershire that the Government will promote co-operation between the NHS and social services throughout the year, so that they can get the vital services they need for sick family members?

Mr. Dobson: I can certainly give my hon. Friend that guarantee. It is not that we will be promoting co-operation; we will not tolerate a lack of co-operation.

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone and The Weald): The right hon. Gentleman has lauded the state of communication and co-operation between the health service and the social services. He will be aware that one of the biggest problems facing social services and the health service is bed blocking. It is impossible to discharge certain patients, because the proper sums of money are not available to social services to care for them. As the right hon. Gentleman is so concerned with proper and constructive co-operation, what will he do to ensure that social services have adequate, identifiable funds to care for those who should not be in NHS beds, and who are thus contributing to the waiting lists which he says he is so concerned to bring down?

Mr. Dobson: The fact is that, as a result of the initiatives we took and the extra money that we found, there was greater co-operation last winter between the health service and local social services than at any other time in the past. In the right hon. Lady's own area, as a result of the money that we found, more than 450 extra residential places were provided to get people out of hospital, and more than 400 care packages, as they are called, were provided for people in their homes. That is what happens when people work together. It did not work everywhere, but it did work in the right hon. Lady's area—although she did nothing towards it and has not praised the people who delivered it.

Miss Widdecombe: The right hon. Gentleman ought to talk to people in my area. This was a matter of considerable concern to them, and I made representations about it to the trust involved—so he is wrong to say that I took no action, and I hope that he will now apologise for saying it.

I speak not just on behalf of my own area; I have asked the right hon. Gentleman once again a specific question that he will not answer. Can he guarantee that social services—not just last winter, next winter or the winter after that—will have as a matter of course enough identifiable funding to care for people who need not be in NHS beds but who are in them in my area at the moment?

Mr. Dobson: The right hon. Lady should know that there was so much successful co-operation between social services and the national health service precisely because I had supplied the funds to the NHS locally; the NHS, in turn, made it a condition of local social services getting the money that they spent it on what we wanted it spent on—in contrast to the traditional Tory system, which was to give local authorities money with no guarantee that it would be spent on the services for which it was intended. That is what we put in place last year. I have freely admitted to our budging our way through the chaos that we inherited. We intend to have in place an altogether better system for the coming winter and future winters—but we will take no lessons from the Tories.

Schools (Health Programme)

11. **Mrs. Helen Brinton** (Peterborough): What action he is taking to promote the Government programme of health in schools. [42186]

The Minister for Public Health (Ms Tessa Jowell): The Minister for School Standards and I launched the cross-Government healthy schools initiative on 14 May 1998. We are providing £2 million in this financial year—£1 million from health and £1 million from education.

The aim of the healthy schools initiative is to recognise the vital role played by schools in improving the health of pupils and teachers alike. A key element in achieving that objective will be fostering joint working between health and education authorities. Accordingly, I can announce today the setting up of eight health education partnerships which will each receive £150,000 from the initiative. They are in Cornwall, Doncaster, Durham, Hounslow, Manchester, Norfolk, North Staffordshire and West Sussex.

These pilots reflect a range of existing practice. They also reflect a range of areas. The lessons learned will be used to inform the development of a national healthy school award. It is our intention that every school should become a healthy school. Deprivation exists in both rural and urban areas, and is the prime cause of inequality in the health of our children. [HON. MEMBERS: "Come on!"] Opposition Members—

Madam Speaker: Order. Questions and answers have been inordinately long today. I am very disappointed that we are only at question 11; we should be at question 17. I hope that Back Benchers and Front Benchers will put their questions speedily and that Ministers will reply

speedily. There is a great deal of frustration on the Back Benches, and it is most unfair on Back Benchers whose questions are not called.

Ms Jowell: The programme will be a major step in tackling inequality in childhood.

Mrs. Brinton: I look forward to schools in my constituency taking part in the initiative that my hon. Friend described. Can she give me more details about how schools are to be healthy not only for children but for caretakers, dinner ladies, ancillary staff and teachers? Do we not want whole healthy schools? Will she show us how the Government will get stuck in, unlike the Opposition?

Ms Jowell: As I made clear, the initiative is an essential step in tackling health inequality in childhood, which so often affects children's ability to learn. However, healthy children also need to be taught by healthy teachers—and other members of the school staff. Investment in school staff is the best way of driving up children's educational achievement.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher and Walton): Given that the Minister said that she was to issue a pamphlet stating that life begins at 40, what message does that give to schools about health? Does she propose to use modern technology in the initiative? Is she co-operating with the information technology industry, which offers excellent facilities such as video conferencing and other means of bringing health education into schools?

Ms Jowell: The answer is yes. Later this year we shall announce a new website to allow schools and children to access information about health.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): Will the programme deal with pollution from industry as it affects children in schools? In my constituency, Sarp UK Ltd. caused acid clouds to escape over the Killimarsh junior school on 14 and 20 May. The school was not occupied at the time, but that could have been disastrous, as teachers and children could have been trapped in the school. We must deal with the question whether schools or the processors that create the problem should be moved.

Ms Jowell: As part of the healthy schools initiative, we recognise that local circumstances such as those in the case cited by my hon. Friend should be taken into account. That is another illustration of my contention that we will drive up health standards only by co-operation across Government and between local education authorities and local authorities.

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): Will the new health education partnerships consider the issue of healthy school diets? Does the Minister accept that additives in food are often a factor in disruptive behaviour? Will she take the matter seriously?

Ms Jowell: Schools will certainly be encouraged to attend to healthy eating and diet.

Regional Inequalities

13. **Mr. Roger Casale** (Wimbledon): What research he has commissioned into health inequalities by region. [42189]

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Frank Dobson): The Department of Health has already published the results of an analysis of regional inequalities in health. On coming to office, we established the independent inquiry into inequalities in health, which should report by this autumn, and I recently announced a £1.7 million research programme into health inequalities.

Mr. Casale: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth health authority, which serves my constituents, is currently engaged in difficult negotiations with the South Thames NHS executive to secure a bridging loan to help it make ends meet and balance the budget by 2001? Is it not time to put an end to the need for such transitional finance by changing the national capitation formula so that it more truly reflects the real health needs of Londoners?

Mr. Dobson: We are reviewing the allocation of funds to health authorities, and I hope that, following the outcome of the comprehensive spending review, there will be more funds to allocate in the first place. We are determined not simply to research but to reduce health inequalities. That is why we have established health action zones; why we are getting people back to work; why we are introducing a national minimum wage; and why we are investing the takings from the sale of council houses in order to provide better homes for people who have nowhere decent to live. Those measures will improve the health of the worst off in this country.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. Time is up.

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone and The Weald): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. This is a direct point of order for you. You will be aware that during Question Time it is not possible for hon. Members to respond if other hon. Members make personal statements about them. The statements by the hon. Members for Preston (Audrey Wise) and for Milton Keynes, South-West (Dr. Starkey) were inaccurate. I do not seek to rehearse that point with you, but I seek to rehearse whether it is within the conventions of the House that hon. Members should have statements made against them when it is not possible for them to respond.

Madam Speaker: We have many great privileges in the House and I have always said that we should exercise those privileges with great responsibility, and heed the wise words of "Erskine May" in the language that we use across the Chamber. Let us discuss policies in the House, not personalities.

Audrey Wise (Preston): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: I cannot take a further point of order. I have dealt with the matter.

Cities (Process and Criteria for Designation)

3.31 pm

Jane Griffiths (Reading, East): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to establish a process and criteria for places to be designated as cities; and for connected purposes.

I thank the House for giving me this opportunity. The granting of city status to a town is a rare mark of honour, which is bestowed by the sovereign, and has not been granted often. This century, city status has been granted to Cambridge, Lancaster, Plymouth, Salford, Derby, Leicester, Portsmouth, Southampton, Swansea, Stoke-on-Trent and Sunderland. Other towns, including Wolverhampton, Croydon, Northampton and Stockport, have expressed interest.

The importance of city status derives at least partly from the fact that it is granted by the monarch. However, there are many misconceptions about what is required in order for a town to become a city. Many people believe that a city must have a cathedral. Not so. Many believe that a city must have a university. Not so; with the proliferation of universities in recent years, that is a less meaningful criterion. For example, Winchester is a city and believes that it was ideally suited for the granting of such status in view of its long history. I suggest that all towns and places have long histories. I suggest also that the concept of a city is deep-rooted both in our collective psyche and in our understanding of democracy in the truest sense of the word.

The city state originated in ancient Greece. In modern Greece, the word "polis"—for city—is officially accorded to significant municipalities. Almost every country has a clear process and criteria for identifying a city.

In China, centuries of bureaucracy and civil service practice have arrived at highly detailed and inflexible criteria, including, for example, that the non-agricultural population of the town must exceed 120,000, of whom no fewer than 80,000 must be engaged in non-agricultural industries. By contrast, in the United States the situation is different in each state, and a state may label an area a city regardless of population size. Thus, Spring City, Tennessee, with an approximate population of 2,000, and New York, with an approximate population of 8 million, are legally cities.

I was especially impressed by how matters are conducted in Peru, where detailed criteria include population growth and the existence of educational institutions and hospitals. In Japan, rather differently, a city must have a population of 50,000 or more, and its inhabitants must be engaged in commercial or industrial pursuits. Thus, Tokyo contains several cities.

Many other countries have also considered the matter publicly, and have established criteria and processes for a town to become a city—I am indebted to their embassies for the information that they have supplied.

All that is educational, and should give us pause for thought. The Government are committed to openness and clarity of decision making, and to inclusiveness and a sense of pride in, and belonging to, our communities, but the process by which a place may be designated a city remains shrouded in mystery.

City status confers a tremendous sense of pride on a community and is attractive to business and to investment, but it should not be conferred willy-nilly. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary would determine clear criteria and a transparent process by which a town would become a city. I shall not prejudge what those criteria and that process should be, but I shall suggest what some of the criteria might be: a place to which people travel to work, to shop, to be educated and to receive medical treatment and which is rich in history and culture—in short, a place very much like Reading, which I have the honour to represent.

Reading was settled in Saxon times because it was on the confluence of two great rivers, the Thames and the Kennet. The railways and then the roads came. More people commute into Reading than out of it, despite its closeness to London, and it is surpassed only by London and by Birmingham as a place where major companies locate their headquarters. Reading has a great university and a great abbey, where Parliament sat in former times when this place was plague-ridden or otherwise unattractive. King Henry I is buried in Reading. Next to Reading abbey is Reading gaol, which was made famous in verse by one of its most famous, but least willing, inhabitants, the great genius, Oscar Wilde. Musical notation was invented and photography pioneered in Reading, and I should mention the Reading rock and Womad festivals.

To become a city, a town should attract people, investment and institutions on economic, cultural and geographical grounds. If those criteria were known to all and if a clear process were established by which any place could apply to the Government to be judged against the criteria, with a recommendation made to Her Majesty accordingly, we as a nation could approach the new millennium with a sense of pride in, and belonging to, the places in which we live.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Jane Griffiths, Ms Jenny Jones, Mr. Peter Bradley, Mr. Michael Wills and Mr. Martin Salter.

Cities (Process and Criteria for Designation)

Jane Griffiths accordingly presented a Bill to establish a process and criteria for places to be designated as cities; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 3 July, and to be printed [Bill 194].

Opposition Day

[12TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Electoral System

Madam Speaker: Before we commence the main business, I must tell the House that I shall limit speeches to 10 minutes between 7 pm and 9 pm. I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

3.39 pm

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): I beg to move,

That this House affirms the strength and fairness of Britain's current electoral system; recognises that it meets the criteria laid down for the Independent Commission on the Voting System better than any alternative; believes that the current terms of reference of the Commission prevent a fair and balanced assessment being made; urges the Government to change the remit of the Commission to allow it to examine equally all systems of voting; and believes that, in these circumstances, the Commission would recommend the status quo.

We have chosen to debate Britain's electoral system because we believe that it is being deliberately and systematically attacked and undermined. What makes this debate all the more urgent is the fact that this demolition is happening right now, under the guise of an independent review, which will report in the autumn. We face a process that is clearly aimed at changing the present system not on the balance of any argument that it is right to do so, but because wider political motives are motivating such change. It is a cynical attempt to play politics with people's votes dressed up as an intellectual and even-handed exercise, which it simply is not.

The so-called independent commission on voting systems, under the leadership of that well-known advocate of electoral reform, the noble Lord Jenkins of Hillhead, was established at the end of last year by the Government. Its members were selected by the Government, not in consultation with other political parties but, in most cases at least, according to each individual's known interest in and support for electoral reform. Its remit is not to examine all possible electoral systems and to evaluate them on the basis of what will be best for this country, but coldly and openly to find an alternative to the present system. Its intent is to create an electoral environment that will permanently favour one brand of politics over another.

Far from being independent, the whole exercise is pointing firmly in one direction—away from the first-past-the-post system, which has served this country so well and for so long.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Does the right hon. Gentleman recall that, in last year's election, 20 per cent. of the population of Wales voted Conservative, yet not one of the 40 Welsh Members of Parliament is a Conservative? Is that a system that is strong and fair?

Mr. Ancram: If the hon. Gentleman waits to hear the rest of my speech, he will discover why I believe that the present system is strong and fair. His point is often put to us, but I do not believe that our consideration of the way in which we elect this House of Commons should be governed by political expediency. It is very easy to say that proportional representation would help the Conservatives in Wales and Scotland, but we are talking not about parties' votes or politicians' votes, but about people's votes. That is why we must examine closely the work of the Jenkins commission.

Mr. Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield): The right hon. Gentleman said that people's votes are more important than politicians' votes. Is he in favour of a referendum?

Mr. Ancram: I shall also ask the hon. Gentleman to listen to my speech. If he reads our motion, he will see that we are asking for changes to be made in the remit of the Jenkins commission, which, as we understand it, will be followed by a referendum.

Despite the protestations that the outcome of this exercise will be put to the people in a referendum alongside the current system—that is reflected in the Government's amendment—the whole dynamic and momentum of the Jenkins commission is clearly designed to persuade people that, in this era of constitutional reform, it is smart to change the way in which we vote and stuffy to resist it. That is a dangerous and cynical argument. It is playing politics with the very foundations of our democratic system, and the way in which people elect their representatives and their Governments. More dangerously, it threatens to play party politics with this central constitutional issue, which, ahead of all others, should be above party politics.

Mr. Dale Campbell-Savours (Workington): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ancram: I shall give way once more, and then I want to make some progress.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: The right hon. Gentleman has been slinging a few insults across the Dispatch Box. He will know that a number of Conservative Members of Parliament belong to organisations that are in favour of electoral reform, including direct proportional representation. Does he cast the same aspersions on them? Is he challenging their integrity on these questions?

Mr. Ancram: It is obvious that the hon. Gentleman has not been listening to what I have been saying, and has not read the motion. I am arguing not that one system alone should be considered, but that the Jenkins commission should consider all potential systems, including first past the post.

I pay tribute to the courageous article by the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) which was published in yesterday's edition of *The Times*. In that article, the hon. Gentleman advanced a cogent argument for retaining the current system. He is, I suspect, by no means alone in the Labour party in holding that view. Indeed, looking at the few Labour Front Benchers who are present for today's important debate, I suspect that he might even find tacit support for his opinions there—although we may not hear it enunciated today.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his excellent article which appeared in a Sunday newspaper about 10 days ago. May I request that

Conservative Members never again be asked to vote, on a three-line Whip, for a list system? That has happened several times in the past few months, and is clearly contrary not only to the Opposition motion, but to my right hon. Friend's extremely good newspaper article.

Mr. Ancram: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his comments. As I am sure he realises, we had argued firmly for a first-past-the-post system in the context of those elections; only when we failed to achieve that did we try to mitigate the results of what we considered a very bad alternative by arguing for an open list.

My central thesis is that it is time to open the windows on what is actually happening—to get away from the soundbites and slogans that we heard this morning, and to begin a genuine public debate on what is in the best interests of our democratic system and the rights of people within it. Our motion sets out our confidence in the current system of electing this House of Commons. We believe it to be both strong and fair, in ways that I shall outline shortly. It is because of our confidence in that system that our motion does not seek to bring down the Jenkins commission. In any event, we are realistic enough to know that, were we to try to do so, given the Government's current majority we would be unlikely to succeed.

What we are doing is challenging the Government to broaden the commission's remit to allow it to evaluate the first-past-the-post system alongside the others. We believe that, were it to do so honestly and strictly in terms of the criteria given to it by the Government, it would be bound ultimately to recommend no change. We have the confidence to issue that challenge to the Government today. We want to know whether they will have the integrity to accept it, and we shall find that out later this afternoon.

Let me make it clear that Conservative Members do not blindly oppose constitutional change. We do, however, oppose it when the case for it has not been made—when it is for short-term party advantage, or simply change for change's sake. Tried and tested arrangements should be discarded only when they have clearly failed. Moreover, any reform should have the national interest, rather than partisan interests, at heart, and should proceed on the basis of the broadest possible political consensus.

I have to say that the Jenkins commission is the antithesis of consensus. It stems from the Government's decision—agreed as part of their cosying up with the Liberal Democrats—to proceed unilaterally on electoral reform. Conservative Members were not approached about it; the commission was packed, its remit was rigged, and the British voting system is now in danger of being dragged into the party political arena.

We seek today to introduce some balance, some fairness and some independence into the exercise before it is too late. The present picture is of a commission the outcome of whose deliberations is a foregone conclusion. That outcome will be a voting system designed to produce perpetual coalitions, and tailor-made to allow the core message of the popular vote to be ignored and an enduring political hegemony to be achieved. The fact that such an hegemony is openly envisaged as left of centre makes it even less palatable to Conservative Members.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Jack Straw): Did the right Gentleman say Gramsci?

Mr. Ancram: I have been reading something very different, as the Home Secretary will discover.

Before the general election, the Labour campaign news letter stated:

"So what are the realpolitik reasons for electoral reform?"

The answer was:

"We can abolish right wing Tory Governments forever."

The Minister nods, but that is hardly the language of consensus or of reaching across parties. It is the language of raw political ambition, and its echoes permeate the Jenkins commission.

If our electoral system needs to be reviewed—and I have yet to hear a rational rather than a political case for doing so—the basis of the review should be even-handed and should have no predetermined outcome. On an even playing field, the case for the present system would prevail, even using the carefully selected criteria that were given to the Jenkins commission.

Our argument is simple. It is, first, that the current system of first past the post produces clear results which, by and large, reflect the most favoured choice of the electorate. To borrow a phrase, election day is, in a very real way, judgment day. Only on the rarest occasions, such as we almost reached in February 1974, are we left with a result that depends on the machinations of politicians behind closed doors rather than on the electorate.

The opposite would be the case under any proportional system. That is great for politicians, but bad for voters. At the moment, the voters know whom to blame and how to get rid of them. Last year, we discovered the truth of that in spades. Although we may not have enjoyed that experience, we accept that that is what accountable democracy should be about. Under any so-called proportionate system, that ability of the electorate would be seriously, if not fatally, undermined.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): In that context, or later in his speech, will my right hon. Friend draw attention to the New Zealand experience? The people of New Zealand were conned into changing their electoral system and they have bitterly regretted it, not least because the outcome of the first election under the new system was the opposite of what they expected, and was the result of back-room deals between political parties.

Mr. Ancram: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for making that important point. I shall address it later, because it flags up the inherent dangers of the Government's proposals in the context of the Jenkins commission.

The second part of our argument is that, under the terms of reference for the Jenkins commission as a whole, first past the post still wins. It is worth repeating those terms of reference. They are the requirement for broad proportionality; the need for stable government; an extension of voter choice; and a link between MPs and geographical constituencies. Those who gave the commission those criteria may have thought that they were first-past-the-post-proof and that the argument had been won before it had begun. They were wrong. In our submission to the Jenkins commission last month, we argued that the British voting system beat the alternatives,

[Mr. Ancram]

even on the Government's own terms. That system is the only one that can maintain a genuine constituency link between elected and electors.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): What about AV, the alternative vote system?

Mr. Ancram: When the hon. Gentleman can show me that AV is a proportional system, I shall listen to him. All the signs are that its products are totally disproportionate.

Any form of PR either breaks the direct one-to-one relationship, or at least dilutes it beyond recognition. Our electoral system also empowers voter choice more widely than the alternatives. It ensures that the most popular candidate in each constituency is elected, and it tends to give a working majority to the party with most votes. It offers the electorate the chance to decide.

By contrast, under PR, it is politicians rather than the people who make the real decisions as they negotiate to form governing coalitions. The only certainty under PR is that no voter will get the manifesto for which he voted. In giving a working majority to a single party, the British system also provides stable government, whereas under PR coalition government is almost inevitable. As the record in other countries shows, it can produce the very opposite of stable government. Where there is stability under PR, it is often achieved by giving undue influence to small minority parties—in some cases, from the extreme edges of the political spectrum.

Mr. Hugh Bayley (City of York): If the right hon. Gentleman is arguing that proportional representation leads to bad governance, could he explain why, over the past 30 years, Britain has had the second-lowest average growth rate out of the 15 EU member states—I am not making a party political point—when all 13 countries with a better growth record than ours have PR systems?

Mr. Ancram: If the hon. Gentleman had been listening, he would have realised that I was talking about the stability of government. We can all bandy statistics around, but the countries to which he refers have higher unemployment rates than this country. I am not suggesting that that is because of the instability of government. I am talking about the way in which we elect Governments and what we should expect from them.

Mr. John Gummer (Suffolk, Coastal): Will my right hon. Friend go further and point out that in Germany, for example, the proportional representation system means that the smallest party has perpetual membership of the Government? If one wants an unfair system, it is that Mr. Genscher first, and his successors thereafter, as Free Democrats, will be the Foreign Minister of Germany almost in perpetuity. Is that a fair system?

Mr. Ancram: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for making another point to which I was going come later. One of the slogans of those who support proportional representation is that it is a fair voting system. My right hon. Friend quite rightly asks what is fair about the way in which, in Germany, the smallest party has spent the longest period as part of the Government.

The final criterion is broad proportionality. Proponents of PR almost invariably argue from the standpoint of proportionality of seats. If this means—and in most PR systems it does—that voters should have the right, by and large, to be represented by representatives of the party they voted for, it opens some seriously dangerous doors. The German regional elections this year have shown how easy it is for extremists to enter Parliament, when the Deutsche Volksunion won 16 per cent. of the seats for its 13 per cent. of the votes in Saxony-Anhalt. Do we really want to go down that road here? That is one of the implications of PR.

Incidentally, that is the reason why France scrapped PR after using it for only one election. In 1986, the National Front won 6.3 per cent. of the seats—or 35 seats—for 9.8 per cent. of the vote. The National Front won only 0.2 per cent. of the seats—one seat—at the next election on the same share of the vote. That suggests that what matters in democracy is whether people get the Government they voted for. That is at the heart of our case against proportional representation.

Small parties play a pivotal role in forming a coalition, and thereby exercise a degree of power quite disproportionate to their share of the vote. My right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) has made the point that in Germany, the Free Democrats have almost always been in government since the war, and, furthermore, have been able to decide which of the major parties should share the Government with them. This can mean that the largest party—in terms of its votes or its seats—is excluded from the Government.

What should matter is not proportionality of seats, but proportionality of power. There are widely accepted measures of disproportionality, which usually compare a party's share of the vote with the number of seats it wins. We have applied those same measures to proportionality of power. This morning, we published new figures—based on data largely gathered with a great deal of assistance from the Library—which show that the British system is more proportional in terms of the share of power than any of the conventional PR systems, as well as systems such as the alternative vote.

The Jenkins commission cannot take this evidence into account, as the Government have prevented it from considering the current British voting system. Why will the Home Secretary not allow the commission to reach a truly independent assessment of all the various systems? Why can it not base its recommendations on a fair consideration of the evidence after looking at the British system, as well as those abroad?

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): Will the right hon. Gentleman clarify the Conservative party's position? He has argued that the electorate often do not get the Government they want. Is he saying that, regardless of how small the percentage of votes a party receives—perhaps 44 per cent. or 33 per cent.—and the fact that a majority of the electorate did not support that party, the people will be given the Government of their choice simply because the arrangement of constituencies will give that party a majority of seats in this place?

Mr. Ancram: Again, the hon. Gentleman makes a very strange case. I suspect that he has supported systems that

have enabled the Free Democratic party, with 7 per cent. of the vote in Germany, constantly to be part of the German Government.

No system will produce an exact proportion between the share of votes and time spent in government. The exercise that we have conducted—I will not give the figures to the House; I suspect that we would all have some difficult in reading them because they are rather complex—shows that the gap between proportion of votes and time spent in government is much smaller under the first-past-the-post system than it is under any of the other systems examined.

The other systems covered by our exercise included most of the other forms of proportional representation under consideration by the Jenkins commission. We covered Israel, which uses the list system; Germany, which uses the additional member system; Australia, which uses the alternative vote system; France; Ireland, which uses the single transferable vote system; and the United Kingdom. On the basis of those systems, it is clear that the proportionality-of-power battle is won by the first-past-the-post system.

Dr. Tony Wright (Cannock Chase): I am trying to follow the right hon. Gentleman's curious argument on disproportionality of power. Under our system, on two occasions in this century—once in 1951, and again in 1974—the party that won the most votes lost the general election. Regardless of the proportionality of our system, can we tolerate one in which the party that wins loses?

Mr. Ancram: The hon. Gentleman has produced two examples from the past 100 years. In any of the proportional systems, such examples are the norm rather than the exception—which is precisely why we believe that the Jenkins commission should consider the first-past-the-post system with the others. I am confident that, were the commission to do so, the evidence would clearly show that the British system scores best against the commission's criteria overall, and better than most other systems on each criterion.

It is worth examining the alternative systems. The first is the additional member system, which the Government have decided to foist on Scotland and Wales. We know from our previous debates on the devolution Bills—which may come as news to most hon. Members in the Chamber today, as those debates were not very well attended by English Members—that the additional member system is wide open to abuse and manipulation because of what is known as split-ticket voting, which can produce highly disproportionate results.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) said, the evidence on the additional member system is not encouraging. In New Zealand, it took more than eight weeks to form a Government after the 1996 election, which was the first in which a similar system was used. During that time, New Zealand First eventually supported the National party, although it had stood in the election on an anti-National ticket. That is hardly an example of "fair votes" or—to use the other slogan— of "making votes count".

The evidence is not confined to New Zealand.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): I am trying carefully to follow the logic of the right hon. Gentleman's argument. At the beginning of his speech, he said that he was not saying that we should not have a referendum. However, he seems to be trying to get the Jenkins commission to make the choice, rather than giving the people the choice—which is what the Government want to do.

Mr. Ancram: As I said—I do not know whether the hon. Lady was listening—the Government have set about the matter by trying to achieve a momentum behind the alternative proposed by the Jenkins commission, with the intention of seeing that alternative implemented. I am asking for a fair evaluation of all the systems. I believe that, if we have that, first past the post will win.

We have already dealt with the situation in Germany. It is worth remembering that—overnight, in 1982—the Free Democrats switched allegiance from the Social Democrats to the Christian Democrats, immediately changing the complexion of the German Government. That is hardly another example of fair votes or votes counting. I am astonished that New Zealand came to be saddled with a system that had such a track record—a system that the polls show is highly unpopular there.

We shall use the list system to elect our Members of the European Parliament next year. Evidence from other countries shows that that form of proportional representation does nothing to enhance the quality of democracy. Italy has had more than 50 Governments since the war, the shortest lasting, I think, 12 days. No doubt that is why the Italians voted in a referendum in 1993 to abolish list PR for the Senate—a clear signal that prompted the parties to change the electoral system for the Chamber of Deputies as well. In each case, three quarters of the members are now elected from individual constituencies, with only a quarter elected from lists.

Then there is the single transferable vote. After the 1997 election in Ireland under that system, Bertie Ahern had to rely on the Progressive Democrats—a party with only four seats out of 166. In 1994, when I was involved in Irish affairs, the same system allowed the complexion of the Irish Government to change without any reference to the electorate, because the partners in the coalition changed their minds about each other and formed different coalitions. Professor Philip Norton, a former Minister in Ireland, has written that, of the

"many factors which inhibit reform of the virtually powerless Dail . . . the first and arguably the most intractable is the proportional representation multi-seat system."

The case for keeping our current electoral system is compelling. The electorate can remove the governing party if it no longer retains their confidence. We avoid coalitions and prevent minor parties from bringing down Governments. Above all, our system is fair; the most popular party always forms a Government, it cannot be kept out of office by minor parties, and the most popular candidate in a constituency is elected. We should not consider changing a system that evidently works so well.

The Government's exercise is not about democracy, but about power. If it was about a fair voting system or about making votes genuinely count, the Jenkins commission would have been asked to look at all the options; it has been prevented from doing so. It would have been asked to recommend the most appropriate system; it has been asked, for better or worse, to recommend an alternative. It would have been asked to test the current system against

[Mr. Ancram]

the criteria of its terms of reference to see how it fared; it has been told deliberately that it cannot. Its terms of reference are skewed, so its answer will be skewed.

The exercise is not academic; it is political. I do not believe that Lord Jenkins would deny that he would like the electoral system that would be most likely to produce the left-of-centre political balance beloved of Asquith's Liberals.

The process is playing with political fire. A country cannot destroy the credibility of its voting system and then hope to re-create it—look at New Zealand. It cannot seek to give smaller parties more influence and then complain when small, extremist parties get elected and start wielding real political power—look at Saxony-Anhalt in Germany. It cannot destroy the basis for electing stable and coherent Governments, and then complain about constant changes of Government for no good political reason—look at Italy before the move towards our current system. It cannot undermine the basis of representative democracy and then complain when democratic institutions are devalued—look at Ireland.

Ms Gisela Stuart (Birmingham, Edgbaston): The right hon. Gentleman puts great stress on the election of the most popular candidate, and has referred to New Zealand, where vote splitting resulted in 37 per cent. of electors voting for the candidate they wanted, but choosing the election manifesto they preferred. There is a contradiction in the right hon. Gentleman's argument.

Mr. Ancram: I listen with interest to the hon. Lady's argument. New Zealand ended up with a Government that nobody had voted for, because the partners in the coalition had campaigned against each other.

Voting systems are not like new hats to be tried and then discarded if we do not like them. They are the basis of people's democratic rights, the source of their sovereignty and the guarantor of democratic accountability. It is an insult to democracy to subject them to the judgment of Paris—or, in this case, the judgment of Roy—with one of the beauties excluded from the contest. Such judgment is designed to produce a predetermined result, and no amount of flannel can cover that fact.

Today's debate and tonight's vote are not about the usual political issues which are the normal fare of Supply days. They are about the very future of our political system. The implications of what we are discussing could be far greater than any of the other constitutional changes that the Government are proposing. At the very least, such implications should be examined honestly and even-handedly. The Jenkins commission, by its terms of reference, cannot do so. It is a rigged exercise, designed to produce a rigged result. We should reject not only its outcome, but the very basis on which it has been set up.

Our motion gives the Government a chance to redeem the credibility of the Jenkins commission. If they reject that chance, we Conservatives at least must start the campaign to keep the system that has served our democracy so well. This is a battle for the political integrity of our democracy. It is a battle to establish beyond doubt that the people's vote is for the people and not for the convenience of politicians. Our message today is simple: stop messing with the people's votes.

4.10 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Jack Straw): I beg to move, To leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

'congratulates the Government on its constitutional reform programme; welcomes the creation of the Independent Commission on the Voting System and its remit; and supports the commitment of the Government to consult the people of the United Kingdom by a referendum on the appropriate electoral system to be used to elect this House'.

I congratulate the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) on his imminent appointment as chairman of the Conservative party, and the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) on his appointment as shadow Home Secretary. I should also like to take this early opportunity to pay tribute to the right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire (Sir B. Mawhinney). I enjoyed our year of facing each other across the Dispatch Box, and I wish him well in his new role on the Back Benches. It was typical of the man that, within a few hours of becoming a Back Bencher, he was asking forensic questions on a matter very dear to his heart—Northern Ireland.

The Government welcome the debate. We have embarked on a major programme of constitutional reform. We are modernising our constitution, and hoping to bring the institutions of government closer to the people whom they serve. We want to restore the trust of the people in the democratic system. The introduction, where appropriate, of new electoral systems is an important element of that agenda.

In any democracy, if the electoral system is not right, everything else is open to question—the right hon. Member for Devizes was entirely right to assert that. So the question of which electoral system to use for any election, far from being a matter of concern only to enthusiasts, is a vital one. The distinguished political scientist Dr. David Butler was entirely correct when he observed:

"Electoral Systems lie at the heart of a nation's arrangements".

My party's interest in electoral systems dates from when the very first Labour Members were elected to this House; from the first moment that there was any prospect of power for the Labour party. As a minority party in those early days, it was, I suppose, natural for senior party figures such as Keir Hardie to be in favour of a proportional system in order to gain more seats in Westminster and so move out of the Liberal party's shadow.

Our stance in the early years of the century was in marked contrast to that of the Liberal party, which was then one of the big two players. The Liberal party opposed moving from the first-past-the-post system when the issue was first considered by a Speaker's conference at the end of the great war. It is a matter of record, of which we should take account, that it was only when the Liberal party became the third party that it began to look on proportional representation with rather more favour than it had during its time in government—while my party was moving in the opposite direction.

Following a few sporadic forays into the sphere of electoral reform between the wars, it was not until the late 1980s that the issue arose again as a major area of debate in the Labour party. Under the leadership of

Neil Kinnock, my party took the step of establishing an internal commission on the subject, chaired by Lord Plant of Highfield. In turn, the Plant committee's recommendations triggered the late Labour leader, John Smith, to propose a referendum on the issue.

The whole House will know that I have not been exactly a shrinking violet when it comes to electoral systems. My view in favour of single-member constituencies is long stated. In the dog days of the Labour party in the early 1980s, when some people thought that my party could never again win by itself, I crossed swords with many advocates of proportional representation.

In last November's debate on the European Parliamentary Elections Bill, I set out my views about the electoral system for Westminster. I said:

"My arguments against proportional representation for the Westminster Parliament have been based on the mathematical and political difficulty of securing an identity between votes cast, seats gained and power secured. It is possible to devise a voting system where the seats won are proportional to the votes cast—but there follows a serious conundrum. The greater the proportionality of votes to seats, the less may be the proportionality of votes to power.

"PR systems typically give disproportionate power to the smaller minority parties, while first-past-the-post and similar systems with single-member constituencies give power to the largest plurality and so help secure a system where the proportionality, not between votes and seats, but between votes and power, may be the greater."—[*Official Report*, 25 November 1997; Vol. 301, c. 804.]

We will wish to take other matters into account, of course. The right hon. Member for Devizes managed from time to time to contribute to the informed debate he wants, but at other times he undermined that debate by insulting the integrity of those who may take a different view from his.

I want to raise two issues that are important to an informed debate. The first matter is raised in the Jenkins commission's terms of reference, and it is the constituency link. The connection between constituents and Members of Parliament has grown in recent years. Like me, the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield will recall the late Sir Hubert Ashton, who represented Chelmsford—the right hon. Gentleman's home town—from 1950 to 1964. Chided on why he had not often visited his constituency—if he had done so at all—Sir Hubert dismissed the complaint famously, by saying, "Sir, I was elected to represent Chelmsford in Westminster, not Westminster in Chelmsford."

Within recent memory, many Members on both sides of the House considered that they were doing their constituents a favour if they made a regal visit to the constituency every one, two or three months. I recall a conversation I had with a close friend—now right honourable, but not a Conservative—when he and I arrived here in 1979. His outgoing predecessor had told my friend of a complaint to his general management committee that he had not been to the constituency for a year. He had taken out his diary and said, "That is entirely wrong. I was there just nine months ago." We all remember such people, and we all know that the connection was not always as strong as it is now.

That fact is also highlighted by interesting work—it is a little dated—on the mail that Members of Parliament receive. In the 1950s, the average Member received between 12 and 20 letters a week. By 1967, it was approximately 50 a week, and by 1986—the date of the research—it had risen to between 100 and 150 a week. Information from the House of Commons postmaster showed that, in 1964, Members of Parliament received 10,000 letters a week in total—though, obviously, not all came from constituents. By 1987, that figure had increased to 40,000 a day. I do not have a contemporary figure, but it is very much greater.

If the public at large are asked what they think of politicians at large, they dismiss us and rate us equal with estate agents and journalists.

Mr. David Maclean (Penrith and The Border): That high?

Mr. Straw: The right hon. Member for Penrith and The Border speaks for himself. It is interesting that, while the public do not generally hold us in great esteem, they wish to use the services of individual Members of Parliament more and more. That is entirely right in a healthy democracy.

Ms Stuart: Only 30 per cent. of the people who live in my constituency also work there. Birmingham has 11 Members of Parliament, but its people have little idea of which side of the Hagley road is the end of Edgbaston and which the beginning of Ladywood. They regard us all as representatives of Birmingham, and therefore as a group. There is a lot of trade in between. Does my right hon. Friend accept that such links can exist with larger units and a multiplicity of representatives, such as 15 Birmingham MPs?

Mr. Straw: Of course I accept that in principle. It is one of the points that I will make when I come to express my disagreement with the motion. Of course there are different ways of achieving a connection between representation in this House and areas of the country. However, I personally believe—it is no secret; I made it clear the last time we debated this matter, last November—that single-member constituencies are best. I know that I am in a privileged position because I represent a one-constituency town with clear boundaries. I have also represented Islington as one three of members for a council ward, and I often wished that I was representing a smaller, single-member ward.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): I have considerable sympathy with what I might call my right hon. Friend's constituency link argument. However, it is widely believed in Scotland that, if we had offered the Scottish people in our recent referendum a Scottish Parliament based on the first-past-the-post system, we would not have achieved the resounding success we did on 11 September.

Mr. Straw: I accept what my hon. Friend says. As he knows, I strongly support the system that we put forward in Scotland. I shall later point out that different political institutions require different electoral systems. I have been on the record for many years as saying that I was never happy with situations such as that in 1971 when I was elected to Islington council: 70 per cent. of the vote was for Labour, but we got 100 per cent. of the seats. That was not healthy for the electorate or for the Labour party, as events have proved.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): Following the intervention of my hon. Friend the Member

[Mr. Gerald Kaufman]

for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart), is my right hon. Friend aware that, although things may be different in Birmingham, in Manchester people know very well who their representatives are? I have split roads in my constituency, but when people from the side of the road that is not my constituency come to me for help, it is not because they think I represent them, but because they wish I did.

Mr. Straw: I know that to be true of my right hon. Friend. His extraordinary expertise in parliamentary matters is exceeded only by his modesty.

Another issue is often raised by those who want a fundamental change in the system. It was raised early this morning on the radio by advocates outside the House of a shift to a full proportional representation system. It is the issue of voter turnout. To follow on from the serious part of the speech of the right hon. Member for Devizes, what is important is that we have an informed debate and that we do not make huge claims for one system over another, but that we recognise that we are dealing with systems that may or may not—there is no perfect system of election—produce a balance of advantage for a country or an institution.

The figures on voter turnout are interesting. I was sorry that, in the last election, there was a lower turnout than in 1992—I dare say that the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) was even more sorry that the turnout was only 71 per cent. However, it is interesting to compare that with Portugal, which has a system of proportional representation, where the turnout in the most recent national elections was 68 per cent.; or with Ireland, where turnout was 65 per cent.

When discussing the question of proportionality—in this case, not proportionality of power with the interesting algorithms developed by Library statisticians, but proportionality of votes cast to seats gained—it is interesting to note that, although the United States uses a first-past-the-post system for national elections, because there is a two-party system across the country, there is almost exact proportionality between votes cast and seats gained; and even in that country, turnouts are low by any standard, at 50 per cent.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): There is a problem with the turnout figures in this country, because our electoral registration process is inadequate. There are many people on registers who have died or moved and who are therefore not expected to vote, but we calculate the turnout of voters in an election from the number appearing on the register. The worse the registers become, the more inadequate are the turnout figures, so an improvement in the registration process would help us considerably in understanding exactly what proportion of people vote.

Mr. Straw: I accept entirely what my hon. Friend says, and I pay tribute to his work over many years in Parliament to raise interest in voting. In my judgment, increasing interest in voting is a function not simply of the electoral system, but of many more prosaic issues, such as making the system of registration easier and quicker, making polling stations more accessible, and perhaps changing the day on which we vote.

I remember that, when I first took numbers in Chigwell urban district council elections, voting in urban districts in many parts of the country took place on a Saturday. We need to have an open debate on that matter. All those issues are being considered by a working party chaired by the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, North and Sefton, East (Mr. Howarth), on which nominated representatives of the Conservative party, the Liberal Democrats and other parties sit.

It should be an obvious truth that no electoral system can be suitable for all political institutions, whatever their purpose or powers. We have proposed different arrangements for the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh assembly and the Greater London assembly. In the debate on the European Parliamentary Elections Bill, I set out the reasons why, in my judgment, the first-past-the-post system in huge artificial European constituencies was not a satisfactory system, and why, in the particular circumstances of the European elections, where we are electing not a Government but a representative body, a regional list system was better.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): All voting systems have blemishes, and no one, including its defenders such as myself, denies that the first-past-the-post system has its faults; but should we not recognise that, despite all that has happened on the continent before and after the war, no fascist and only the occasional communist has ever been elected to the House of Commons? Would not almost every anti-democratic party—fascist, communist or whatever—dearly like proportional representation to be introduced in this country, for obvious reasons?

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend makes an important point, which needs to be weighed in the balance. I cannot and do not say that, if we moved to a system of proportional representation, it would be bound to lead to a growth of extremist parties. However, were it not for this debate, I would be chairing a European Union conference on racism being held in Manchester today under our presidency; and it is true that almost all our European partners are greatly anxious about the fact that extremist parties—particularly from the right—now have parliamentary representation in their domestic parliaments.

I have read with great care the Conservative party's submission to the Jenkins commission, and I say, without any condescension, that, on the merits of first past the post, it is well argued. Its fault lies in its dogmatism—its refusal to admit at all the possible merits of any alternative. That fault is compounded by the practice to the contrary of Conservative Administrations.

The right hon. Member for Devizes is the last person to dismiss Ireland as unworthy of the consideration that we should give the mainland of Britain, which is to his credit. He knows that, not once but twice in the Conservative party's recent history, Conservative Members have come to the House and recommended for Northern Ireland's political institutions not first past the post, but systems of proportional representation: the single transferable vote for elections to the old Northern Ireland Assembly, and a closed regional list system with our now famous d'Hondt divisors for the Northern Ireland peace forum.

The Conservative party rejected first past the post not only for those institutions but for its Members of Parliament, who make up the franchise for the electorate of the Conservative party leader. The system that the party has operated since 1965 is so complicated that it might well have been invented by our old friend, the famous Belgian, Victor d'Hondt, while resting from his labours on divisors. However, in essence, the system for electing the Tory leader is a form of the alternative vote.

Those who have just benefited from the patronage of the Leader of the Opposition, the right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague), ought to be thankful that the Conservative party uses an alternative vote system, because, had the Tory leadership been decided by first past the post, the Leader of the Opposition would be not the right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks, but the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), and some Front-Bench Conservative Members might not now be in their posts.

Mr. Burden: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is interesting to note that, when the right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks was at Oxford university, he urged the adoption of a single transferable vote system for its Conservative association?

Mr. Straw: That information is interesting, but I do not necessarily hold against people what they did or said when they were students. To do so might be unwise not only for me, but for some of my hon. Friends.

Although I have long opposed proportional representation and favoured single-member constituencies, I have also come to recognise that questions have increasingly been raised about the legitimacy of first past the post, with endless challenges to its merits on the grounds of its alleged lack of arithmetical proportionality between votes cast and seats won.

It is for that reason that I have also long been a supporter of a referendum on the issue to give the British people a chance, which they have never had before, to express their confidence in the current system or to vote for a specific change. The 1995 Labour party conference finally made a decision on that issue. I was then a member of the national executive committee, so it fell to me to recommend such a referendum to the conference, which I did.

It is on that point that a great gulf emerges between the Government and the Opposition. The gulf is not between those who support proportional representation and those who support first past the post. There are different views among Labour Members, and, as I shall explain, in the Conservative party and the country. The gulf arises from the fact that the Conservative party writes an elegant and persuasive paper in favour of first past the post, in which it says:

"the evidence suggests that the British system fulfils the criteria"—

set out in the Jenkins commission's terms of reference—

"better than any other system".

It submits that evidence to the Jenkins commission, but it is unwilling to submit the same evidence to the British people.

Where is the courage of Conservative Members' convictions? Where is their trust in the British electorate, who, through first past the post, have served them so well, giving them power for 35 of the 53 years since the war? If their arguments are as strong as they say, what exactly is it they are scared of?

Sir Nicholas Lyell (North-East Bedfordshire): Does not the logic of the Home Secretary's argument lead to the question why the Government have not been willing to allow the Jenkins commission to give advice to the country on the whole question, including the merits of first past the post? Will he keep an open mind on that question and eventually answer it in the affirmative, and change the commission's terms of reference?

Mr. Straw: If the right hon. and learned Gentleman will bear with me, I shall deal with that point later, because it was also raised by the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth), who has left the Chamber.

I ask the Conservative party in the House of Commons: why does it appear to be scared of a debate across the country about the relative merits of the first-past-the-post system and an alternative? I do not believe that Conservative Members' view is unanimously shared by members of the Conservative party. I note that Mr. Timothy Rathbone, Member of Parliament for Lewes until he lost his seat under the first-past-the-post system at the general election, is today reported as saying:

"The parliamentary motion on electoral systems chosen by the Conservative party in the House of Commons for debate today must be one of the most thoughtless and complacent of political actions by any party for a very long time."

I share that view.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): The Home Secretary is making a sensible, balanced case. Does he not think that it would add to the confusion if we held a referendum and only 50 per cent. of the electorate bothered to vote?

Mr. Straw: Obviously, there would be an issue of the turnout, but it would be for proponents of each argument to ensure a good turnout. I strongly believed—and advocated before the general election, when it was not the unanimous opinion in the Labour party—that referendums should be held in Scotland, Wales and London on the major issues of constitutional change there. I have never accepted that a minimum turnout should be set for the legitimacy of a referendum vote, because I do not believe in compulsory voting. I happen to believe that, in a democracy, people have as much of a right not to vote as they do to vote.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): That does not include trade union recognition.

Mr. Straw: We are talking about political institutions, not about trade unions—it would be quite off the point to do so.

The right hon. Member for Devizes seems to imply that the views that he has expressed are the unanimous views of the whole Conservative party; he knows that that is not true. I have with me the evidence that Conservative Action for Electoral Reform submitted to the Jenkins commission. It starts:

"Conservative Action for Electoral Reform welcomes the inquiry by the commission into an alternative system."

[Mr. Straw]

It says:

"In the late 1970s, the Conservatives in Parliament had 41 Members of Parliament and 60 peers who supported change."

It says that even the campaign guide of 1991—which, it correctly says, is the Conservative candidate's definitive authority from which the line is taken during a general election—stated:

"Ever since its invention in the 19th century, PR has had its advocates and opponents. In the Conservative party, the latter have always predominated, though the case for PR had been put with vigour by the group, Conservative Action for Electoral Reform, founded in 1974."

If the Conservative party now denies that there is unanimity in the party on the issue, and if it accepts that there should be a debate in the Conservative party on the subject, why the devil should there not be a debate across the country also?

Mr. Gummer: I am following the right hon. Gentleman's argument with care, and I am very much in favour of a debate across the country. However, would it not be helpful if that debate were to be informed in two ways? First, should there not be a commission whose membership, and above all whose chairmanship, was seen to be both balanced and, as far as the chairman was concerned, entirely without past baggage, so that it would present an independent approach? Secondly, would it not be helpful to ensure that the terms of reference enabled that commission to make comments about the present system, so that a subsequent referendum could properly draw its opinions from a properly presented case?

Mr. Straw: The right hon. Gentleman anticipates me. I shall now discuss the appointment and the terms of reference.

Dr. Tony Wright: Slightly more than 20 years ago, in 1976, an independent commission—organised by the Hansard Society and chaired by a distinguished Conservative peer, Lord Blake—did indeed study electoral systems. Contrary to the argument we heard earlier—that no rational person could reach a conclusion other than to support the first-past-the-post system, that independent commission, having studied the range of electoral systems, came out in favour of electoral reform. Is that not another important item for my right hon. Friend's list of Conservative opinions?

Mr. Straw: Yes. There have been many external or independent commissions, some centred on voluntary organisations—and that is all as it should be. This is the most vital issue to affect any democracy—as far as that goes, I do not demur from what the right hon. Member for Devizes said.

The Jenkins commission was established in fulfilment of a manifesto commitment. There is, first, the issue of membership. We held discussions with the Liberal Democrats and among ourselves—[HON. MEMBERS: "Not with the Conservatives."] No, indeed, because, in the run-up to the general election, the Conservative party completely ruled out the possibility of any constitutional change. But there is always time for sinners to repent.

I am conscious of the repentance often uttered by the right hon. Member for Devizes, for instance. He was a sinner against sinning back in the 1970s, when he strongly supported constitutional change while in opposition, and spoke up in favour of a Scottish assembly. I have the quotations with me if the right hon. Gentleman has forgotten them—

Mr. Ancram: It was 1976.

Mr. Straw: Yes. So the Conservative party ruled itself out of the equation.

The experience of New Zealand was uppermost in many of our minds. In that country, there was discontent with the electoral system. That is often a feature of all systems, even in countries with apparently wonderful systems of proportional representation. It is usually easier to find complaints about the systems than advocates of them—until one moves across the border. My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart), with her shining expertise in matters German, knows that to be true.

Nevertheless, the New Zealand experience was instructive. There was discontent with the first-past-the-post system, and the consensus was that there should be a referendum to decide whether there should be change. The voters were offered a curious choice, between a current system whose advantages and disadvantages they knew in every particular, and a mirage of some imprecise change whose detail was by definition unknown.

We were determined to avoid that. The Liberal Democrats and Labour agreed that the only fair way to put a choice to the British people was to give them a choice between two equals: between the first-past-the-post system—it would be absurd to suggest leaving it out—and another system carefully worked out by a relatively independent body.

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire): Is the right hon. Gentleman seriously saying that the commission is in any sense independent or impartial?

Mr. Straw: I used the term "relatively". I, for instance, would not be qualified to serve on the commission—this was a matter of some levity between the Liberal Democrats and me—because my views have not exactly been in favour of PR. There was not much point in putting on the commission people who were wholly opposed to the idea of PR, because its whole purpose was to draw up a practical alternative.

Mr. Heald: Where is the balance, then?

Mr. Straw: I am sorry that it is taking me so long to get my point across. The balance is between the existing system, which the hon. Gentleman and most of his hon. Friends support, and an alternative worked up in detail. So, when the British people have the chance to vote, they can see the advantages and disadvantages of both.

Mr. John MacGregor (South Norfolk): Does it follow from what the right hon. Gentleman is saying that, when the time comes for the referendum, the Government will make the case both for what the commission recommends,

which we know will have a particular slant, and for the existing system; and that they will ensure equal time and resources for putting across both cases to the country?

Mr. Straw: I shall come to that in a moment. It is, of course, important to ensure that a fair debate is conducted on such a crucial issue. We have not yet made any final decisions; it will still be many months before we receive the report of the Jenkins commission. The right hon. Gentleman's point is an important one, and it distinguishes this issue from arguments about the Greater London referendum, for example—

Mr. Gummer: If a commission presents a report saying that such-and-such is the best system, inherent in that presentation will be a judgment. Thus the British people will be presented with a report by a commission that has spent many months discussing the issue, and also with the status quo. They cannot but think of the commission as the sort of body that would usually investigate all the pros and cons and then come up with a proposal. Now we are told that it is not that sort of commission at all: it is supposed to come up with some proportional system, which will then be compared with the present system.

I submit that the Home Secretary should make it quite clear that the commission's report will be different in kind, and that whatever suggestion it backs will have a different sort of authority.

Mr. Straw: No. The Conservative party has got itself in a terrible twist. The absurdity of its argument—which is that the commission will bring down tablets of stone declaring which is the best system—lies in the fact that the commission has not been invited to consider the merits of first past the post alongside all the alternatives. The Tories would have been in a pickle if the commission had been invited to do so. If an independent commission, as Lord Blake's body did 20 years ago, then handed down a recommendation stating that the additional member system or some form of STV system was incontrovertibly better than first past the post, Conservatives who support the latter would be in serious difficulties. The fact that the commission is not doing that is doing them a favour, although they seem not to recognise it.

Mr. Martin Linton (Battersea): As the first-past-the-post system is guaranteed a place on the ballot paper, regardless of its merits and regardless of the findings of the Jenkins commission, can my right hon. Friend understand what the Opposition want?

Mr. Straw: I do my best.

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): Surely the frailty of the Home Secretary's argument is that it contravenes the principle, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it"? To mix my metaphors, one does not have exploratory surgery while feeling perfectly well. Consequently, the British people will assume that the thing is broken, damaged or faulty from the very fact that it is being investigated.

Mr. Straw: Although my views on single-member constituencies are widely known, I also acknowledge that, over the past 30 years, the legitimacy of first past the post has increasingly been challenged—that is a fact. Now it is time to ask the British people either to express their confidence in the system or to move to a different one.

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): I do not believe that the Home Secretary answered the question about equal funding. Will he give the House a guarantee that the campaigns for both systems will receive equal funding?

Mr. Straw: I hope that my answer to the right hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor) was satisfactory, because I well understood his point. I understand the expectation among all parties that there will be fairness in the conduct of the referendum. The Government have made no decisions yet, but we shall take the views of all parties fully into account.

Mr. Mackinlay: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Straw: With great respect, I want to conclude my speech, so as to give others a chance.

The right hon. Member for Devizes seems not to have consulted the Conservative party's own evidence when he wrote his speech and the motion. In the motion, the Government are urged to change the remit of the commission. In the evidence that the Conservative party submitted just six weeks ago, it is not the Government who are urged to change the commission's remit, but the commission that is told that it should have been allowed to drop its own terms of reference. That is one of the most extraordinary propositions that I have ever read, and not one to which any Government of the Conservative Administration has ever subscribed. Indeed, it would amount to an abdication of government, were it to happen.

I shall go through the expected time scale for the referendum. The Jenkins commission hopes to report in October. After that, primary legislation will be needed to permit a referendum to be held. The plan is that the referendum should take place well before the next election. It will offer the public a clear choice between first past the post and an alternative, drawn from the recommendations of the commission.

If there were a vote for change in the referendum, further primary legislation would be required to introduce the new electoral system. Depending on the nature of the new system, extensive redrawing of electoral boundaries might also be required. These factors will determine whether any new system could be in place for the next general election.

At the last election, the Prime Minister said that he wanted to rebuild the country's faith and trust in Government and politics. Fundamental to that vision was a change not just in what the Government do, but in how they do it. Confidence in our political system has been significantly eroded in recent years. Our challenge is to restore confidence in our democracy, to bring decision-making closer to those who are affected by decisions, and to restore trust in the way in which we are governed. That is why we have embarked on a major programme of change.

We are giving the Scottish and Welsh people a greater say over the issues that affect them. We are giving Londoners their own elected mayor. We hope to secure a settlement in Northern Ireland. We are bringing rights

[Mr. Straw]

home for all. We are reforming the House of Lords, and, yes, we are giving the British people the right to decide how they elect those who represent them.

The right hon. Member for Devizes said that what mattered were not parties' votes, but people's votes. For that reason, I find it extraordinary that he opposes a referendum. Voters, not politicians, should have the final say over the electoral system that they, the voters, use to elect us, their representatives, to the House. Whether there is change or no change, the referendum will provide the popular legitimacy that is essential for our working democracy. It is the British people's right to have that say, and our responsibility to provide it.

4.52 pm

Mr. John Major (Huntingdon): The Home Secretary has just made a speech in a very reasonable tone of voice. That makes me suspicious. When I was at the Dispatch Box and I was excessively reasonable, it usually meant that I had something to hide, or that I sided with the Opposition, but did not wish my own party to realise that so plainly. We are not clear which is the case with the Home Secretary, although the cat may have come out of the bag towards the end of his speech when, in a low-key, throwaway tone of voice, he set out a possible sequence of events for changing the nature of elections to the House before the next general election. I may return to that point in a few moments.

Since they came to power, the Government have been determined to make constitutional changes. I have no objection to that. They won a clear mandate at the election for some of those constitutional changes; where the changes are sensible, I have no objection to them, although my own preference is for incremental change, rather than root-and-branch constitutional upheaval.

It is sad that many of the changes that have taken place so far are not sensible. Of course, the Government have a clear electoral mandate for devolution in Scotland and Wales, even though it was obtained from the belief of many voters that devolution would put to rest the fear of Scottish nationalism, whereas, in practice, it has excited and improved the position of Scottish nationalism. It has fed it, rather than curbed it, and Scottish nationalism may yet be the coffin that carries away the Union that has been of such great assistance to both England and Scotland over the past couple of hundred years.

The Government clearly also have a mandate for the mayor of London, on the ground of democratic accountability. I accept that, although I find it curious that that desire for democratic accountability does not extend to letting the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) be a candidate in that election. I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman is not present. He is probably out canvassing, having turned his pager off, for he is notoriously unprogrammable. He is clearly Labour's best candidate for the election if it comes about, and it is a great shame that he may not stand and that a party clone may stand in his stead.

The Government are also flirting with piecemeal changes to the House of Lords and, as the Home Secretary has just told the House, to the electoral system for this House. I fancy that those two points are connected, as I shall explain to the House in a few moments.

Why are the Government considering these changes? I came to the House today in an optimistic frame of mind. I thought that perhaps they were not really considering change, but rather stringing along the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) and the Liberal Democrats in return for their slavish support. That seems to have been working over the past few months. The leader of the Liberal Democrats, whom I am delighted to see in his place, or at least in the Chamber, is the main cheerleader for the Prime Minister and the new Labour Government, and has already given full value for the electoral change that he hopes to achieve, by consulting them from a kneeling position seven days a week.

I sympathise with the right hon. Member for Yeovil. If I were a Liberal Democrat—which, thank goodness I am not—

Mr. Bob Russell (Colchester): You almost are.

Mr. Major: The hon. Gentleman does not know me very well. I can give him a categorical assurance that, despite the charm of his implicit invitation, I shall not be able to accept it; nor would I wish to. However, if I were a Liberal Democrat, I would be in favour of changing the electoral system. I am not arguing that first past the post is perfect or even perfectly fair. Of course there are aspects of it that are unfair, and every other electoral system has its own share of unfairness.

We should consider whether a change in the electoral system is logical and whether it would work in the national interest—not which party is elected, but whether the party in government, when elected, can make the often painful, difficult and unpopular decisions that any Government must make.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) *rose*—

Mr. Major: I shall give way to the right hon. Gentleman a little later.

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil) *rose*—

Mr. Major: Will the right hon. Gentleman wait a couple of minutes? He may have more to intervene on.

Mr. Ashdown: On the right hon. Gentleman's last point, if he reflects on the last year of his Administration, does he believe that he had the power to institute what he wanted to institute? Even his more generous friends would believe that his party was a coalition and that he was driven by a very small, extreme group in it to decisions that he would not have wished to take.

Mr. Major: If the right hon. Gentleman had been a little wiser and waited a few more moments, I would have dealt with the points that are exercising him.

Those who advocate one or other form of proportional representation—I understand why they do so—seem to be confused about the underlying purpose of popular elections. Is the purpose to produce a miniature mirror of the entire electorate—a Britain in vignette? If that is the case, plainly some form of proportional representation is the right way to achieve it: I concede that. Such an assembly would mirror society more accurately than first past the post, but let us make no bones about it: if we fall below a certain strength, first past the post places a firm hand on our shoulder, informs us that we have lost, and shows us the door.

If the purpose is to make West Lothian a little Gothic framed mirror in which every face is known, proportional representation is best for us, and we can look forward to welcoming into the House, as the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) said a few moments ago, some tiny parties, some of which have very extreme views.

The question arises: what is that Gothic mirror for? The electorate may have the illusion of democracy because they see in the House of Commons a direct reflection of their own image. However, is that really what the electorate wants to see? Do the people want their Parliament, when elected, to provide an effective Government, and effective Opposition parties who will work together when that is appropriate?

A Government—whether Tory, Labour or Liberal—must take firm decisions. For example, my predecessor's Cabinet did not privatise only 60 per cent. of British Airways because 40 per cent. of the House of Commons wanted the corporation to remain in state hands. The present Cabinet abolished the assisted places scheme after winning the vote in this place. Some 25 per cent. of hon. Members voted against that proposal, but we lost and we accepted defeat. It would be absurd if the decision were made to represent us proportionally by leaving in place 25 per cent. of that scheme. As far as I am aware—unless we have more to learn from the Government—we shall not have three quarters of a London mayor, half a Welsh assembly or four fifths of a Scottish Parliament.

The point is that decision making is a first-past-the-post system. Those who lose the argument are outvoted and overruled. That is frustrating, and they hate it, but decisions in the interests of the country then get taken.

Mr. Mackinlay: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Major: In a moment.

The present Government—like all their predecessors—are about decision making. At some stage, the losers must be ushered out. To offer the electorate a proportional Parliament that mirrors its opinions, but is unable to take decisions that mirror those opinions, is to change the moment at which the losers are ushered out. It offers a false prospectus to the elector.

Mr. Mackinlay: I differ from Privy Councillors in that I am concerned about not strong government but arbitrary government. There are insufficient brakes on government in our constitution, and we are getting arbitrary government. Electoral reform might mean that Governments—of whatever political complexion—will reflect on that point. For instance, the poll tax was a daft idea, which everyone agreed was stupid but which they had no way of stopping. If there had been a less arbitrary Government with an overwhelming parliamentary majority, that crackpot legislation might not have reached the statute book.

Mr. Major: It is interesting to develop the question of arbitrary government. It is self-evident that the hon. Gentleman is not wearing his pager. If he were, he would no doubt hear from Alastair Campbell within a matter of seconds. If there is a buzz, we shall know exactly what it is—we shall wait and see whether the hon. Gentleman leaves the Chamber shortly.

I understand the frustration of the advocates of proportional representation—I do not dismiss that. However, proportional representation has practical drawbacks for the process of good government.

Under proportional representation, in theory the sitting Prime Minister could have remained in office after every general election since the second world war if he or she had obtained the support of the third party. No Prime Minister would have left office. That is hardly democratic, and it is hardly the wish of the electorate, but it illustrates vividly the disproportionate power that proportional representation gives to the third party—or perhaps the fourth or fifth party in some cases. The electorate's basic decision becomes irrelevant, and a decision is made after the House reassembles.

Mr. Ashdown: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for giving way. I must raise some issues now, as I may have to leave shortly—I am not wearing my pager. The right hon. Gentleman has made four important and familiar points regarding, first, firm decision making; secondly, strong government; thirdly, the national interest; and, fourthly, control by extremists. Reflecting on the last two years of his Administration, does the right hon. Gentleman believe that he was able to provide that for the nation?

Mr. Major: At this moment, the Government—and the right hon. Gentleman as their faithful ally—are benefiting from the strength of the economy that they inherited from the previous Government and the decisions that that Government took, many of which were deeply unpopular. Those decisions were opposed mostly, but not entirely, by the right hon. Gentleman and almost entirely by the Labour party. However, their legacy is an economic climate unlike that inherited from any previous Government. The right hon. Gentleman would do well to reflect on that point.

Let us take a flight of fancy and suppose that Britain abandoned the first-past-the-post system. What would happen after future general elections? It is likely that they would be followed by a period of negotiation: the wishes of the electorate would matter less than the ability of party leaders to bargain. A coalition would be formed; by definition, coalitions are unstable and uncertain. History shows us that they are likely to fall because of internal politics rather than the electorate's wish at a general election. History tells us also that coalitions find decision making a tortuous process.

Over the past 20 years—the right hon. Member for Yeovil might reflect on this point—the previous Government took tough and unpopular decisions that are now generally accepted as having been correct. Would the unions have been tamed, the health service reformed, inflation brought down and privatisation begun if Governments had been elected by proportional representation? No; none of that would have occurred. Yet the present Government—and, I assume, the Liberal Democrats in most cases—now support those measures.

The last time we had a coalition—the Lib-Lab pact of 1977–78—it led to an erratic and ineffective Government that was in hock not to moderate and sensible opinion but to extremist Welshmen and sour Scots who had to be fought off. Any system that makes that the norm is mad, bad and dangerous to adopt, and we should not touch it.

Mr. Maclennan: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way to one who served in the

[Mr. Maclennan]

arrangement that he has described. The difference between the Lib-Lab pact and the Government over which he presided was that the arrangements between the Liberal and Labour parties were open and clear, whereas he presided over a dishonest coalition of people who could not agree about the most fundamental issues facing the nation—particularly European policy.

Mr. Major: I am afraid that the real difference was that the Lib-Lab pact left the country in a shambles, whereas we left it in the best economic circumstances for generations.

What form of proportional representation should we have? Some forms create two classes of Members of Parliament—those with constituencies and those without—and others degrade the constituency link entirely. One system requires mumbo-jumbo, multi-member seats that no one wants. None of those options is attractive. The Government promised to hold a referendum—the Home Secretary has reiterated that pledge today—but they are already making changes, step by step, without a referendum. They have not made changes to Westminster—the Government have promised to hold a referendum in that regard—but they have introduced a London assembly, a Welsh assembly, a Scottish Parliament and changes to European elections.

Under the Government, first past the post might soon become the only electoral system that is not available to the British nation. The Government are inflicting a confusing mass of electoral systems on voters. There will be a regional closed list system for the European Parliament, two versions of the additional member system for the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh assembly, the supplementary vote system for the London mayor, the additional member system for the London assembly, and whatever the hand-picked enthusiasts for reform on the Jenkins commission finally come up with for Westminster. Commission members are reformist, so who will even consider the case for retaining the status quo?

Labour-style electoral reform panders to the repressive tendencies that we are coming to expect from this Government. They have, I suspect, a taste for the closed list system which allows the party—we know what a small number of people that means in the present Labour party—to foist almost anyone on the public by offering a "take it or leave it" party ticket. Decisions in the Labour party national executive committee make it evident that that is the way it is going.

Even the Liberal Democrats—*[Interruption.]* I was about to say something nice about them, but that was clearly a mistake. Even the Liberal Democrats, whose eyes normally light up at any mention of proportional representation, did not like that system. The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) nods his head. He, at least, has been listening and understanding a little of what I have said.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): We sought to amend that closed list system, but does the right hon. Gentleman recognise that the first-past-the-post system is a closed list of one, which is open to the same criticisms? In any seat in which a party has a large majority, it leaves the choice of who will serve as constituency Member to the party.

Mr. Major: First past the post is not controlled remotely by the centre in the way in which that other system would be. The right hon. Gentleman understands that very well; he is a Liberal—an old-fashioned liberal, I think.

As the distinguished commentator Ferdinand Mount put it a year or so ago:

"PR means the Party Rules."

Proportional representation means less control by the voters, not more. Under our present system, the voters have a good idea of what they are letting themselves in for when they vote Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrat or whatever. Under proportional representation, a party may not choose to say with whom it will go into coalition after the votes have been counted. If it does, it may rat on them, as the New Zealand First party did so memorably a year or so ago.

If the Jenkins commission advocates, for example, the additional member system, Britain will end up with two classes of MPs: party hacks without constituencies chosen from a list drawn up in party headquarters, and directly elected constituency Members who, to rub salt in the wound, will have their constituencies enlarged to make way for the seatless additional Members.

If the commission advocates the alternative vote system, Britain will end up with a system that is far less representative than even the most hostile advocates can say of the present first-past-the-post system. Winston Churchill described the alternative vote system as

"the stupidest, the least scientific and the most unreal"

of plans for electoral reform. As usual, he understated his case.

An examination of proportional representation in action is pretty fearsome. In Israel, for example, the Prime Minister is hamstrung by small religious parties whose militant MPs keep him in power. Although those MPs won only tiny votes, Israel has them because it has the purest system of proportional representation.

In Germany, which has been mentioned, the alternative member system has produced a Parliament hamstrung by coalition, compromise and indecision. The previous change of Government occurred because the small Free Democrats decided to ditch the SPD and back the CDU—it was nothing to do with the voters. A majority of German voters want tax reform and welfare reform, as do the German business system and German politicians, but the electoral system simply cannot deliver it. Reform proposals have collapsed, causing social unrest and political disquiet. Here in Britain, whether the Government were Labour or Tory, those proposals would have gone on to the statute book, because the Government would have had a majority in the House. I do not think that we want a system of government that is causing so much difficulty elsewhere.

New Zealand has also been mentioned. In many ways, it offers the best lesson for us to absorb before minds are finally closed on this important issue. In 1993, it voted to abandon the system bequeathed by Britain and introduce one similar, but not identical, to Germany's. It now wants to change back, and it is easy to understand why. After the first general election under the new system, it took eight weeks of secret negotiation even to form a

Government, and then only because 17 members of the New Zealand First party ratted on a pre-election promise not to go into coalition with the National party.

Mr. Burden: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Major: I shall not, if the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, because many hon. Members want to speak, and I want to make progress.

New Zealand First is nowhere in the polls, yet it still decides who governs. That is not appropriate to an electoral system that is like ours and a country with a democratic history similar to Britain's.

From Italy, too, we now have something to learn. After 40 years of instability, deal making and corruption, it reformed its electoral system. What did it reform its system to? Something that bears more than a passing resemblance to the British system.

Mr. Andrew Stunell (Hazel Grove): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Major: I shall not, if the hon. Gentleman will forgive me. I have given way several times, and many hon. Members want to speak.

Let me touch on a final danger of proportional representation. The Government threaten to reform the House of Lords—not wholesale, but piecemeal; to abolish hereditary peerages; and to flood the upper House with the Prime Minister's appointees to make it an obedient poodle of Downing street, whenever he needs it to be so. Making the Lords a poodle first, then introducing a forced change of the electoral system without the likelihood of the Lords blocking the scheme would be a contemptible way for the Government to proceed, but it would surprise few people if that is what they plan.

I hope that the Home Secretary, who has a reputation for straight dealing, will keep that reputation and ensure that that is not the Government's intention. If he does not, we shall be warned. I am profoundly suspicious about what the Government plan and why they plan it. He knows in his heart that their plans are for party advantage and not for the maintenance of secure good government in this country, whether Labour, Conservative or Liberal Democrat. I hope to be proved wrong, but the Government's actions, not the Home Secretary's words, will convince me.

5.16 pm

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): Until he spoke this afternoon, I had held the view that the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) was a kindly fellow, but his praise for my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) as a potential mayor of London may have delivered the death blow to my hon. Friend's chances. If so, we shall have witnessed this week the collapse of Gazza, the collapse of the Spice Girls and the collapse of my hon. Friend. It has been a wonderful week indeed.

I listened with fascination when the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) moved the motion, especially when he rebuked Ministers for what he called playing politics with people's votes. That comes rich from the Conservative party, whose Representation of the People Acts 1983 and 1989 played politics with people's votes.

Conservative Members attack Ministers, but they are the people who when in power had the nerve to increase the deposit for parliamentary candidates while trying not to reduce the threshold for losing the deposit; who tried to reduce polling hours at general elections from the present concluding hour of 10 pm to 9 pm, thereby reducing people's chance to vote; and who sought to reduce the right of people to obtain postal votes in Northern Ireland compared with the way in which such votes were allocated in Great Britain. I worked with Enoch Powell and Jim Molyneaux to prevent the Conservatives from reducing the value of a vote in Northern Ireland compared with a vote in Great Britain.

The Conservatives are the people who introduced the overseas vote, which introduced to this country the novel concept not of no taxation, without representation, but of representation without taxation and allowing people with only a remote connection with this country to decide who should govern it. I strongly hope that, when my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary introduces a Representation of the People Bill, he will remove the overseas vote from the statute book, because there is no possible justification for it. I can tell him, in the great friendship that I bear for him, that, if he does not propose to remove it, I shall table an amendment to do so.

The last people to whom I would pay serious attention when they denounce Governments for playing politics with people's votes are the Conservatives.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, in the previous Parliament, the Conservative Government redrew the local government boundaries in Scotland by administrative fiat and with no reference to the boundary commission?

Mr. Kaufman: As is generally—although not quite always—the case, my hon. Friend is right. *[Laughter.]* One has to measure one's words in the House. I never know who is going to quote me and in what context.

The Home Secretary was absolutely right to point out that the Labour party and the Labour Government have a manifesto mandate to examine changes to the voting system and to conduct a referendum. Labour Members were elected on that manifesto, and the Government are properly committed to carrying out that pledge. The Home Secretary also made it clear that the Government do not have a manifesto mandate to change the voting system; nor do they have any obligation or commitment to do so. They have a commitment to enabling the electoral to decide whether to retain the present voting system or to change it for one suggested by the Jenkins commission.

I am gratified that my right hon. Friend reminded the House of his scepticism about electoral systems other than the first-past-the-post system. I am also gratified that, on television recently, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made clear his own preference for the first-past-the-post system, as have my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister and other members of the Government. As the right hon. Member for Huntingdon and others have said, it can be argued that the present voting system is imperfect. Although it is undoubtedly imperfect—I was defeated twice before I got into the House of Commons—alternative systems are far more imperfect.

Copious references have been made to the fact that the people of New Zealand are bitterly repenting their choice of a new system. The right hon. Member for Huntingdon

[Mr. Kaufman]

referred to the disaster of the perfect proportional representation system in Israel. David Ben Gurion, the first Prime Minister of Israel, wanted to get rid of that system. He was a great respecter of the British parliamentary system. He would have liked to introduce the first-past-the-post system in Israel, but the small parties in the Israeli Parliament elected under a proportional system would never allow their disproportionate power to be taken away from them by the introduction of a truly fair electoral system in the state of Israel.

The right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) referred to the imperfections in the present system in Britain. The PR system that they have in Israel, which could be used elsewhere, including in this country in certain circumstances, enables a tiny collection of fanatics to wield disproportionate power and thereby to jeopardise the peace of a region and, possibly, the peace of the world.

I was talking about the imperfections of the Israeli electoral system to Senator Patrick Moynihan in New York. He said, "There is a rabbi in Brooklyn who tells the Shas party what to do, and the Shas party tells the Israeli Government what to do." That is an example of the most perfect PR system with a very low threshold—of 1.2 per cent.—for representation in the Israeli Knesset.

Mr. Beith: Will the right hon. Gentleman concede that the terms of reference of the Jenkins commission exclude the Israeli system?

Mr. Kaufman: That may be so, but we are discussing electoral systems and proportional representation. I shall deal with other systems and shall not confine myself to the Israeli system. Right hon. and hon. Members will understand that I take any opportunity to denounce the Israeli Government, because that seems appropriate.

Ms Stuart: Does my right hon. Friend accept that, when an election results in a stalemate, it usually reflects a tremendous diversity of opinion and energy within a state rather than the election system? Some countries may be extremely difficult to govern, irrespective of the electoral system used, because of the nature of the interest groups that have to be brought together.

Mr. Kaufman: Our present electoral system does not remove diversity of opinion in the House, either among several different political parties or within parties. It is one of my great regrets that the Labour party is not more monolithic. I am in favour of a rigidly controlled parliamentary Labour party so that my own ideas can be implemented as much as possible. That strikes me as an appropriate concept of democracy.

I am not focusing my opposition to alternatives to the first-past-the-post system merely on the system used in Israel.

Mr. Gummer: Did the right hon. Gentleman notice that the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) dismissed the most perfect PR system as beyond the competence of the Jenkins commission? If the perfect PR system is so worthy of dismissal, how can the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed commend to the House a less than perfect PR system? At what point does the perfection of the PR system become such that it is impossible to implement?

Mr. Kaufman: That is a matter for the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), should he catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As a simple socialist, I lack the sophistication to answer such difficult questions.

All the differing proportional representation systems result not in government by the majority or by the largest single party, but in government by small minorities. It is government not by the people who make their choice of programmes put before them at a general election, but by the manoeuvring of politicians.

We have seen what has happened in this country since 1979. The minority Labour Government were brought down on 31 March 1979 not by the Conservative Opposition, who lacked the power to do so, but by the Liberal party and the Scottish National party. Those two parties put Margaret Thatcher into power—let that never be forgotten. By devising that vote of no confidence in the Labour Government in March 1979, the Scottish National party set devolution back a quarter of a century. Minor parties are not only wrong-headed, but often self-destructive—although not self-destructive enough for my taste.

In the last few elections, what we have seen is the irresponsibility of minor parties. Some say that we on the left of centre—if I may associate myself personally with such a group—

Mr. Straw: You may.

Mr. Kaufman: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend.

Some say that we on the left of centre would not have had to put up with the Thatcher years, or even the more benevolent Major years, if only we had had a system of proportional representation. Using the language of moderation for which I have become somewhat noted in the House, I must say that that is absolute rubbish.

Let us just see what would have happened under proportional representation in 1979, 1983, 1987 and 1992. In those years, the Conservative party had a huge lead over Labour in terms of votes: 7 per cent. in 1979, 14 per cent. in 1983, 11 per cent. in 1987 and 8 per cent. in 1992. Is anyone really going to tell me that in such circumstances the Queen would have sent for anyone except the leader of the Conservative party to form a Government?

Furthermore—although on each of those occasions the Conservative party received less than 50 per cent. of the vote—is any hon. Member going to tell me that the Liberals, who connived to throw out the moderate Jim Callaghan Government when the moderate Jim Callaghan Government had received more votes than the Conservatives in October 1974, would have worked to keep Jim Callaghan in office in May 1979, having kicked him out of office on 31 March 1979? Are the people who kicked out Jim Callaghan really going to say that they would have worked to help Michael Foot in 1983 and would have worked to make Neil Kinnock Prime Minister in 1987 and 1992? That is utterly absurd. We would have had a Thatcher majority Government, or a Major majority Government, in every one of those elections.

People say that, under proportional representation, there would have been a minority Government. They say, "We would have been able to moderate their approach." Would a Margaret Thatcher who could crush Jim Prior and Francis Pym have bowed the knee to David Steel? I will

take a little convincing of that. She would have had her way, with the added legitimacy—from her point of view—of the support of the Liberal party and the great left-wing socialist David Owen.

Mr. Bayley: My right hon. Friend will recall—because he was a Member of Parliament at the time—that in February 1974 the Queen sent for Edward Heath to ask him to form a Government because he was the leader of the party with the most Members of the House of Commons. He spent a few days trying to form a Government, but failed. The Queen then sent for Harold Wilson. Does not my right hon. Friend think that it is quite possible that that could have happened under proportional representation following the 1987 and 1992 elections?

Mr. Kaufman: As it happens, I was there myself—and not just as an elected Member of Parliament, proud though I was to be so. I was at No. 5 Lord North street, Harold Wilson's house, while he waited to find out what was going to happen. What happened, of course, was that Edward Heath tried to persuade Jeremy Thorpe to join him in the Government. There were wrangles in the Liberal party, and it took four days for that to sort itself out.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Kaufman: I am replying to my hon. Friend. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hon. Friend?"] I am replying to my hon. Friend the Member for City of York (Mr. Bayley). The hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) could be my hon. Friend in certain circumstances if he played his cards right.

Mr. Tyler *rose—*

Mr. Kaufman: I am replying to my hon. Friend the Member for City of York. He has the right to put questions to me because I went to help him in his constituency.

Mr. Winnick: And he won.

Mr. Kaufman: Indeed; he won with an enormous majority—under the first-past-the-post system.

I shall explain to my hon. Friend the Member for City of York. What happened between 28 February and 4 March 1974 was one thing. The Conservatives had a lead of five seats over Labour. In the case of the elections in which Labour was defeated, between 1979 and 1992, the Tory lead over Labour was never less than 8 per cent., and rose as high as 14 per cent. The scenario that my hon. Friend imagines for 1974 simply would not have been repeated.

Why the delusions of those on the left who hated—understandably; I did too—so much of what was done during those Tory years? They believe that under proportional representation the Tory years could have been avoided, but they could not and would not have been, and the Tories would have been given the imprimatur of the Liberals and the Social Democrats.

The right hon. Member for Huntingdon—and the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, who rightly dismissed the Israeli system—referred to the system that is most supported: the additional member system, which I discussed with Lord Plant. People say that the German system ensures good left-of-centre government and that we in the Labour party should adopt the same approach, but let us look at what has happened under that great additional member system.

In the 49 years since the first election in post-war Germany, our sister party—the Social Democratic party—has held office for a total of 13 years. That is even less than the Labour party in Britain—and we should take account of the fact that, during the 1980s, the Labour party deserved to lose general elections because it was riven by extremism. Under the first-past-the-post system, Labour has been in power for a greater aggregate period than the Social Democrats in West Germany. The Christian Democratic Union has been in power for 35 years during that period, and the Free Democratic party for 27 years. It has been in power—part of the Government—for twice as long as the Social Democratic party, although on occasion its vote has fallen as low as 6.9 per cent; and that is the system that some of my hon. Friends, who in other respects appear perfectly sane, are ready to support.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Kaufman: Let me finish my argument first.

Who held office as Foreign Minister for longer than any other Minister in democratic western Europe? Mr. Genscher, who, among other things, was the architect of the disaster in the former Yugoslavia. He was Foreign Minister in West Germany for 18 years, regardless of whether the Social Democratic party was in power—as it rarely was—or the CDU was in power, as it frequently was.

Mr. Linton: My right hon. Friend seeks to give the impression that proportional systems have led in Germany and perhaps elsewhere to a preponderance of centre-right government. Germany was partitioned after the war, and the largely social democratic part was in the east. To draw comparisons not only from one instance, but especially from Germany, is misleading. Why did he not point to the success under PR of the Austrian socialist party, the Swedish social democrats, PASOK in Greece and the Spanish socialist party?

Mr. Kaufman: One of the great glories of the Austrian system was Kurt Waldheim. I am sure that we all envy the Austrians having him as their leader.

Mr. Hogg *rose—*

Mr. Kaufman: I promised to give way to the right hon. and learned Gentleman. After he has intervened, I shall respond further to my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Linton).

Mr. Hogg: The right hon. Gentleman made an important statement about the Free Democrats, who, under Hans-Dietrich Genscher, secured the foreign ministry at the price of the party's support for the CDU.

[Mr. Hogg]

However, the issue goes further than that, because Klaus Kinkel secured an extension of that freehold at the price of the support of the Free Democrats.

Mr. Kaufman: The right hon. and learned Gentleman makes his point. I shall now respond further to my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea, who quotes a special circumstance.

Even after East Germany was incorporated into Germany, it continued to elect the CDU. Any country using PR has a propensity to instability. It is a miracle that the Irish Republic, with its single transferable vote system, has managed, despite constant changes of Government, to achieve the peace settlement.

Mr. Stunell: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Kaufman: No. My arguments are overwhelmingly compelling, and no intervention will throw me. Many hon. Members wish to take part in the debate, and I take it, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that you will choose them proportionately.

Like every Labour Member, I was elected on a manifesto commitment to hold a referendum on electoral systems, and I accept every commitment in that manifesto. I was not elected to support a change, and in no circumstances will I do that. I support my party's manifesto, and after that I am free in a referendum to campaign for the continuation of the present system. I hope that the Government will do that. I certainly shall.

5.42 pm

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross): The right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) has been a Member for a long time, and it is normal courtesy to follow his remarks with at least some animadversion. His memories of No. 5 Lord North street are riveting, but when he fantasised about possible alternative systems to be transplanted from foreign soils to this country, he was less interesting. In that area, the right hon. Gentleman speaks with no greater authority than any other hon. Member. He chose to use the debate, rather prematurely, to discuss alternative systems to first past the post, with which we are familiar. The debate was initiated by the Opposition, and focuses not on alternatives but on first past the post.

The debate was opened by the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram), and I add my felicitations on his translation to the chairmanship of his party. It is somewhat analagous to my role as president of my party, although, of course, my role is on a smaller scale. Like the right hon. Gentleman, I have not found it impossible to speak my mind. However, a Front-Bench place for the right hon. Gentleman is not always guaranteed. I have great admiration for the right hon. Gentleman as a rhetorician, and even greater admiration for his ability to glide from one position to another on constitutional affairs, leaving no wake, so that within a decade or so he can complete a 180 degree turn on devolution for Scotland.

I agree with the right hon. Gentleman's bon mot that he is in favour of retaining the integrity of the political system. The debate is being held because the integrity of the system was plainly under attack. In a candid speech, the Home Secretary, who has not always shown himself a whole-hearted supporter of electoral reform, showed that the electoral system has become a central issue for constitutional debate. For that reason, discussions were held before the election between the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats. The discussions were not exclusive: other parties and individuals were involved.

A common programme was agreed before the election by both parties, and the electorate resoundingly supported the proposition that there should be a referendum on the electoral system. The Home Secretary rightly emphasised the nature of the choice, and explained the way in which we should proceed. The Government are simply carrying out precisely what they said they would do. It would not make sense to put to the electorate a wide range of alternatives and expect a sort of grab-bag approach to the exercise.

It is hard to follow the logic of the motion. The right hon. Member for Devizes said that the Government-appointed commission needs to investigate the merits of his preferred system, which is first past the post. Everybody over the age of 19 has a direct and recent familiarity with that system: it has been in operation for 100 years. Does the right hon. Member for Devizes seriously believe that the British people would prefer the commission to be asked to say what it thinks about a system under which they have been operating and with which they are so familiar?

It is preposterous to suggest that the people who are considering the alternatives should not favour reform. Such an approach is perfectly sensible and natural, to ensure that the best alternative to first past the post is chosen. That will ensure that the known system and the best alternative can be weighed in the balance. We are not debating some sort of quick political fix or change in the political environment of the kind that the right hon. Member for Devizes suggested the Government could somehow manufacture. We are debating the will of the British people expressed through the ballot box, and yes or no will decide whether the system is to be changed.

The right hon. Member for Devizes will have many opportunities to deploy his arguments in favour of first past the post, and will no doubt pursue the line of thought that is becoming so familiar in the Conservative party, whose members seem to think that they have the philosopher's stone that will turn the base metal of their argument into liquid gold—the philosopher's stone being repetition. I dare say that we shall hear the right hon. Gentleman's speech again, but not necessarily from him.

I must be fair to the right hon. Gentleman, who produced one rabbit out of the hat—the novelty of a new definition of proportionality. He apparently managed to persuade the Library to give him some figures to enable him to make his case, which he said was too complicated to explain to the House. Of course, we in the House would not understand it; no doubt those outside will. We look forward with great interest to the right hon. Gentleman's explaining it to the country.

I have taken the precaution of reading the Conservative party document, and of endeavouring to understand it.

Happily, I agree with the verdict of the Electoral Reform Society—an independent organisation—that the document is

"nothing more than a fiddle with figures to make a preposterous claim."

Mr. Gummer: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Maclennan: I am dealing with a very important point made by the right hon. Member for Devizes, who is still the Opposition spokesman on the issue. We shall no doubt hear more from the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) later.

The Conservative party has equated power with having representation in the Cabinet, with no differentiation between being a major or minor coalition partner. Power is then measured as the proportion of years during which a party has had representation in Parliament.

Exactly the same mistake was made by the right hon. Member for Gorton, who talked about the FDP in Germany as though it had been a great power wielder over the past two decades. The right hon. Gentleman may know a great deal about the workings of the electoral system in Israel—I bow to his views on that—and about the country's Government, but it is evident that he knows very little about what happens in the Federal Republic of Germany. Those who say that the FDP has been a great wheeler-dealer are plainly out of touch. Mere representation in Cabinet is no measure of power.

The argument advanced by the right hon. Member for Devizes about the proportionality of power, if applied to Ireland, would show that the Labour party in Ireland was a more powerful party than Fine Gael. I do not believe that there is a single Irish Member of this House who would recognise that description. Coming from the right hon. Gentleman—a former Minister with responsibilities for the northern part of that island—it is a peculiarly disingenuous argument.

Mr. Ancram: If the right hon. Gentleman disagrees with my argument, could he explain why Dick Spring was the Deputy Prime Minister under both Albert Reynolds and John Bruton and was the man who decided which was the Taoiseach as he switched from one side to the other?

Mr. Maclennan: Deputies are not always second in power. I have noticed the fate of the immediately outgoing shadow Chancellor, the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley), who has been elevated to the deputy leadership of his party. Some of us have been here too long to be taken in by that kind of argument.

I did not find the submission of the Conservative party to the Jenkins commission at all compelling as a case for first past the post. In fact, it was such a weak case that I wondered why they had tried to make it. It was such a weak case that I wondered whether, from the Conservative party's own point of view, it gave the Jenkins commission a legitimacy which it may come rather to regret as its arguments are stripped out one by one in later months.

Some of the things the Conservatives have said in the document are coruscating truisms. The document states:

"The electorate can remove the Government if it no longer retains their confidence under first past the post."

What a remarkable aperçu. Is that not also true of Governments in other countries? Have not the Irish Government been defeated at a general election? Have not the Spanish and French Governments been defeated at a general election? May not the Federal Government of Germany be defeated at a general election? What a bizarre proposal in terms of the accountability of Government.

We are told that, in Britain,

"parties under the first-past-the-post system have to be sensitive to the public mood if they are to survive."

Is that peculiar to the position in this country? I would suggest not. It is true in all democratic countries.

The first-past-the-post system is always referred to as "the British system", for reasons that are hard to discern, as it was first devised in the United States of America after the revolution. Certainly it is true that we have lived with it for a long time.

In another of the document's insights, it boldly states that the British system

"ensures that both parties and their Members of Parliament govern in the interests of the people."

That is a product of the British system. It must be said that many people felt that there was a certain disconnection between the interests of the British people and the Government during at least the latter days of the outgoing Administration, which led to the sort of electoral nemesis which I had not experienced in my 32 years in this House. The system did not ensure the position of a Government who had been involved in all the queasy privatisation deals, the fat cats and jobs for the boys. I do not want to bring back memories of the ethos which is being prayed in aid of the present system. That would be repetitious.

The Conservatives' other allegation was that first past the post produces stable Governments, and we heard a great deal about that from the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major). Both my right hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) and I intervened briefly to ask whether the Government over whom he presided had truly demonstrated firmness of purpose and a great sense of direction. The country's judgment was a resounding no.

I was not surprised that the former Prime Minister chose not to answer and talked about the state of the economy, which, unusually, the country was prepared to overlook during the election, so dazzled was it by the Government's other activities, which had been calling into question the probity of many of their members.

Mr. Evans: The right hon. Gentleman got fewer votes in 1997.

Mr. Maclennan: I certainly did, and I much preferred it when I had the majority of the votes, as I did at the 1987 election—the only time under our present system when I felt able to say that I spoke for the majority of my electors. I look forward to the possibility of that happening again.

The argument of the right hon. Member for Devizes suppresses the obvious fact—that the biggest single party in Parliament winning 43 per cent. of the vote leaves 57 per cent. voting against. I am sorry that I have to produce somewhat inane arguments to deal with inane propositions. This is all about allowing the people their

[Mr. Maclennan]

voice. On that I agree with the right hon. Member for Devizes—the people's voice has not been heard clearly for a long time in this country. That is why we wish another electoral system to be adopted.

I should like to mention one other peculiar utterance in the Conservative party's statement to the Jenkins commission in defence of first past the post. Page 14 of the submission states:

"Systems other than our present one do not give voters choice."

That statement seems to be standing the argument entirely on its head. Nevertheless, the submission goes on to trumpet that lack of choice with the rather extraordinary sentence:

"Our present system is monotonic."

First past the post is monotonic? I looked up the word in the "Oxford English Dictionary", and found that it does not exist in that context, or in any other. It is a neologism. Presumably that creative use of the English language is supposed to dazzle us into thinking that there is more to the matter.

We have seen the Conservatives' argument for what it is. In truth, the argument is about the fact that, in the past 100 years, the first-past-the-post system has served them not at all badly. The Conservative party has been in power—especially if one accepts their definition of "proportionality of power", which is being in coalition—for 70 out of 100 years. That is the achievement of the first-past-the-post system. It has kept Conservative Members sitting on the Treasury Bench for a very long time.

Some Conservative Members have hopes that the electorate will put them back on the Treasury Bench—I would not count on it. However, I should certainly think their return more likely if the absurd system with which the United Kingdom has been lumbered is perpetuated—which I cannot think would reflect the wishes of the British people.

The Liberal Democrats have expressed our views on the matter. I invite the right hon. Member for Devizes to study and comment on those views, and to find arguments that directly address them. He has not done so today. We believe that the single transferable vote system best fulfils not only our objectives but those stated in the criteria of the Jenkins commission. It is unnecessary to repeat the objectives now, as this is not a debate about alternative systems. We will have an opportunity to debate those systems once the Jenkins commission reports.

Broad proportionality—the first criterion sought by the Government from the Jenkins commission—under the single transferable vote system would ensure that no party would be likely to secure a Commons majority without the support of nearly half the popular vote. Ideas that the British public would prefer something else, and that they would not like to look at the House and the Government and see in them a reflection of their own opinion—which the former Prime Minister characterised as looking in a Gothic mirror—seem to be far removed from public opinion on the matter.

The second criterion that the Government asked the Jenkins commission to apply was the need for stable government. Under the single transferable vote system, Governments will always reflect the opinions of the majority of the electorate, rather than being captured by rival minorities. Parties will rule by consensus and avoid destabilising, extreme policies.

The extension of voter choice—the third criterion—was dismissed by the right hon. Member for Devizes as leading to "splitting the vote". What is wrong with voters having the opportunity to vote for candidates of different parties if they so choose? There is quite a lot of evidence to suggest that, at the previous general election, in many constituencies, people chose to vote not for the party they most favoured—or even to which they belonged—but for another party which had a better chance of defeating the sitting Conservative Government. It was called "tactical" or "judicious" voting; it seemed to me to be sensible voting. Splitting the ticket may also be sensible voting. The British public are quite capable of intelligently making up their minds how to use whatever electoral system they give themselves—as they will do when casting their votes in a referendum.

The final criterion is maintenance of a constituency link. With the single transferable vote system, constituencies could be strengthened by being given the same boundaries as natural communities. I so agreed with the point made by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart), who spoke about the importance of people in Birmingham looking on their Members as attempting to represent the people of Birmingham, and of familiarity. The link problem arises not only in urban constituencies. In rural constituencies, such as mine, confusion is caused when the boundary commission shifts boundaries—south, in my case—and adds an additional 300 square miles. There is no sense of the constituency being a natural community.

Mr. Martin Salter (Reading, West): Will the right hon. Gentleman explain to the House how—in the context of the much-beloved multi-constituency system—a constituency link could be applied to the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Dr. Brand)? Which specific part of Hampshire forms a natural community with the Isle of Wight? Is it Basingstoke?

Mr. Maclennan: That is one for the boundary commission, which I will happily leave to it.

Given the breadth of experience and acumen of all the commissioners, I have no doubt that they will find an admirable proportional alternative to the current system. Although I hope that the alternative system will be the single transferable vote, I know that all the commissioners will be seeking to devise a system that fully meets all the set criteria.

I look forward to the day when the United Kingdom will be able to decide on the arguments for and against those rival systems. If the type of arguments that we have heard today from Opposition Front Benchers are deployed generally in the United Kingdom, there can be little doubt that, when the opportunity comes, the British people will vote for electoral reform.

6.6 pm

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): It is a great pleasure to speak after the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan), and in a debate in which the humour has flown thick and fast. I hope that that humour will continue not only for the rest of the debate, but into the subsequent campaign.

The right hon. Gentleman mentioned the arguments that may be made by Conservative Front Benchers in the campaign, and said that, on the basis of those arguments, the public would change not only their view but the electoral system. I tell him, and the House, that the campaign will be fought fully by many Labour Members who support first past the post. On both sides of the House, the campaign to ensure that the system remains the same may well begin today.

In elaborating on the reasons why the system should not be changed, I shall build somewhat on the comments of the right hon. Gentleman—although I shall not advert to the philosopher's stone. He mentioned some of the comments of the Electoral Reform Society. I should like to share with the House some of the comments made by the society on the elections in New Zealand, about which we have heard much in this debate.

On the first election in New Zealand held under a proportional representation system, the Electoral Reform Society said:

"On the negative side many New Zealanders are unhappy that the system has not led to a more consensus based politics. Many politicians are still operating under a first past the post mindset.

"There is also a feeling that New Zealand First"—

to which the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) referred—

"betrayed its supporters by going into coalition with National when it had campaigned against National in the election and most people believed it would form an administration with Labour."

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): There is clearly criticism of the electoral reform in New Zealand. A system takes time to settle in. However, the main problem was not the system, but the fact that Winston Peters, the leader of New Zealand First, said, "If you want to get National out, vote New Zealand First," and then made an alliance with National. That was the betrayal. That is a problem of the politicians, not the system.

Mr. Bell: I had been wondering what had happened to my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby and where he was lying in wait for me, when he pounced from the Bench behind me. What he says is correct. However, the right hon. Member for Huntingdon gave some insights into that election. New Zealand First said that it would not form a coalition and the campaign was based on trading insults from one end of the country to the other, yet at the end of it all New Zealand First entered into the sort of coalition that would suit the Liberal Democrats.

On the basis of 13 per cent. of the popular vote, the leader of New Zealand First ended up as Deputy Prime Minister and Chancellor of the Exchequer, with eight Cabinet Ministers from his party. He had fought the election on the argument that too many assets in New Zealand were going to foreign companies and immigration should be stopped, but in government he immediately dropped both those commitments, for which 13 per cent. of the electorate had voted.

Mr. Burden *rose—*

Mr. Bell: I should like to make a little progress, because I do not want to get bogged down on New Zealand. I shall come back to my hon. Friend, but I should like to comment further on the remarks of the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross, who mentioned Dick Spring, the leader of the Labour party in the Republic of Ireland.

I know Dick Spring, and have followed events in Ireland for some time. I am interested in the fact that the Liberal Democrats favour the single transferable vote. In 1992, Dick Spring's Labour party campaigned vigorously against Fianna Fail. When the election was over and the votes were counted, there was horse trading for some time, after which the Labour party came into government with Fianna Fail, much to the bemusement of the electorate. That Government lasted for two years, before being exchanged for a Labour coalition with Fine Gael. At the following election, the voters did not forget the behaviour of the Labour party, which paid heavily for it.

Mr. Maclennan: Is that not the point? The proportional system punishes parties that seek to overstep their support in the country. The hon. Gentleman has given one of the classic examples, but there are others. The same principle could well be demonstrated shortly in New Zealand, where New Zealand First's 13 per cent. support appears to have slumped to 1 per cent.

Mr. Bell: The right hon. Gentleman makes the case for first past the post. The problem is endemic in the system. He said that 43 per cent. of the electorate voted for new Labour at the general election last year; in fact, the figure was 45 per cent., and we had a majority of 177. He then said that the 57 per cent. who did not vote for the Labour party were opposed to it. That is not the case.

The right hon. Gentleman is a fellow barrister, but his logic has gone somewhat astray. People have a choice at a general election, but when the votes are counted, the person who is elected becomes the Member of Parliament for the whole constituency, and the Government govern for the whole country. That happened with the Conservatives from 1979 and Labour in 1997.

The Liberals have never argued with the proposition that a Government, once in office, seek to represent all the people. The right hon. Gentleman has shown that a proportional system has horse trading built in. Manifesto commitments are diluted. The specific manifestos for which the public voted are brought together, and there is a punishment at the end. That is endemic in the system. He wants to introduce that instability to our system.

Mr. Stephen Day (Cheadle): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, however imperfect our present electoral system—no electoral system is perfect—when the electors cast their votes, they know that they are deciding who will govern and what that Government's policies will be, because in each constituency the candidate with the most support wins? Under proportional systems, the composition of the Government might be decided only days or weeks later. Under PR, the politicians, not the electorate, decide who will form the Government.

Mr. Bell: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. We fully accept that no system is perfect. My hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase (Dr. Wright) mentioned two elections that resulted in a Government being elected with fewer votes than a rival party. New Zealand set up its electoral commission because that had happened twice in the 1970s, but 54 per cent. of the population now say

[Mr. Bell]

that they wish that they had never changed the system. However, that is a valid point that we shall argue in the country.

Mr. Burden: My hon. Friend says that the shenanigans in which Winston Peters indulged is endemic in proportional systems. He should consider the results in the constituency seats in the New Zealand elections. The National party won 34 per cent. and the Labour party won 31 per cent. New Zealand First would have held the balance of power under a first-past-the-post system. Winston Peters, not the voting system, produced the shenanigans.

Mr. Bell: It is not clear that my hon. Friend's analysis is correct. However, under a proportional system, the manifestos for which the electorate voted were diluted. The programme of government that resulted was different from that which they would otherwise have had. The people now regret that. The leader of the New Zealand Labour party has said that the situation is like the bronze medal winner in the Olympic games deciding between the winners of the silver and gold medals. The battlefield is then in Parliament, with to-ing and fro-ing, diluting manifestos and trying to make deals, in which the public are forgotten. The right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) made the valid distinction between a people's vote and a politicians' vote.

Mr. Beith: If only 30 per cent.—or, let us say, nearly 40 per cent.—of the electorate vote for a party's manifesto, surely that party is under an obligation to consider the combined views of a majority of the electorate, rather than ramming through its policies. If that leads to the manifestos of more than one party being considered, that reflects the fact that there was not a majority of the electorate in favour of one manifesto.

Mr. Bell: The benchmark is that, under first past the post, we elect a Government—whom we may or may not like. There have been only three hung Parliaments this century. Some Labour Members have recalled the long years of Thatcherite and Majorite government. That was the fault of the Labour party. My hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby wrote a book called "Four Years in the Death of the Labour Party"—a book that we read, never mind buying it. It took three leaders—Neil Kinnock, John Smith and my right hon. Friend the current Prime Minister—to bring the Labour party back in accordance with its principles to put forward to the electorate policies in its manifesto that could be followed.

We have a manifesto. Our deputy leader carries the five pledges around in his pocket. When he goes to party conference, he loses it, which is nice and theatrical, and then finds it again. Those are the manifesto pledges to which we are committed. The Opposition are perfectly right to hold us to account on those pledges. Under the first-past-the-post system, we are given a Government, the House holds them to account, and their actions are built on a manifesto.

My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart) said that there would have been a hung Parliament in New Zealand anyway. If there is a hung Parliament, one goes back to the country. For those who wish to recite history, that happened in 1924, when the Liberal party brought down the first Labour Government. The right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross said that the Conservatives ruled for 70 years, but he has only his party to blame for 70 years of Conservative rule. The Liberal party won an election in 1906 with a huge majority, but, in 20 years, it was reduced to 40 Members. Who is in government, or who is not, is the fault not of the electoral system but of the politicians who formed the policies on which the parties run for elections.

Ms Stuart: That is precisely the point about New Zealand. It was not the electoral system that let down the people, but the politicians. Two parties that were totally opposed to each other formed a coalition Government, and their agreement was so tightly drawn that it does not allow for coalition government.

Mr. Bell: The point that I am making, on which the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross touched, is that such faults are endemic in the system.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) said that he was in Lord North street in February 1974, when the former Labour leader, Harold Wilson, was waiting to see what would happen between the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath), the Prime Minister, and Jeremy Thorpe, the leader of the Liberal party. The two spent five days horse trading because the Conservative party leader believed that he could do a deal with the Liberals because of their pro-European position and social policy. Jeremy Thorpe agreed, on condition that the Liberals were given proportional representation. The then Prime Minister said that he could not do that, so the deal fell through. Therefore, Harold Wilson was called to No. 10 Downing street.

Later, during the Lib-Lab pact of 1977, David Steel—now Lord Steel—asked for proportional representation for European elections. He has had to wait 20 years; we will give it to him next year. The Prime Minister of the day said that he could not give the Liberals PR for the European elections, but he would grant a free vote on the matter on the Floor of the House. As my hon. Friend the Member for Edgbaston said, horse trading is endemic.

I accept fully that my hon. Friends who support proportional representation do so with the utmost sincerity and honesty, but such horse trading cannot be blamed on the situation in New Zealand or the politicians; it cannot be changed. One thing is certain; if we adopt a system of proportional representation, we are inviting a minority Government, a weak Executive and, at least, a coalition Government.

The right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross has put the Liberal Democrats' view for the single transferable vote. He said that it meets the constituency link argument. If I may, I shall draw again on my experience in the Republic of Ireland. In the Republic, Deputies from the Dail told me that they were spending all their time in their constituencies because their constituents had three Members of Parliament to whom to go. If their constituents did not like what one Member told them, they would go to another. If they did not like what the second told them, they could go to the third.

Under parliamentary convention in this country, where there is one Member of Parliament for one constituency, all that is out the window. In a multi-member constituency, there is a beauty contest between Members, because they all participate in elections again. No Member wants to let anyone down, so Members spend more time trying to deal with constituency matters and less time in the Dail dealing with national matters.

Mr. Levitt: My hon. Friend is eloquently expressing his scepticism about proportional representation, much of which I agree with. He is right to say that we have a manifesto commitment to improve the electoral system if we can. In his response to the hon. Member for Cheadle (Mr. Day), he acknowledged imperfections in the first-past-the-post system. For example, barely 12 Tory Members command the support of 50 per cent. or more of their electorate. Thirty Members who represent English constituencies have the support of less than 40 per cent. of their electorate. There is clearly a lot wrong with the first-past-the-post system. I ask my hon. Friend to consider how we can improve that system to meet many of the criticisms that he has accepted.

Mr. Bell: I surmise, therefore, that my hon. Friend advocates the alternative vote or the supplementary vote, as my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) proposes. I can well understand that, but I must tell him that, if one writes in a second vote preference, one writes in tactical voting. One must accept that. I understand that, at the last election, the Conservatives would have lost even more seats under an alternative vote system.

Mr. Levitt: So be it.

Mr. Bell: My hon. Friend makes a party political point that I well understand—but we may be there some day. Given that the Liberals lost power in 20 years and the Conservatives won an election in 1979 with a majority of 40, which rose to 100 and then 161, who can tell where the Labour party will be in 10 or 15 years? This matter is not party political but constitutional, and of the utmost importance. The alternative vote or supplementary vote advocated by my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Mr. Levitt) writes in tactical voting, which is not necessarily healthy because it is destabilising and breaches the terms of reference that the Secretary of State for the Home Department has given the Jenkins commission.

Mr. Levitt: I take my hon. Friend's point—although, by allowing an alternative vote, one allows voters to vote with both their head and their heart. At the moment, they have to choose whether to vote with their head or their heart. The experience of the 1992 general election, in which tactical voting was urged, suggests that the present system is not ideally suited to tactical voting. One cannot transfer the results of the previous election to assess how people would have voted under a different system. One simply cannot tell from previous results how an election under the alternative vote system would turn out. I ask my hon. Friend to give the matter more consideration.

Mr. Bell: I have already considered the alternative vote and the proposal of my hon. Friend the Member for Workington. I say again that such systems introduce volatility and instability, and encourage tactical voting. Any party that happens to be unpopular at the time will suffer the consequences.

If I may, I shall throw in a comment from the French revolution—why not, this is a wide-ranging debate. When men came to see Danton and said that the Robespierre faction had been executed, Robespierre said, "We are all factions," and Danton was the next to be executed. The Conservatives were unpopular in 1997, but Labour might be unpopular in 10 or 15 years' time, and we would do a great disservice to our people who look to Parliament for democratically accountable government if we somehow gave such accountability away. It would be quite wrong to do so.

Mr. Stunell: A few moments ago, the hon. Gentleman made two comments on the way in which the single transferable vote applied in the Republic of Ireland. First, he said that proportional representation broke the link with constituencies. Secondly, he said that constituency work for Members in the Irish Republic was overwhelming and preventing them from carrying out their national duties. Which of those two contradictory arguments does he want us to take seriously?

Mr. Bell: As was said earlier, those who are elected to the House are elected by their constituents to serve them in this place. We also play a national role, which turns out to be very important and significant. Over the past year, we have not had to deal with a great crisis, but when one such as the invasion of the Falklands by Argentina occurred, the House came into its own. In a multi-member constituency, one serves three or four masters, and one cannot ever get out from under them.

I do not want to detain the House much longer after having taken a number of interventions which have added to the debate and helped me to make my argument, but I have two final points. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary referred to Lord Plant and his commission's report, which talked of the ethos of conviction, which means having a conviction that one belongs to a party that has an ideology that should not be diluted, and of the ethos of responsibility, under which it is fair to dilute ideology to gain power. I believe that the ethos of responsibility and the ethos of conviction can come together in elections to the House through first past the post.

I sincerely believe that the introduction of proportional representation for elections to the House of Commons would ensure minority or coalition governments, and would deprive any future Government of a mandate to govern in the way that it might have been expected to govern if elected under the first-past-the-post system. Let me finish with one more comment from a New Zealander who followed events there closely, and who felt that proportional representation had let the genie out of the bottle so that it would never go back in. We should remember that in the House and in the campaigns to come. A change to the voting system will weaken government, weaken democracy and do a great disservice to our people, for which they will not forgive us.

6.30 pm

Mr. John MacGregor (South Norfolk): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell), partly because I entirely agree with his

[Mr. John MacGregor]

argument, but also because his article in *The Times* made points of relevance to his party. He has demonstrated that there are divisions on the Government Benches, just as there have been on our Benches. The Home Secretary made great play of the point that one of my former colleagues supports electoral reform, but we all know that many Members on the Government side—I suspect rather more than on my side—have grave misgivings along the lines taken by my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram).

On taking office, the Government found that many issues were much more complex than they thought when they were in opposition. That is why there has been a long delay, whereas they have made up their mind on public expenditure programmes, on the transport White Paper, on pensions and on many other issues. However, they have rushed headlong into a series of constitutional reforms without thinking through the consequences or worrying about the impact. Without doubt, there will be unpredictable consequences, sometimes boomeranging in unexpected directions.

The Scottish Parliament, the Welsh assembly and elections to the European Parliament have already been mentioned. Much interesting feedback will come from those, and it is a pity to rush into deciding what to do about the Westminster Parliament without taking their lessons into account. We have already had one clear lesson from the referendums. I am a member of the Neill committee on standards in public life, which is currently considering party funding. I am not giving away any secrets about how the committee is thinking, because I do not know, but public evidence relevant to the question of referendums has made it clear that practically no one in Wales felt that the Welsh assembly referendum could possibly be justified as an example for the future.

I want to press two further points arising from the Home Secretary's reply to my intervention. He made a strong point about the fact that the Jenkins commission is looking for the best alternative voting system, because, when the time comes, we shall have a choice between the existing system and whatever the Government believe the Jenkins commission is advocating. The Government may not wish to adopt all that the commission proposes, but they should ensure equivalent resources for both sides of the argument when a referendum comes. That did not happen for the Welsh or Scottish referendums, or for the referendum for a London mayor.

Equivalent resources should be available to both sides because a referendum would be of profound constitutional significance to the future of our country. It is equally important that the Government should not only promote the Jenkins commission's proposals but ensure that arguments for the existing system are put forward too.

I would go further. There has been clear evidence in the debate that many Labour Members favour the present electoral system. I hope that, when the referendum comes, the Government will do what was done in the 1975 European referendum, so that Ministers will be able to put their own case rather than being bound by the Government vote. They should have a free hand to advocate in public whichever of the two systems they think is right.

This is not a party political matter, but a matter of acute constitutional significance. The example of 1975 should be followed, and if the Minister cannot deal with that point tonight, I hope that it will be taken on board in consideration of how the referendum will be treated. It must follow from what the Home Secretary said today in reply to our motion.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): I accept what the right hon. Gentleman is saying, but does he accept that his party might give resources to those of its own members who support electoral reform?

Mr. MacGregor: I was talking not about party funding for the referendum, but about Government funding being available, I hope, to both sides. What the two sides do by way of raising funds is a matter for them. It is clear that there will be cross-party arrangements, because there will not be one party arguing one case while the other argues the other.

I have long felt that a huge amount of special pleading is dressed up as so-called fairness arguments for proportional representation. Its advocates fail to take account of the experience of other countries, and of the real benefits of our system that countries with PR do not have. I am glad that the debate is dealing with both the negative aspects in other countries and the advantages that we have here.

I shall not repeat all the arguments, as they have been fairly well rehearsed, but I shall run through a few quickly to put my own gloss on them. The only serious criticism of our present system that has ever made an impact on me is that seats in the House do not always mirror precisely the proportion of votes cast in the country. That is a criticism, but it has been generally accepted in the debate that no system is perfect. There are difficulties in all systems.

Mr. Mitchell: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the greatest piece of special pleading is to argue for a system that, for 18 years, gave the Government of whom he was a member the almost absolute power of the British Executive? That Government had a minority of the voters in favour of them; most people were opposed to them and voted against them. The system effectively entrenches a dictatorship of the minority.

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Member for Middlesbrough has already dealt with that point. The other parties are divided in what they seek, and the people who support them would not form a complete coalition in support of the same policies against a Government who had gained the biggest plurality. I do not agree with the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell).

When we consider the alternative, we begin to see the difficulties. The constituency link that our system offers is one of its greatest strengths, and people in other Parliaments envy it. It keeps Members of Parliament in touch with what is going on in the country and with what people think, as the Home Secretary, who supports the link, has said. The argument that Members are out of touch is fallacious; we are probably more in touch than anyone with all the trends and difficulties in the country, and in our constituencies.

The constituency link allows individual grievances and problems to be taken up by an identifiable Member of Parliament, which is a great benefit. Above all, it avoids the remoteness of Westminster and Whitehall debate from

the real feelings of the country. As a Minister in many Departments, I frequently found that my constituency experience was of great help in dealing with departmental issues. That experience was simply not available to the civil servants who were apparently there to advise me.

I also recall that, in Cabinet discussions, colleagues dealing with foreign affairs or defence made good contributions on housing policy because they had the constituency experience that enabled them to contribute. My right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) will remember that. That is lacking in many other systems.

Ms Stuart: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. MacGregor: I am sorry, but I cannot because many other hon. Members wish to speak.

When I was Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food negotiating in Brussels or Luxembourg, I was often struck by the following fact. In those late night sessions, when we were not part of the negotiating process and were waiting for the President to discuss our delegation's view, I was sometimes seen dictating constituency mail because I knew that it would build up if I did not deal with it before I got back. Colleagues from other countries would look on in amazement and ask what I was doing. I explained that I was dealing with my constituents. They never had to do that; they did not what know what was going on.

I asked one Minister how many letters a month he got from constituents and how many meetings he addressed. The answer was practically none—the opposite of the single transferable vote experience mentioned by the hon. Member for Middlesbrough. He explained that he was on a regional list and that people just did not get in touch with him. He made only the occasional speech in his region. That is a consequence of PR systems. I am a strong believer in the constituency link, and oppose systems that weaken or break it.

That point leads me to the additional member system and the German system. The arguments against it have been well rehearsed. First, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) said, there would be two classes of MPs. It will be bad enough having two classes of MPs as a result of the Scottish Parliament. Such systems would involve a further two classes, with one group allied to the party line and not attached to a constituency interest, and another with a considerable constituency work load.

Without going into all the details, that is a great weakness of that system. We shall learn, certainly from the way in which the Labour party is approaching regional lists in the elections for the European Parliament, that the power of the centre of the party will hugely increase. I hope that that becomes a big issue in the political debate.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough): What about you?

Mr. MacGregor: The Conservatives are going through the selection process. We are giving selection to all local members of the party in each regional constituency. It is proving to have considerable difficulties, but it is not increasing the power of the centre in the way in which the Labour party will. The regional list system makes it much easier to increase the power of the centre, which I oppose.

That point brings me to the alternative vote system, which sometimes seems to be the fairest. There are two fundamental objections to it. The study by Democratic Audit of how the Australian system would have applied in the last UK general election has already been mentioned. The Government's majority would have increased from 179 to 213. The Labour party would have taken 68 per cent. of seats on 44.3 per cent. of the vote; the Conservatives 17.2 per cent. on 31.5 per cent. That is hardly proportional representation and hardly democratic. It destroys the argument for that system in one go.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Anyone who has done any study of how supplementary vote or alternative vote systems work will emphasise that the whole dynamic effect is being underestimated. People begin to use their first preferences in a very different way if the system changes to AV or SV. I cannot stress too much to hon. Members that they should consider the dynamic effect before making up their minds.

Mr. MacGregor: To plunge into a new system with such consequences—a substantial step—at least in one election, would need a strong justification.

The other problem is that in many constituencies, not a majority, but a substantial proportion of those voting would get not the candidate that they wanted but the candidate three or four down their list of preferences, having voted to keep someone else out. I do not believe that that is an attractive system.

Mr. Linton: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. MacGregor: I am sorry, but I will not give way any more, because I know that other hon. Members wish to speak.

The greatest weakness of all the alternative systems of which I have heard has already been rehearsed: they put the third or fourth parties in a position of permanent power. When it is realised that the argument that a Government have got only 43 per cent. of the vote and are therefore able to govern has changed to the argument that a party that gets 14 per cent. of the vote has the controlling influence, there will soon be disillusion among the electorate.

It is endemic in such systems, as the hon. Member for Middlesbrough said and as the New Zealand experience shows. Under first past the post, there occasionally has to be some horse trading if there is a close result. It is endemic in other systems that that will happen most times. It is at that point that disillusionment with politicians will not only set in, but get worse. I do not see that that is fair or democratic in any sense. The electorate do not vote for coalitions, but that is what they would get under such systems.

Those systems are especially wrong because, under our system, the party commanding the biggest number of votes sets the agenda for a Government. Under the other systems, the whip hand will pass to the third party. Often a party with only a limited agenda would have the whip hand and hold the biggest parties to ransom. I sometimes wonder whether the Labour party before the last general election had insufficient confidence that it would be able to sustain a majority, and so was held to ransom by the Liberal Democrats and made to go for this referendum.

Fiona Mactaggart: Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that the fact that our party, with its large majority,

[Fiona Mactaggart]

is giving away power to the national Governments, and considering doing it through electoral reform, is the opposite of what he said about us being frit?

Mr. MacGregor: I suspect that many in the Labour party did not expect to have such a big majority. When the consequences of PR sink in, many of them will think again.

It is not right that the most popular party, the one that wins the biggest number of votes, will be in government only if the minority parties decide to vote for it. That is also a consequence of PR systems. Minority parties would have an influence disproportionate to their share of the vote. It is easy to see that that is why the Liberal Democrats have always favoured PR. It was astonishing that the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan) should wax so eloquently about the Conservative party being in power for so long because we commanded the largest number of votes. He seeks what he regards as a better system, in which his party would have a controlling influence with a very small proportion of the vote. There is nothing fair about that, but it was precisely the logic of what he said.

For this debate, I examined what Lord Jenkins said about his desire for proportional representation in his delightful autobiography, "A Life at the Centre". It was clear that, at bottom, it was his disillusionment with the Labour party as it then was that led him to support such a system, coupled with the attachment that he has always had to elitist, centralist views of politics. I hope that it is clear that mine is rooted in the constituency link.

The Labour party is taking the plunge on this for no good reason. Rather, it got itself committed to it before the general election because it was afraid that it might not succeed without the support of the Liberal Democrats. It is a plunge that will get Labour into even deeper water if it goes down that route.

I have two pleas. First, the referendum must be fair, and both arguments must be fairly put and properly resourced. Secondly, and even more importantly, the Government should wait to learn the lessons of the constitutional election changes that we are already making and see how the electorate react to them, and how we regard their development, before taking the plunge on this crucial Westminster vote.

6.48 pm

Mr. Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor), even though I disagree with much of what he said. I do agree that it is important that the referendum be fair, although, as a supporter of electoral reform, I wish I had his confidence that we will be able to raise the vast amounts of money that will swamp the other side.

We have had an interesting debate. I found the Opposition motion rather intriguing, and the speech in support of it by the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) even more so. The motion implies that the criteria for the Jenkins commission are okay—indeed, the Opposition have produced a rather strange set of figures to back up their contention that first past the post is the most proportional of all systems. However, the motion goes on to say that the terms of reference for the commission are overly restrictive and need to be changed. Apparently, the Opposition think that the commission charged with the responsibility of looking at alternatives to first past the post should be able to recommend first past the post.

I find that slightly illogical, and the Opposition have to answer a question that I asked the right hon. Member for Devizes, but which he did not answer. What is their view on the referendum? Do they agree with the referendum, or not? If they do agree with it, are they seriously suggesting that we should have a commission that recommends first past the post to put into a referendum against first past the post? That is an absolutely absurd position. Alternatively, are they saying, as I suspect they are, that we do not need a referendum at all? Are they saying that, because they as politicians—and perhaps politicians in general—feel that the present set-up is okay, the people really do not need to have a say in the matter?

I hope that the Opposition will make clear their view on the referendum, because, if they are saying what I think they are, it shows how out of touch they are. They proved that they were out of touch in the run-up to the last election, and they suffered at the polls as a result. Sooner or later, they need to grasp the fact that such a complacent "we know best" attitude is a profound turn-off for the British people and the electorate.

A few weeks ago, the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) wrote an article on electoral reform in *The Independent*, saying that, in launching a debate on electoral reform, the Prime Minister had got it wrong—that he

"is fiddling the system rather than mastering the art of perpetual popularity."

Nobody could accuse the right hon. Gentleman of having mastered the art of even temporary popularity. The fact is that the Opposition motion and the thinking behind it is of a different age—an age that is being left behind by the people of this country.

All the evidence is that the people want change. They wanted a change in the colour of Government, and they achieved that at the last election; but I believe that they want a more fundamental change—a change in the political process itself. They look at this place, and are turned off by what they see.

Mrs. Eleanor Laing (Epping Forest): I am following the hon. Gentleman's logic carefully, but I do not understand how he can be so sure that the people want change in a certain direction when the people have not been consulted. Why can they not be consulted about whether they want things to remain the same?

Mr. Burden: I recommend that the hon. Lady, if she is going to participate in the debate, follows what it is about. There is no dispute that retaining the first-past-the-post system will be on the ballot paper in the referendum. That is what is so absurd about the Opposition's position. They—indeed, hon. Members on both sides of the House—will have every opportunity to argue their case in the referendum campaign. We are in favour of consulting the British people, and of people who support first past the post advancing their arguments. The hon. Lady should ask her own Front Benchers whether they share that view.

Do the Opposition think that there should be a referendum, and, if so, should it offer the sort of fair choice that the right hon. Member for South Norfolk wanted? If they believe that, they must accept that the process of establishing the Jenkins commission is absolutely right, and that it should look at the alternatives to first past the post and consider which might best fit the British political culture; and that it is right to let the people, not politicians, decide.

Mr. Gummer: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Michael Spicer (West Worcestershire): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Burden: Time is short, but I shall give way twice more, once to an Opposition Member—the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer)—and once to any of my hon. Friends who intervenes later.

Mr. Gummer: Will the hon. Gentleman read again the Government amendment, in which we are supposed to welcome

"the creation of the Independent Commission on the Voting System and its remit",

and try to understand what the issue is? It is not an independent commission, but one that has already been told that it has to come up with an alternative to the current voting system; both sides agree on that point. Does he not understand that, if the British people are to vote, they will have on the one side a investigation that has been held and a commission that has made a recommendation, and, on the other side, merely the status quo? All we are suggesting is that the Government must make it clear that the two will be presented in an equal manner.

Mr. Burden: With respect, the hon. Gentleman is wrong about his own party's motion—that is not what it suggests. The motion suggests that the independent commission on the voting system should be able to recommend first past the post into a referendum that will be on an alternative to first past the post. That is logically impossible.

People outside this place will have more interest in the sort of political culture reflected in this debate, because this is the sort of politics the people want. All too often, the people see a bear garden, where the question of which gang one belongs to appears to be more important, and generates more heat, than the issue being discussed. The evidence suggests that people want a politics that is based on solving problems, not on exaggerating the differences between us. That is not an argument for fudge or for compromise where no compromise is possible, but an argument that the stuff of politics should be the issues and not which colour we wear.

Sir Michael Spicer: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Burden: No—I said I would give way twice, once to one side of the House, which I have already done, and once to the other.

That is why the debate is so important. No one suggests that changing the electoral system will, on its own, change the political culture in this country, but it is part of the package of constitutional reform on which we have already embarked—devolution to Scotland and Wales, and the beginnings of devolution to London and the English regions. We are adopting a new approach to local government which tries new ways of consulting people and shows that the rights of citizenship do not revolve around one cross on one ballot paper once every five years, but go much further. The electoral system is part of that process, because, with first past the post, the process by which Governments are elected too often resembles a military coup.

Sir Michael Spicer: As none of his hon. Friends has risen, will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Burden: No, but if none of my hon. Friends has asked me to give way by the end of my speech, I shall certainly give the hon. Gentleman his chance.

Under our current electoral system, it is not the job of Governments to try to win majority support. The right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire (Sir B. Mawhinney) made it clear before the last election that a party did not need the majority of the people behind it to win, but only enough votes. Under the current system, just enough votes in just enough constituencies gives just enough seats in this place to allow a party to claim monopoly power and a democratic mandate for anything it wants to push through. We saw the consequences of that for 18 years.

When people argue about how the Thatcher years might have been changed by a different electoral system, no one suggests that, in 1979 or in 1983, a Conservative Government would not have been likely. The issue is how power is wielded in this place. Measures such as the poll tax, which patently never had majority or even substantial minority support, would not have been passed. That would have been a democratic strength.

Before I came to the House, I was involved in the water industry. At the time that the Conservative Government privatised that industry, polls showed 80 per cent. public opposition to selling it off, but that was not reflected in the House. The exercise of power in Parliament, bolstered by the present electoral system, does not reflect people's feelings or empower the individual in the political process.

Much changed in 1997, when there was a massive turnaround. The British people showed their determination, and wised up to how to get rid of the Conservative Government. There was a significant Tory defeat; 174 seats changed hands; there were many Labour gains; and the Liberal Democrats doubled their representation. All that was good news, but there was also bad news in that election—the turnout was the lowest since 1935.

The turnout was lowest of all in those seats that are regarded as safe. Many people believe that their vote does not count and will not change anything, and to some extent that is true. The statistics for the previous election show that no fewer than 14.5 million people—nearly 50 per cent. of the electorate—helped to elect nobody with their vote. That has an impact on voter attitudes, and separates the citizen from the political process.

That factor has an impact also on parties' behaviour, because in recent years they have wised up to the fact that, to win elections, they do not necessarily have to address grave national issues, or even the most difficult ones.

[Mr. Burden]

Let us examine the difficulty that politicians have in discussing the drugs problem in this country. We cannot have the discussions that social workers, parents, young people and police officers have, because, as soon as we say anything, the press are on to it. In our present electoral system, it is too risky for political parties to address matters of great national importance, so they do not.

Parties wised up to the fact that they had to target swing voters in about 100 marginal seats. They are the people to whom all political parties address their policies. The idea that parties operate on a clear mandate because they openly discuss their policies and then put them to the people is out of touch with what happens in British politics today.

Mr. Maclean: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Burden: No, I stick to what I said before, and the hon. Member for West Worcestershire (Sir M. Spicer) is ahead of the right hon. Gentleman in the queue.

It is time to call an end to that political mindset, which we have had for too long. That is why I welcome the establishment of the Jenkins commission. We can seek, and find, a fairer system in which every vote— *[Interruption.]* With that ingenuity, if the right hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean) stays on these Benches and votes accordingly, I will give way to him.

Mr. Maclean: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way, and I am sorry that I had to use this temporary ruse to bring that about.

Is the hon. Gentleman seriously suggesting that issues such as drugs, which he criticises politicians in this country for not addressing, are better addressed by politicians in countries with voting systems different from ours? I shall sit on this side of the House, if I may, to listen to his answer.

Mr. Burden: I am afraid that, as he has agreed to my conditions for giving way, the right hon. Gentleman will have stay on these Benches and vote accordingly.

The electoral system is part of the glue that holds together our political culture. No one is suggesting that it is the only factor. The centralisation of power and the way in which the media operate are other factors. However, it is wrong to think that the electoral system is divorced from them.

The right hon. Gentleman should consider the problems that his party—or, I should say, his former party—is experiencing at present. It is trying to get back in touch with the British people, but I wager that it will not consider in broad terms what actions are necessary. Over the next five years, it will examine what it needs to do to win just enough votes in just enough seats to get back on these Benches and claim a monopoly on power for another five years. Within the House, parties may exercise such power well or badly, but the British people expect more from politics. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Very early in this Parliament, Madam Speaker made plain her views about the way in which hon. Members dispose themselves in the Chamber. This kind of play-acting is not adding to the quality of the debate.

Mr. Burden: Polls that are being published as this debate takes place show a reservoir of support for changing the voting system. Up to 75 per cent. of people want such a change. If the Conservative party is serious about its listening exercise, perhaps it should listen to people's views on the electoral system as well as on other matters.

It is possible to have systems that fit the Jenkins commission's criteria of broad proportionality and voter choice, retain the constituency link, and provide a better form of government. Conservative Members should examine all the evidence from abroad, not only that which suits them. There has been much selective quoting of experience abroad. We should consider, as my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Linton) said, the experience of Scandinavia, how proportional systems have worked, and how the political process has benefited, rather than suffered, as a result.

The precise system has yet to be determined. I make no bones about the fact that I should prefer a proportional system based on the single member constituency. Liberal Democrat Members have a different view. However, there is unity on one point—when citizens in this country cast their vote, every vote should count in every constituency in every part of the country, and it should count equally. That is not the case under the present system, which is why I look forward to the referendum and to a fair debate.

I am confident that after that debate, the British people will vote for change. Even more important, perhaps, than how they vote in the referendum is the process that they will have gone through. For the first time that I can remember, people across these islands will have been given the chance to say not only what party they want in government, but what they want politics to consist of. That is valuable, and we should welcome it.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. I remind the House that the 10-minute rule now applies.

7.7 pm

Sir Peter Lloyd (Fareham): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. Burden), although much of his argument was contradictory. He seems to believe that the present system prevents a Government from tackling serious issues because they may experience unpopularity or difficulty, but he criticised the last Conservative Government for implementing a series of policies in the national interest which, I agree, at the time did not individually have majority support in the country. He cannot have it both ways. However, what we all want from an electoral system is to have it both ways, and that is not possible for any of us.

When I visited the Netherlands earlier this year as part of an Inter-Parliamentary Union delegation, some of our Dutch hosts said that they had heard that the UK was changing to PR. They could not understand why we might want to abandon a system that, in their view, had produced great governmental stability. They obviously

admired the clarity and the personal involvement of the single member constituency system, which they do not have. I do not know how representative those Dutch Members of Parliament were—they were certainly not a scientific sample even of Dutch Members—but, although many of them wanted the UK to join economic and monetary union, if only for company, none of them advised us that we would be better off with their electoral system. Perhaps that is because they have yet to find out about EMU, but they have personal experience of PR.

As I listened to the Home Secretary's very good speech, it became plain to me that a similar suspicion of PR flourishes at the highest reaches of the Government, and I wondered whether that was why they had chosen for the Euro-elections a form of PR which shows PR at its worst. The Euro-constituencies will be so large, and will have so many representatives, that it will be impossible for any of those elected to make the personal constituency-wide connections with local organisations—let alone voters—that most MEPs of all parties currently seek to do. Inevitably, closed lists will give maximum power to party machines. Despite the real effort to open selection, and the all-important list order, to all its members, the Conservative party is finding that the decisive voices still belong to only a limited number of the most active activists.

I shall not try to discuss all the shortcomings of the various systems on offer, because in one way or another they have been dealt with effectively by previous speakers on both sides of the House, but I shall dwell on two points.

First, as the Jenkins commission is to recommend an alternative to the current electoral system, it will presumably make the case for its chosen system, and explain why it prefers it to all possible alternatives. Come the referendum, therefore, voters will have the commission's authoritative arguments on the merits of its chosen system. Apparently, however, they will not have a similarly authoritative set of arguments for the merits of the present system. Unlike many of my hon. Friends, I do not think that could be reasonably asked of the Jenkins commission, which was set up to find an alternative.

No doubt the arguments for the present system will be set out in, and publicised by, those who believe that our present system meets the Government's criteria better than any of the alternatives, but, as my right hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor) said, it is essential that we know that the Government will be even-handed and straightforward in the way that they organise the test of voter opinion. I hope that, when the Minister replies, he will make it clear that that is the Government's intention.

I hope that the Minister is listening to this as well as talking to his colleague. I hope that he will assure us that every household will receive, officially paid for by the state, the full arguments on both sides of the case, so that all voters may reach a fully informed decision.

Secondly, although the point has been well made that the first-past-the-post system produces strong Governments, whom, because they do not rely on coalitions and deals, the electors can throw out whenever they are dissatisfied, in the long run its most valuable characteristic is its prior effect on the parties which want to win power. To form a Government, a party must appeal broadly across the electorate. It is not enough to maximise support among a minority, and then rely on being needed as part of a coalition Government. To win and keep power in the United Kingdom, a party must seek to retain the support of the broadest swathe of voters and their opinions, and of people who do not naturally or automatically vote for it or support all its policies.

The voters impose a very heavy penalty indeed on parties that lose the confidence of the electorate generally, as Labour saw after 1979 and the Conservatives saw in 1997. Labour eventually learned that, to win back that confidence, it had to appeal beyond the bedrock of its support. If we had adopted PR in the 1980s, we should not have had new Labour; we should have had the rump of old Labour, exerting unrepresentative influence within an uneasy coalition. Although it hurts me to say so to Labour Members, I know that the former possibility would have been worse. Similarly, the Conservative party knows that its return to office depends completely on being able to reconnect with and convince the mass electorate, not only its traditional supporters.

The first-past-the-post system provides strong government and clear choices, but it also forces parties to listen to all the electors, and punishes them if they do not. It thus ensures that there are real changes, when the voters at large come to feel that previous policies and arrangements no longer suit—as they did pre-eminently in 1945, as they did in 1979, and as they obviously did in 1997.

In the long run, the first-past-the-post system is more responsive to the electors than PR. Abroad, under PR, political frustration, without effective political outlet, can accumulate as it does not here. I fear that, in some of our neighbouring countries, that may yet produce very disagreeable outcomes.

I am very happy with the prospect of a referendum, because I am certain that, when the arguments are placed properly before them, British electors will realise—if they do not already—the truth of what I have been arguing, and will vote to stay with the present system.

7.15 pm

Mr. Martin Salter (Reading, West): I welcome the opportunity to debate electoral reform, although I find Conservative Members' arguments confused, and, in some ways, inspired more by panic than by serious consideration of the issues. They appear to want to pre-empt the Jenkins commission, and certainly to discredit it, despite the fact that the Labour Government have a clear mandate to establish it, and have done just that.

Like my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, I have examined the submission by Conservative Action for Electoral Reform and the official submission by Tory central office. They could scarcely be more different, and it raises the question of which brand of Conservatism is on show today. It may surprise hon. Members to learn that several newly promoted members of the so-called shadow ministerial team are long-standing supporters of electoral reform; they may be in a quandary about which way to vote tonight. We shall watch their voting records with interest.

In fact, there are differing views in all parties—even among the Liberal Democrats, who may not be very excited by the debate any more. Does that not show how

[Mr. Martin Salter]

right the present Government are to leave the final choice on our political systems to the people of this country? What is there for Opposition Members to be scared of?

I am worried that the debate—not just in the Chamber, but within the Labour party and between the Labour party and other political parties—is becoming polarised. The debate is almost saying that electoral reform equates to pure proportionality. If that is the case, I certainly would not be an electoral reformer. I do not believe that electoral reform necessarily means pure PR. To coin a phrase, I do believe that there is a third way, but I shall come to that.

The first-past-the-post system is difficult to defend, but some alternatives are even worse. For me, the most important function of any electoral system is the retention of the link between an individual Member of Parliament and his or her constituent—a case eloquently made by hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber. That link is the foundation which gives us authority to speak on behalf of our constituents—the people who send us to this place. Arguments about accountability are every bit as important as those about proportionality. I have not heard enough in the debate about accountability—and retaining the link is the essence of accountability.

The first-past-the-post system does produce huge anomalies. As has been said, 300 Members of the House do not enjoy a clear mandate—they do not enjoy 50 per cent. of the vote in their constituencies. I am one, and there are many on the Opposition Benches.

I cannot believe that it is acceptable to continue with a system in which we purport to represent all our constituents on a vote of, in the case of the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), 37 per cent; even more ludicrously, Russell Johnston won his seat in Inverness in 1964 with 24 per cent. of the vote. What kind of mandate is that? Perhaps it is good enough for a Liberal. One hopes that the Jenkins commission will remove such anomalies once and for all.

The case for proportional representation has been roundly attacked by Members on both sides today. The additional member system, which produces two classes of Members of Parliament, one with a constituency link and the other with none, is presumably favoured by the party hierarchy. God save us all from that. It would certainly damage democracy and reduce accountability.

I cannot see how the multi-member system would work in my area. We have already discussed the nonsense on the Isle of Wight, and I know that its Member shares my concerns. Berkshire is a very polarised county. Two Labour Members represent the Reading seats, a Liberal Democrat represents Newbury, and there are Conservatives Members for Wokingham, Windsor, Maidenhead and Bracknell. If Berkshire were split, which bit of it would my colleagues or I represent? Would we represent the leafy lanes of Wokingham or the council estates of Reading? It is just not workable.

Ms Stuart *rose—*

Mr. Salter: I accept the point that my hon. Friend is about to make—indeed, I will make it for her. Different arguments may apply to Birmingham, but, in my neck of the woods, the multi-member constituency could never work; nor would the link between the constituency and the Member be retained.

Ms Stuart: I represent a constituency which has never had a Labour Member before; 23,000 of its people have never had a Member who shared their views. It appears that the constituency link is strong only if the Member belongs to a party that one supports. What about all the others?

Mr. Salter: I thank my hon. Friend for her remarks. The argument may be right for places such as Birmingham, but it is not for many other parts of the country.

I regret the attacks that have been made on the integrity of the Jenkins commissioners. I also regret the attacks on the integrity of my party. The commissioners were given contradictory criteria, and they faced an extremely difficult job. They were asked to find a broadly proportional system, a system that extends voter choice, a system that produces stable government, and a system that retains the constituency link. I know from my Northern Ireland experience that we can all cherry-pick—but no single system will meet all those criteria. Thank goodness, the issue will be decided by a referendum.

I favour preferential voting systems, whether they involve the supplementary vote or the alternative vote. Of course, an electoral system that is right for this Parliament will not be the same as the systems for the European Parliament or for what I hope will be an elected second Chamber. When we vote for Members of this place, we are choosing an Executive and a legislature. We want Members to represent different points of view and different parts of the country fairly, and we want to retain that all-important link. We also want to provide stable government that commands majority support; it is important, too, to reward more consensual and pluralist politics.

The alternative vote does reward pluralism, and parties that can be seen to work together—that is one of its greatest advantages. AV can require Members to have a proper mandate and to represent clear majorities of their constituents. It also rewards parties that share common ground. What is more, it can be implemented in time for the next general election, without the need for a boundary commission. It is probably the only system for which this Parliament is likely to vote—I do not believe that we are going to vote our own constituencies out of existence.

Perhaps most important of all, in view of attacks to the effect that tactical voting is enshrined by AV, I might point out that there was a huge amount of tactical voting at the general election, but it was dishonest voting. The mood of the country was to get rid of the Tories, so we had to persuade our swing voters to second-guess how their neighbours might vote—to work out whether Labour or the Liberal Democrats were most likely to defeat the incumbent Conservative. At least the AV system is honest: people can exercise their clear first preferences, but still vote tactically.

The Conservatives may have problems arguing against the alternative vote, as it was the very system that they used to elect their leader.

7.24 pm

Mr. John Gummer (Suffolk, Coastal): One of the problems with arguing about the PR system is that, every time one presses objections to a particular system, one is told that that, of course, is not the one supported by the person to whom one is talking. The purer the PR system becomes, the more likely its supporters are to ditch it. The purest PR system of all, in Israel, has been said to be outwith the terms of reference of the Jenkins commission—that is perfectly reasonable.

We are told that the Liberals do not like AV because it is not proportional enough; they do not like the Israeli system because it is too proportional. What they want is the system most likely to produce the largest number of Liberals. They want a different kind of politics. But the Labour chairman of the electoral reform organisation wants a different sort of politics only in the sense of an electoral system that is predisposed in his party's own favour.

The Conservative party is in a strong position to discuss first past the post, given how badly that system dealt with us recently. I still, however, maintain that it is the right one.

First, people know in advance—before the election—which coalition they are going to get. That coalition, in the case of my party, contains people such as me, who are strongly in favour of membership of the European Union, and one or two others who do not happen to hold the same view. But at least people know in advance the coalition that they are voting for; with proportional representation, they do not.

Under PR, as experience of many PR systems shows, people vote for a party that closely identifies with their personal views. Such parties tend to become ever smaller. Then, behind closed doors, that party does a deal with a number of other parties in order to reach power. In doing that deal, it almost inevitably abandons the very positions for which people voted in the first place. People find that the parts of the manifesto that they most approved of are the ones which the party drops to get into power—and they do not know in advance which bits will be dropped. Parties do not say to voters, "We are against abortion but once we are elected we will drop that because we know we cannot keep it and get into power." No; parties get votes under certain pretensions and then do deals afterwards.

That is not proportional representation: it is a system in which people buy a pig in a poke, and the pigs decide which poke to enter after the election.

The second problem concerns constituency contact. Last weekend, I was in the village of Chediston. Only the Member of Parliament for Suffolk, Coastal would ever be likely to know the best way to get from the village where I live, Winston, to Chediston. I travel the route often, but if I were one of six or seven Members for a large constituency it is unlikely that I would. There are 74 miles of coastline in my constituency, so it is pretty big. I do the route because I am the only Member, and all my constituents need to be able to ask for my help, irrespective of their political views.

I try to hold my constituency surgeries in places that are not politically labelled, although that is not always possible. Some Labour Members call themselves the Labour Member for somewhere or other. They are not the Labour Member for anywhere. They are the Member for a constituency. I find it difficult to reply civilly to hon. Members who put their party politics before their constituency representation. From the moment the election is over, almost all of us seek properly to represent the constituency, because there is no one else to do so. No one else can be blamed for not doing whatever needs to be done.

If we did not have just one constituency, we would adopt the do-not-care-at-all view that is so noticeable in some PR systems, or, worse still, everyone would be busy arguing against the other, often of the same party, to get the odd extra vote, and the job of the legislature that produces the Government would not be done.

Our Parliament is different from many continental Parliaments. I repeat that I am a strong supporter of the European Union. I believe it to be essential if Britain is to have real influence in the world, but it is no good pretending that everything that everybody else has is better than what we have. If I want people to be a little more humble about what we have in Britain and to learn a little from our continental neighbours, I must also recognise that we have one or two things that we should share with them. One of those is a system where government is firmly anchored in Parliament.

Apart from the present incumbent, most Prime Ministers have insisted on coming to the House twice a week to be questioned. Ministers are never questioned in the French House of Representatives or even in the Dutch Parliament, which is the closest to ours. One of the reasons for that is that no direct connection is seen between the election and the Government. The parties arrange among themselves what the Government should do.

Mr. Mitchell: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gummer: No, I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman, because I have never heard him listen to the views of anyone else for a whole 10 minutes. I have only 10 minutes and I should love him to listen to my views, just on this occasion. I am sure that I shall have to listen to his in future.

Continental Governments do not see themselves in the same way as ours—as rooted in Parliament. In this country, we have a parliamentary democracy, and changing the electoral system will have a fundamental influence on it. We should be concerned about that.

Much has been said about the frustrations of the minority. To those who are in favour of PR, may I say that the frustrations of the minority are nothing like the frustrations of the majority in a PR system when minorities always hold sway. We have spoken about the problems of Germany, but there are many other examples where small numbers of people get parties elected which can then change Government policy, even though only a tiny minority of people want that change.

We must be careful about trying to run our society by never making a change unless it is popular at the time. The Government do not say that they will renationalise the water companies—I should declare an interest, as I work for a water company, but it is one of those that was never privatised—or that they will renationalise the electricity company, yet they say that privatisation was unpopular when we carried it out. They support the privatisation now. Indeed, they could not deliver their programme had those companies not been denationalised.

[Mr. Gummer]

The Labour party must recognise that part of government is to do something that is unpopular at the time so that, when it has been seen to work, it is recognised as part of the consensus. The electoral system must give the Government the strength to do that. Only the first-past-the-post system delivers that.

7.34 pm

Ms Gisela Stuart (Birmingham, Edgbaston): I am beginning to wonder whether the debate is opening an age divide—the supporters of the status quo seem to be hon. Members who have been in the House for some time. I hope that I do not do an injustice to some hon. Members of longer standing, but perhaps, by being in the House for a long time, hon. Members become more focused on effective government and tend to forget that we are also meant to be here as parliamentarians. An electoral system is supposed to deliver a healthy and effective Parliament that can hold the Government to account. A healthy Parliament must also be representative of the people.

The right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) said that government was our role, but as this is a parliamentary democracy, Parliament and its ability to hold the Government to account are equally important. For that, we should be representative of the people who elected us. As a body, we are not representative of the people.

Mr. Hayes: That is a narrow definition of representativeness. You are talking about mirror image representativeness, in the sense of hon. Members being men or women, black or white. That is not the same as representing all the people—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am not saying anything. I think the hon. Gentleman is referring to the hon. Lady.

Mr. Hayes: The hon. Lady is defining representation narrowly. Does not representation mean that, having been elected, hon. Members represent all the people, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) outlined?

Ms Stuart: Being representative is a springboard for forming the Government. One of the most glaring features of the House is that only one in five Members are women, yet we are supposed to be governing a population of which half are women. Ethnic representation is not doing well. If the first-past-the-post system has served us so well, why have some parts of our constituencies not been represented?

We have heard much about the constituency link. The right hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor) feels strongly about it. Other systems allow the constituency link. Some people feel that, if their Member of Parliament is not representative, it is not worth going to see him.

It has been suggested that, if there were three Members for a constituency, there would be a beauty contest among them, which would be dreadful. May I suggest that we start looking at electoral systems not from our point of view as politicians, but from the point of view of the people we are supposed to represent? They may want a beauty contest to choose the most representative Member. Perhaps there should be more competition, instead of the present complacency.

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Stuart: No. Speeches are limited to 10 minutes and I should like to proceed.

I urge hon. Members on both side of the House to move away from our self-interest as parliamentarians, and to start seeing things from the point of view of our electorate. Coalition is considered a dirty word. That may be so where coalition means instability, but where it means consensus seeking—and if it changes the way in which we conduct Parliament—it may be welcome.

The experience of New Zealand was unfortunate. The coalition there that followed the electoral system changes was a disaster. The two parties that formed the coalition did not make it clear before the election where there was common ground between them or where they were open to negotiation to form a coalition Government.

A change in the electoral system brings in its wake a change in political culture. That takes a little time. A debate that begins by outlining the voting pattern in the United Kingdom, the various systems and the possible outcomes is rather sterile because of the dynamics of changes in voting patterns. We must ensure that our electoral systems are representative.

My biggest objection to first past the post was illustrated at the general election. It was fought in some 100 key marginal seats, and a tiny minority of voters decided the result. Voters are very sophisticated and tactical voting is well within their capabilities, although they have had to work within a system that they do not like. I would rather have a more open and honest system, so that the electorate can identify the common ground and areas of negotiation between parties. It is a fallacy to assume that political parties produce a manifesto and do not deviate from it for the next five years. If that is the case, we are wasting our time debating issues in this place. There are debates in Parliament because we are seeking consensus about the way forward, which requires compromise and change.

Time is limited, and I wish to give as many hon. Members as possible a chance to contribute. When participating in constitutional debates, I urge my fellow parliamentarians to use as a starting point the people we are meant to represent. We must consider how we can form a strong Government that reflects the people's wishes. We must put an end to the old-fashioned, arrogant view that we, as politicians, have all the answers. It is not valid to argue that, although 80 per cent. of people opposed water privatisation, a firm Government introduced it and hence it was good. Politicians must have some humility: they must accept that they may have got it wrong. If the electoral system seeks consensus as part of its political culture, it may be possible for politicians to be more humble and to reconsider the issues rather than become entrenched in their views.

It has been argued that proportional representation would lead to the rise of extremist political parties. I simply make two points. First, that problem has been dealt with effectively in other countries by introducing thresholds. Secondly, if more than about 5 per cent. of the

British public support a very right-wing racist party, I want to know about it. I want that party's representatives to come to this place and try to defend and explain themselves. We could then deal with them openly and face them head on rather than attempt to address a swelling underground culture. I believe that that objection to PR is a red herring; our starting point must be the people we are meant to represent, not our interests.

7.42 pm

Sir Nicholas Lyell (North-East Bedfordshire): The hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart) said that she favours a more open system, which would be provided by proportional representation, but the debate has exposed the fact that, although PR may appear to be the theoretically correct manner of electing individual Members—comparisons have been made with the purist Israeli system, which no one would choose, and other systems—the horse trading would begin shortly thereafter, and we would not get what we saw. That is the great danger of the PR system, particularly for the House of Commons.

I wish to develop two points. First, for the House of Commons, the first-past-the-post system gives the electorate the power to choose. The people must make up their minds about which major party to support, and, as my right hon. Friends the Members for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) and for Fareham (Sir P. Lloyd) said, those major parties must show that they are broad churches that encompass the spread of political requirements of the day and are united in that cause. That is one of the great strengths of our system. If people vote for a party and their vote is successful, what they see is what they get.

I wish to broaden the argument and remind the House that the United Kingdom has a bicameral system. Many of us have considered electoral reform for more than 20 years—I think that I still subscribe to the Conservative Association for Electoral Reform, although that does not mean that I agree with the comments of my old friend, Tim Rathbone. I have personal thoughts about proportional representation in relation to the House of Lords, which I think are part of the debate.

The Government are looking correctly at the future voting system for this Chamber and at the future composition of the second Chamber, the House of Lords. Those two issues must be distinct. Our first-past-the-post system is envied across Europe and the world because it produces a clear decision. There are only one or two examples this century when that has not occurred. Basically, our system produces a clear decision as to the nature of the Government for the next five years.

Secondly, the House of Lords must be a strong constitutional anchor. I shall concentrate for a moment on the House of Lords, because I wish to put down a marker that I believe will be acknowledged by many of my right hon. and hon. Friends. It is unacceptable for this Government—however large their majority—or any other to tinker with the House of Lords and abolish the voting rights of hereditary peers until they have thought out, canvassed, consulted on and advanced their proposals for what should happen to the second Chamber as a whole.

A feature of that second Chamber—whatever its political make-up—must be that its Members are substantially independent. That independence may come by way of appointment for life, but if we appoint too large a proportion of the second Chamber, we will give too much patronage to the Prime Minister of the day.

Independence may come by way of election. I think that there is a great deal to be said for looking to proportional representation to elect a part of the second Chamber. People who are so elected should serve for a lengthy period—perhaps six or nine years on a rolling system—so that they exercise substantial personal independence.

Another feature of the second Chamber should be that it represents the great interests of the land. That role is fulfilled in part at present by the Law Lords and the bishops, who represent the law and the Church, which are two great interests. One might consider other interests, such as industry or the trade unions, and such representation would provide a constitutional anchor.

I hope that the Government will consider with an open mind the fact that hereditary peers have a great deal of skill—although that is receding in some ways—and a great deal to offer. I think that we should consider allowing hereditary peers to elect a proportion of their number, as the Scottish hereditary peers used to. In that way they could continue to make a valuable contribution to the second Chamber.

I return to why I believe passionately in the importance of first past the post for this Chamber. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) said, first past the post enables the voters' choice to be reflected in the Government. It means that the most popular party—it may not have 50 per cent. of the vote; it seldom does—always forms the Government. It means also that the most popular candidate in any individual constituency is always elected as the Member of Parliament.

A great fallacy that has been exposed during the debate is the idea that alternative votes have equal value in an alternative voting system. A great difficulty is that the second, third, fourth or even fifth choice under an alternative voting system is given the same strength as the first. That simply is not fair; indeed, it is purely an intellectual concept to suggest that it is. As has been effectively stated many times, proportional representation gives disproportionate power to smaller parties. Those points have been well made in relation to Israel, Italy, France and New Zealand, and I support them strongly.

I agree with my right hon. Friends the Members for Suffolk, Coastal and for Fareham that a first-past-the-post system forces any party that wants to form the next Government to be a broad church, to cover the entire political spectrum and to be ready to represent and unite on points of view to provide a coherent Government for the next five years.

My final point is the strong constituency link. It may be possible to achieve it through some proportional representation methods, but it would not be as effective. Even with PR, Members would not necessarily be elected by a majority of people for whom they were the first choice, but Members of Parliament are none the less elected to represent all their constituents. I am sure that hon. Members do not take party matters into account when people come to them for help; we represent our constituency and do our best for it. Over our parliamentary careers, we shall have to stand out firmly against our party in the interests of our constituents on a number of occasions. That is what we should do.

We are looking to a reform of Parliament as a whole, involving both Chambers. The Government should consider the reform of the House of Lords much more

[Sir Nicholas Lyell]

broadly, but I was deeply encouraged by the attitude of the Home Secretary, who recognised the value of the first-past-the-post system. I hope that, with or without a referendum, that is what we shall stay with.

7.51 pm

Dr. Tony Wright (Cannock Chase): As I listened to hon. Members' speeches, all of them excellent, I asked myself, "Why we are debating electoral reform now?" Is it because of the efforts of those in my party who have promoted the cause, the efforts of those in the Liberal Democrat party who have promoted the cause over the years or the campaigning efforts of outside organisations? Although they played a part, we are having the debate because of none of them. The architect of the debate and of the constitutional reform programme is the Conservative party.

While listening to the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram), I felt strongly that Mrs. Thatcher was the real architect of constitutional reform. Until people realised what could be done by an Executive elected by a minority of the electorate and prepared to sweep away the conventional restraints that were supposed to have hemmed Governments in, no one could get a hearing in my party or in the country for the arguments that are producing the programmes that we are carrying out. Conservative Members must reflect on that and, whether they like it or not, regard themselves as the great architects.

Sir Peter Lloyd: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Wright: I should like to, but, with only 10 minutes in which to speak, I cannot.

As we return to it, this issue is the for our generation. In 1908, exactly 90 years ago, a royal commission on electoral systems recommended the alternative vote. A few years later, the first Speaker's conference recommended PR. We do not have the records so we cannot be absolutely sure, but it is believed that the Conservative membership supported PR as a quid pro quo for their toleration of the wider extension of the franchise in 1918. There is a history to all this.

Rational argument gets mixed up with arguments of party advantage. What unites the two main parties is an ability to tease the Liberals. When they were in power and had a chance to do things, what did Gladstone, Asquith and Lloyd George do? They had nothing to do with PR. When the moment was there for them to move on the issue, they did nothing. The choice is for our generation: this is the moment of truth for electoral reformers, because, until now, people could favour electoral reform in a vague, amorphous, unexamined way, and were not pressed on the details of reform proposals. They were generally in favour of something different from the existing system.

We have arrived at the point of choice. A commission has been charged with establishing the details of an alternative on which we shall have to choose. That is a challenge for people in my party—and for the Liberal Democrats, although I hear from certain quarters that they are about to funk it, that they will go for purism and that, if the moment of real change comes, they will move in a different direction. We shall see, but what a missed opportunity that would be.

Mr. Grieve: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Wright: I am afraid that I cannot.

We know that there is no perfect system. I should add, because the point has come up variously, that foreign examples tend to be misleading and generally unhelpful, but we are being asked to find a system that retains the major merits of first past the post while removing the major disadvantages. That challenge has been given to the Jenkins commission. We have to have the argument freshly; we cannot rehearse arguments that we have had year in, year out, because, finally, we must undertake detailed consideration and come to a detailed choice. Can we retain a constituency link, the merits of which have been well advertised in the debate, with more fairness and more proportionality? It is a tribute to the Government that, having been elected by a landslide, they have moved to put the issue on the table and reach a conclusion.

I confess that, to an extent, I have changed my mind over the years. I was a fundamentalist: 10 years ago, I would have signed up to any sort of electoral change, simply to break what I thought was the tyranny of a minority pretending to be a majority and using the resources of our present political system to do it. People asked, "How can a Government do this kind of thing?" The only answer was to change a system that could produce such consequences.

I had not anticipated that a Government could be elected under it who would move to put into place a series of checks and balances that would reform the political system. I had thought that such reform would come only when we had put the trigger mechanism in place, so we must now have the argument in a different way. We must be absolutely sure that we are going for reform not simply to break the system wide open, but because we believe that the reform we propose has the merits to win the argument against first past the post.

I do not want a system that is simply more proportional, as some people do. Although I realise its attractions, I do not even want a system that would dish the Tories for ever more and establish a great progressive coalition that would rule into eternity. I should regard that as an acceptable by-product of a reform process, but it should not be the reason for it. I am much more influenced by other considerations. Would reform of a kind that would solve the riddle that we have given Jenkins to consider do something to strengthen, renew and revitalise our democracy? Could it give us greater civic energy? Could it encourage people to participate more? Could it make them think that their votes count? In an age when parties are becoming ever more disciplined, and when the area of debate is being closed down, would it enable more voices to be heard and more real debate to take place? We desperately need that.

We live in an age when any expression of opinion inside a party is immediately interpreted as a putative split. That is the atrophy of democracy and debate, and it is the end of real scrutiny and accountability. It would interest me greatly if we could solve that problem through a reform of the system.

Lord Jenkins carries a huge responsibility. He has been given the task of solving this great riddle by proposing a British system devised to suit British conditions that can

be voted on by the British people. That is the fresh, new task. This is the moment when the electoral reform argument moves away from the anoraks and the zealots and becomes a public argument that will cut across normal party divides. Even the process of decision, referendum and argument will contribute towards the renewal of our democracy.

8.1 pm

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon): There is no such thing as a right or a wrong electoral system—merely a system that is appropriate to national circumstances and a product of a country's historical development. All electoral systems are, to some extent, a form of manipulation. We can obtain the political result we want by the electoral system we institute at the level of primary democracy.

A generation ago, the French diagnosed their problem as arising from a weak Executive and fractional parties. They chose to vest their democracy in a presidential and bureaucratic system rather than in a parliamentary system. That produces a weak Parliament with delegated votes, in which Ministers cannot sit, which is counter-balanced by a strong local democracy—much stronger than ours. The French system corresponds to their historical experience. When the French briefly changed it to a proportional representation system and Mr. Le Pen's party emerged as a national threat, it was amazing how rapidly they reverted to their two-tier, first-past-the-post system.

If we are in the business of healing—to use a glib word—and want all sections of the community to be represented so that no one feels excluded, we should choose the single transferable vote methodology, because then everyone can feel that they have a stake. The priority is not decisive action, but inclusiveness, which is why that system has been selected for Northern Ireland: it blurs rather than crystallises the divisions.

A country that has not experienced a long period of territorial integrity may want continuity and checks against a majority tyranny and may look to the German system, which has a strongly federal constitution and a large amount of devolved power. The German system lays emphasis on the continuity of the political process, but what we in this country would find offensive is the fact that a small party needs only 5 per cent. of the vote to get over the barrier and has a pre-emptive right over certain political positions under the constitution.

Scotland and Wales will have the additional member system. We will have an amazingly diverse flora of electoral systems in the United Kingdom: almost every system that has ever been tried will be on offer.

It is not true that proportional systems cannot generate radical change when that is necessary, although they may not be inherently good at it. I note what has been said about Italy's hybrid system. The economic change needed to qualify for the single currency has been demonstrably achievable; it will be interesting to see whether it is sustainable. Everyone must ask themselves such questions in the present scenario.

The United Kingdom has a system that has evolved over time. There has been no doubt about this country's territorial integrity for a millennium or more. We have no history of social unrest: there is no fear of social unrest or challenge to the political system. We have a long tradition of civic peace, and a great premium is placed on getting things done. Even though we elect a Government with less than a majority of the vote and Members of Parliament are elected with less than 50 per cent. of the vote, that is not challenged. People accept that that is the system: sometimes they win and sometimes they lose—fair do's.

Our first-past-the-post system depends on two factors. First, all the parties are coalitions. Even though the political system in Britain crystallises the difference, what happens outside the Chamber in the informal contacts among Members represents a consensual overlay to a system that is based on differentiation. Secondly, we have a bicameral system, and the role of the other House in the political process cannot be divorced from the debate, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Sir N. Lyell) said.

The essential question is whether we want a Parliament—and hence a Government—that represents positive choice, or a system of least offence. Is our system pushing towards consensus, however laboured, or are we looking for a system that crystallises divisions? Day after day, the House votes at 10 o'clock; we crystallise the divisions; the winner takes all.

We face substantial variety and change. We have mentioned Northern Ireland, the additional member system in Scotland and Wales, the list system with a single vote for the European Parliament, and the amazing variety of systems in local government with single or multi-member constituencies and with elections either of all the councillors or a third of them. It is interesting that the Labour Government, who want to ensure that no council leader can sleep happily and quietly in his bed at night with too great a majority, have not introduced proportional representation for local government, which would be the logical way to get what they seem to want. We also have referendums.

We have a significant diffusion of power away from the traditional power exercised in Parliament. There is a diffusion of power regionally or nationally, depending on how one defines the units of the United Kingdom. The House is also aware of a shift of competence towards the European institutions because of our membership of the European Union and the problems of accountability that that poses. Have circumstances changed so significantly in the light of the contradictory shifts that are already taking place that we should add a further shift by introducing a system that may enfeeble the ability of the central Executive? Until it can be shown that there has been a fundamental shift and that an articulate case has been made for changing from an evolved system—there is no point pretending that a deliberate choice has been made, as a great deal in politics has happened by accident—I shall not be persuaded that we should reform the system, particularly given the current constitutional turbulence.

The arguments are familiar. There is the difficulty of the Government-building process following an election in which there is no decisive result. People should feel that they are represented in that process. Sometimes that can take months. Indeed, in countries such as Holland, politicians may not be necessary, given that the bureaucracy copes well in the months that it sometimes takes to build a Government. That may be the happiest period in a country's history.

[Mr. David Curry]

There is the danger of election by the apparatchiks rather than by the people under the list system that is being used for the European Parliament elections. There is the problem—mentioned by my right hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor)—of Members of Parliament with different qualities, as it were. I am talking about a lack of equivalence of function. We already see that in relation to Scottish Members, and we would see it again in a system that depended on the election of Members of Parliament on a constituency basis in parallel with that of Members drawn from a central list, without any such constituency responsibility.

It is important to recognise that, at one minute to seven on election day, we are all equal. I simply do not accept the idea that there is an inherent unfairness in that. When I go to the first poll just before 7 am, I have zero votes and everyone else has zero votes. Whoever ends up with one vote more than anyone else will win, on an entirely fair basis.

What does the Prime Minister seek? I think he knows that, some day, the Labour old guard will say, "We did not join the Labour party for this sort of budgetary rigour. We did not join the Labour party to embrace capitalism—still less to promote it—or to see class sizes and hospital waiting lists increase, or to endorse privatisation. We joined the Labour party because of its socialist policy." I think the Prime Minister fears that there may be a time when he will need to be able to change things in order to continue that non-socialist policy.

It may be that Lord Jenkins has been charged with bringing about the final demise of socialism in this country. If so, there may be at least one argument in the commission's favour.

8.10 pm

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead): It is difficult to follow the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) and my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase (Dr. Wright), who, in their different ways, were very eloquent. I shall begin by shooting myself in the foot, and congratulating the Opposition on their choice of topic: it has led to a good-humoured, rational and constructive debate, which will probably provide evidence that Lord Jenkins will be able to use.

Commendably, the debate has not been particularly fundamentalist. I am tired of hearing devotees of a method of election drawing attention to the difficulties involved in all the other methods, and devotees of a different method doing the same in a different way. As the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon made clear, in a sense such matters arise from historical causes: decisions must sometimes be made not just on the basis of the electoral systems available to us.

In fact, every electoral system is fundamentally paradoxical and fundamentally flawed. As many hon. Members will know, economic literature includes something called the Arrow paradox—named after Kenneth Arrow. It states that, if there is a choice of A, B or C, a population often prefer A to B and B to C but, alas, C to A. In Arrow's terminology, preferences are non-transitive once there are more than two options. That tempts one to think that we would all be all right if only we got rid of the Liberals: when there is a binary system of choice, at least Arrow's paradox is removed.

A long time ago, I read an article in a philosophy journal. When I looked for it in the House of Commons Library, I discovered to my horror that not every philosophy journal of distinction was held there. I hope that the authorities will note the omission, and will stock them all in future. The article in question was written by a woman called Professor Anscombe at Cambridge, who had come up with the following system.

Let us suppose that there is a small-scale democracy, involving only 11 people. Let us also suppose that there is a perfect democracy, in which everyone votes on everything: in this instance, there would be 11 issues on which to vote. That sounds about as pure a democracy as could be achieved, but, in fact, the majority could be in the minority the majority of the time. So there is an Anscombe paradox even when there are no Liberals!

I suppose that we must think in terms of the best bad system that we are trying to select. Churchill said that democracy was the best bad system, but we are trying to choose a form of democracy. Many persuasive speakers have argued that our present system is admirable in many ways, and has many virtues, but—I do not entirely agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase in this connection—today's debate was initiated not just by the former Member of Parliament for Finchley, but by the sense of outrage felt by many people about the outcome of certain elections.

Although I know that all systems are paradoxical, I could not regard it as sensible when European elections returned no Liberal Members whatever. That strikes me as a step too far. Historically, societies sometimes end up with the awareness that a particular system is leading to severe problems that they wish to address.

I was an unsuccessful candidate in the European election of 1989, as in so many others. Being a Labour candidate in Hertfordshire was not guaranteed to secure electoral success, until the happy date of 1 May 1997. In that European election, the Green party received an extremely large vote, and everyone asked why there was no way in which that vote could be translated into at least some form of representation. The party had received 14.99 per cent. of the vote, which was also a paradox. It had argued for a threshold system of proportional representation; I suggested, rather cheekily, that a 15 per cent. threshold would still have left it about 25 votes short.

We have built up a perception that something needs to be done, but I do not think that we are terribly clear about what needs to be done. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase that we need an evolutionary change, enabling us to establish within some new system—but not too new—many of the virtues of our old system, while at least responding to some of the pressures on that system that have made so many people consider it unfair, not remotely for party political or parochial reasons.

I think that, on the whole, the present Government are trying—if I may use the "in" word—to be ethical. They are trying, knowing the difficulties, to deal with a deficiency in a way that most people will consider right. I hope that, in the end, the Jenkins commission will give us a choice between first past the post and a system that, while being very like it, will build in a little additional proportionality.

8.18 pm

Mr. David Maclean (Penrith and The Border): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Hemel Hempstead (Mr. McWalter). His was one of a number of erudite speeches that we have heard today. It is a while since I have heard a debate in which so many hon. Members on both sides of the House have made such knowledgeable speeches; it would be a great shame if I broke that track record.

I want to make only a few simple points, and I hope that I shall be able to so well within the 10-minute limit. I do not wish to comment on all the alternative systems or to make a passionate plea for first past the post—although I firmly support that system, for most of the reasons advanced by hon. Members on both sides of the House. The motion, which I support, states that the commission is not as independent as the Government wish it to seem. The Home Secretary, who is a reasonable man, said that it is a "relatively independent" commission. The Government amendment states that it is an "Independent Commission".

We have said that the commission should investigate the first-past-the-post system and present the pros and cons of that and of the alternative. Any commission that calls itself and is said by the Government to be independent must at least examine the present system. The Home Secretary has said that we misunderstand the purposes, that the status quo will be offered on the ballot paper. He has said that the "relatively independent" commission, which consists of those who passionately support an alternative, will merely recommend the best alternative to the status quo. That is a reasonable argument, and in one of my rare moments in the House I shall try to be as reasonable as the Home Secretary.

If the Government's defence is that they have appointed a partial commission to present an alternative to the present voting system so that both systems—one from the commission and the status quo—can be put to the electorate, it is incumbent on them or on a body of equal status to the independent commission to advocate the pros and cons of first past the post.

When the Jenkins commission reports, it will be trailed for a few days. It will dominate the "Today" programme and the national news. The message will not be that the first-past-the-post system and the commission's alternative are equally good. The report will be presented as if the commission has found the holy grail—a system that is much better than first past the post. The news media will not view the commission as partial. It will be said that the independent commission of the great and the good has found a system that will cure all Britain's ills.

Some Labour Members have been driven to PR because of a dislike of Lady Thatcher. However, I shall not go down that route. The Jenkins commission report will have an unstoppable momentum. Perhaps the Government and the Prime Minister are determined that that should happen. I was reassured to find that that is not what the Home Secretary wants. I am inclined to take the Home Secretary at his word because, unfortunately, he is too reasonable. I might take a greater interest in Home Office affairs if the Home Secretary were not such a reasonable man. I get no pleasure from attacking him.

The Home Secretary must recognise the force of my argument. If he wants the first-past-the-post system to be given equal treatment, respect and consideration by voters he will agree that the Government will have to do more than merely say, "Oh, well, the arguments are well known. The electorate have used the current system for years and we do not need to explain much about it." If the Government propose to rely for their defence on the propositions that we do not understand the objectives, that they had always intended to have first past the post in the referendum, and that the commission is merely trying to find an alternative, they must make sure that there is equal funding or no funding. They must also ensure that the arguments for the current system are fairly put. When the Jenkins commission has reported, that could mean setting up a commission drawn from people in all parties to look at the referendum.

In general, I do not support referendums and I shall support one on this issue only if the Government assure us that it will be different from their referendums so far. In those, the question and the timing were determined by the Government and they made the arguments and provided the funding. That happened in Scotland, but perhaps I cannot quibble with that because it was in Labour's manifesto. The question in the referendum must not be determined by the Government alone at a time of their choosing; they must consult other parties.

It has been said that the previous Government made some changes to the Representation of the People Act 1989 without consulting other parties. I am not aware of that happening, and I think that on most occasions we did consult other parties. In my last couple of years in the Home Office, the shadow Home Secretary, now the Home Secretary, was called in by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) for consultation on potential changes to that Act. I cannot remember whether we went ahead with changes, but we consulted. I cannot imagine my noble Friend Lord Hurd of Westwell, when he was Home Secretary, making changes to the Representation of the People Act without consulting other parties.

The Jenkins commission intends to present an alternative system and it will not consider first past the post. Before the questions for the referendum are decided, all parties in the House should be consulted so that there can be no question of the issue becoming a party political matter—which it will become if the Government determine the question, the timing and which system is to receive Government propaganda. I hope that the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Knowsley, North and Sefton, East (Mr. Howarth), who is also a reasonable man, will communicate my views to the Home Secretary. I also hope that, in his winding-up speech, he will say that the Government will treat equally the results of the Jenkins commission and the current electoral system to ensure that people get a genuine and fair choice. There must be no unfair propaganda from any quarter.

8.27 pm

Mr. Hugh Bayley (City of York): The right hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean) seems to make the mistake that the only document put before the people in the referendum will be the Jenkins commission report. If there is a referendum, a Bill will be presented, and all matters, including the two questions asking people whether they plump for first past the post or for the system recommended by the commission will have equal airing in the House, and no doubt during the referendum campaign.

[Mr. Hugh Bayley]

Many hon. Members tonight have reinforced the myth that, although the current voting system may not be perfect, it has been honed over the centuries, and is the best that human intelligence can devise. However, that is not borne out in emerging democracies. After the fall of the Berlin wall, commissions in central and eastern Europe investigated electoral systems for their new democracies. They considered first past the post, but not one of them opted for it. When South Africa was building towards its first all-race, all-people election, it did not go for our system, but for a system of PR. Those systems have brought substantial benefits to those countries.

I have here an 1837 first edition of the first book written by Charles Dickens, "The Pickwick Papers", in which he describes—among other things—the Eatanswill by-election, and the drunkenness, bribery and debauchery of a by-election in a rotten borough before the great Reform Act. Many things have changed since then—women and working-class people have the vote—but the one thing which has not changed is the electoral system. The system before the great Reform Act was the first-past-the-post system, which was designed for a particular job: to deal with an electorate of a few hundred people who were plumping for one squire or another.

It was not a system designed for a modern, literate and intelligent democracy. That is why countries which have developed their democratic institutions since the emergence of mass literacy have not adopted a historical anachronism; first past the post is not a 19th-century Dickensian voting system, but an 18th-century system, developed in the United States and Britain in pre-democratic times.

There is a wonderful illustration in the book of the debauchery at Eatanswill—I wish the *Official Report* could reproduce it. Perhaps it can be reproduced as a tribute to Charles Dickens, who was an official reporter of this House before Hansard won the franchise.

The right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) argued that there is a broad correlation between the votes cast for the various parties and their years in power. That is simply not the case. I am 46 years old. During my lifetime, there have been seven years of Labour government with a clear, working majority; five years of Labour government with a small majority, which had to be bolstered by deals with other parties, or with no majority at all; and 34 years of Conservative rule. For 75 per cent. of my life, there has been a Conservative Government, but even the Conservatives would not claim that they have had the support of 75 per cent. of the electorate. At no time in my lifetime have they achieved the support of even 50 per cent. of the electorate.

It is easy to see why the Conservatives support the present system—it is one under which they do extremely well. When they support it, they are putting their party interest before the national interest. It is also easy to see why the Liberal Democrats want change; they do exceptionally badly under the first-past-the-post system. They are arguing, at least in part, out of self-interest.

The fact that, in my lifetime, the Liberal Democrats have had the support of about 20 per cent. of the electorate—rather less when I was a child, but slightly more in the 1980s—pinpoints the fallacy of the argument of the right hon. Member for Devizes. If there was a broad proportionality between votes and years in power, the Liberal Democrats and its predecessors would have been in power for a quarter of my lifetime. They have been nowhere near power at any time in my lifetime.

The fact that there is the Labour party is willing to put before the people the possibility of change is very new. A party which is a beneficiary of the two-party system is nevertheless prepared to contemplate change. That is a reflection of the fact that we have a Labour Government who are prepared to contemplate change over wide parts of the constitution. It would be extraordinary if we were prepared to modernise our constitution in relation to the other place, the government of Scotland and Wales, human rights and freedom of information, but stuck rigidly to an 18th-century electoral system for this House.

It has been argued that first past the post gives strong government. After 18 years of Conservative government, based on slightly over 40 per cent. of the vote—about one third of the electorate, as not all electors vote—I have had strong government up to my neck. If we had had a proportional system, the poll tax would not have been enacted by this Chamber. There would have been a moderating and restraining influence, and the decision of this House would have been a better reflection of the will of the people.

First past the post may give strong government, but it does not give effective government; it is not good for the prosperity of the British people. As I pointed out earlier, in average growth rate over 35 years among the current member states of the EU, the United Kingdom is 14th out of 15. If proportional representation systems necessarily led to weak and ineffective government, 13 out of the 15 EU member states—all of which use proportional systems—would not have achieved a better economic performance than the UK.

In terms of gross domestic product per capita—the average income in each of those 15 states—Britain came fifth out of the 15 in 1962. We are now 11th. We have been leapfrogged by Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, Finland, Austria and Italy; all of which have proportional representation systems.

Back in the 19th century, the great Liberal radical John Stuart Mill drew up plans for changing the electoral system; plans which have been reflected, even though hon. Members may not have acknowledged it, in many of the speeches today. He drew up proposals for proportional representation because he was afraid that universal suffrage would create what he called the "tyranny of a majority"—that the poor would keep the educated middle and upper classes out of power for ever. Under first past the post, however, we have had a tyranny of a minority, because, throughout my lifetime, we have never had a Government supported by the majority of the British people.

8.36 pm

Mr. Robert Syms (Poole): The hon. Member for City of York (Mr. Bayley) made some good points, but the key point is that our system has evolved over many decades. It is a tried and tested system, which is widely accepted. There has been electoral reform, but it has been to widen the franchise, to give votes to women and to reduce the degree of corruption which once existed and was alluded to in the novel by Dickens. The system is simple, straightforward and transparent.

We have heard about the various attempts at electoral reform, but none has survived the test of the first-past-the-post system. Even enthusiasts for change can often draw back when they look at the consequences. In 1918, the then coalition Government proposed to change the system. This House voted three times, by ever-bigger majorities, against change, as the consequences sunk in.

The system is effective and delivers changes in government. The electors can go out and feel that they are taking part in a process of change. People can vote on a Thursday; by 2 o'clock in the morning, there is an indication of what is happening; by 4 o'clock, the Government have a majority; by the following day, the Jaguars are sweeping into Buckingham Palace, a new Government are formed, and the furniture vans have turned up to take the former incumbent away. That is a good thing. It allows the electors to deliver decisive change. It delivers a majority Government, who must then carry out their pledges and their manifesto.

All political parties are effectively coalitions. However, under our system, a coalition is formed before a general election, and political parties form around a platform or manifesto which is offered to the public. Under proportional representation systems, that process occurs after the election, encouraging a fragmented political system, in which political parties negotiate. We have heard a great deal in this debate about New Zealand, which took eight weeks to form a Government. That Government was formed around a 68-page negotiated document, which bore no relation to what had happened before the election.

In the general election, the United Kingdom Government stood for election on a manifesto. Undoubtedly they will do their best to implement that manifesto. At the end of four or five years, people will form a judgment on how well the Government have done, and on whether they honoured what the electorate perceived to be their pledges. I think that that is a rather good system, which entails either sacking or backing people. Our electoral system has much to commend it.

Under our system, individuals can vote for an individual they trust, who happens to be a member of a political party. Our system allows a great deal of discretion in what electors can do in constituencies. Usually, although Conservatives will vote Conservative and Labour supporters will vote Labour, some personal voting is possible in constituencies. We have seen many examples of such voting. Quite often, Liberal Democrats are recipients of the results of personal voting, when hon. Members have been elected at by-elections after working specific constituencies.

Under our system, we can vote for individuals who represent a geographical area, for which they are responsible. Even when someone represents a so-called "safe" seat—which, in this day and age, is a very difficult thing to define—he or she will be called to account by the constituency party if he or she does not do the job, even if the electors are not able directly to call their representative to account.

The electorate's expectations of an hon. Member are very high. What were the most frequently asked questions of most hon. Members during the selection process? They were, "Will you live in the constituency? Will you be here? Will you be accessible and available?" A critical point for local people is the ability to feel that their Member is a part of the local community. Our system promotes that connection.

Extremists have been mentioned in this debate. It is true that, when PR was introduced in France, the Front National received representation. The Front National has consistently done better in polls—even after PR was abolished—because of the platform and credibility as a respectable party that that representation gave it. In current polls in France, the Front National does as well as the UVF, with each receiving about 20 per cent. of the vote. The Front National is still a factor in the European Parliament, and it still has much representation on regional councils.

The House may well remember the recent hoo-hah over whether centre-right regional government in France should accept support from the Front National in taking over regional administrations, rather than allowing socialist administrations to be elected. The episode lifted the Front National, giving it a credibility and profile that it has enjoyed ever since.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart) made a very good point about facing down someone who may have fascist or deeply offensive views. However, being elected to a Chamber such as ours gives a person a veneer of respectability and a platform that, in some instances, could be quite dangerous. The first-past-the-post system presents some quite high thresholds; the fact that communists, Trotskyites, fascists and some others have not managed to get through that threshold is a rather good thing.

The Liberal Democrats have always been very honest. They have always been in favour of a single transferable vote system in multi-member constituencies, except where there are natural geographical boundaries—which, one may not be surprised to hear, includes the Isle of Wight, Orkney and Shetland, and several other such areas. That has consistently been their policy.

In elections in southern Ireland, a majority is not necessary to form a Government. Fianna Fail, with 46 or 47 per cent. of the vote, can form a majority, although it does not often do so. Nevertheless, it is a practical possibility under that system.

The single transferable vote system has its benefits in small countries. Malta, for example, uses the STV system. However, given the size of our country, I do not think that the system would be especially beneficial here. The system also tends to lead to parish-pump politics. Moreover, given the size of constituency that would be necessary in the United Kingdom, with each comprising about half a million electors, I do not think that the system would be a practical proposition.

The STV system would also lead to a practice that is completely against the British tradition: Conservatives standing against Conservatives; Labour candidates standing against other Labour members; and Liberal Democrats standing against other Liberal Democrats. Such a system would cause substantial problems in party discipline.

I shall not deal now with list systems. I think that most hon. Members—having voted for such a system for European elections—would not think that a list system was acceptable for elections to the House, simply because of its bizarre aspects.

[Mr. Robert Syms]

The additional vote system has been touted—today, for example—as a third way. That system was introduced in Australia because the Country party wanted it, so that that party and the Liberals could essentially have a run-off in some seats—so that only one of those parties could run against the Labour party, which is the largest party in Australia.

AV has been a great detriment to the Australian Labour party, resulting in a system in which the second, third or fourth-preference votes of the losing or weakest candidates could well cancel out the first-preference votes of a stronger candidate. The system does not differentiate by allowing for weighted voting. One candidate may receive 20,000 votes, and two other candidates may receive 10,000. If 10,000 votes go to the additional candidate, it will wipe out the candidate with 20,000 first-preference votes. The system assumes that every vote is equal, whether it is a second, third or fourth-preference vote.

An argument can be made for transferring votes, but there should be weighting—by saying that someone's second-preference votes are worth only half of their first-preference votes, and by making third-preference votes a suitable percentage of first-preference votes. However, cancelling out someone's first-preference votes by using the lower-preference votes of a losing candidate is not a feature of a sound system.

Additional vote systems also institutionalise tactical voting. In the recent Australian election, it is no accident that the Australian Labour party had eight bells knocked out of it by the AV system, which delivered a landslide. Although Labour polled 37 per cent. of the vote, it received substantially fewer seats because of the AV system. AV is less proportionate than the first-past-the-post system. Therefore, if proportionality has to be a measure of an electoral system—which I think that it has to be—the first-past-the-post system would be acceptable for the United Kingdom.

Our system has served us well. The geographical link is very important. We have delivered effective government, which allows people to hold the Government to account. Accountability is very important to our political system. Although proportional representation may have advantages for other nations, every nation has to look to its own traditions, history and way of doing things. Our system has evolved and done well in meeting the test of time. As a nation, we would be foolish to ditch it.

The one comment by the Home Secretary with which I can agree is that, unlike New Zealand—where the choice is between—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. Time is up.

8.47 pm

Mr. Alan Hurst (Braintree): I am very pleased to be called to speak in this debate, which has enormously increased my knowledge. We have heard philosophical, literary and historical speeches. Had an hon. Member spoken on the d'Hondt system, I would know a lot more about arithmetic than I probably do now.

What surprises me—as a quite firm opponent of proportional representation—is the wording of the Opposition motion. I think that the Opposition have misunderstood the purpose of the Government's policy in establishing the Jenkins commission. The purpose was not to establish a judicial inquiry to determine what learned men consider to be the best electoral system—which would be rather like swearing in an American jury. It would be almost impossible to find someone who had not some predisposition to one system or another. Every commissioner would have to be asked, "Are you now, or have you ever been, a member of the Liberal party?" To do so would be to disqualify any independent person from sitting on such a commission.

The Jenkins commission was not supposed to be an independent commission—it was established to determine the best proportional system. I welcome that task, and I should welcome it if the commission finds the best proportional system. It is right and proper that the British people should have the choice between the best proportional system and our current system.

Arguments about proportional representation have been knocking around for a long time. I first learned about it from Edith Lakeman, whom I am sure Liberal Democrat Members know well. She was the high priestess of proportional representation. She could not be called an independent commission. She had firm views on the subject, but her book has remained the bible for many years for those venturing into the intricacies of different electoral systems.

I glanced through Edith Lakeman's book today for the first time in many years. I was reminded that first past the post is only a recent introduction in this country. We used to elect the first two past the post, because most elections, in counties and boroughs, were for double member seats.

In the Victorian age, we dabbled in proportional systems. Birmingham, which has some firm advocates of proportional representation now, had an experiment in the Limited Vote in the Victorian period. We had some exotic systems, according to the book. A voter might have two votes, but three people were elected. They had to choose carefully or they would get it wrong. We even went further than that. I was reminded for the first time in 30 years of London school board elections in the 19th century, and the cumulative vote. There were six members to be elected, and voters had six votes to cast. They could cast them all for their favoured candidate, but they had to calculate carefully how to cast the votes to maximum party advantage. We have also had the single transferable vote on the mainland of this country as well as in Northern Ireland. It was used for the university seats between 1918 and 1950.

Significantly, none of the systems lasted very long—about 30 years at most, I think. They did not prove popular where they were introduced.

I am concerned about the pessimism of Conservative Members. The debate should be taken to the British people so that they can argue about it and discuss it. I do not believe that people talk of nothing but proportional representation in the pubs of Coggeshall and Kelveden in my constituency. I suspect that they never talk about it. It might be good if the issues were debated openly. They have been swept under the carpet.

The proportional representationists have had the better of the argument in many ways because they use the phrase "electoral reform", which implies that a new system would be better than what we have. I am surprised that Conservative Members use the phrase. It would be better

to talk about electoral alteration or electoral change, because talking about electoral reform almost prejudges the issue before the debate has begun.

We should talk about whether to have electoral change. Let us test our system against the best that Lord Jenkins can come up with. I have little doubt that when the issues are put before the British people, they will decide that our present system provides the right balance. The constituency link is particularly important. I find it difficult to remember which constituencies Members represent, and I have to make notes about them. It would be far more difficult if I had to remember their number and refer to the hon. No. 6 from East Anglia—or was it the hon. No. 17 from the West Country? We might not have the same esteem for right hon. No. 4 because he was not No. 1. The British people, with their robust common sense, will come to the right conclusion.

I shall vote firmly against the motion and support the amendment. However, I look forward to campaigning in support of the retention of our present electoral system.

8.53 pm

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Braintree (Mr. Hurst). I can think of no greater delight than sharing a platform with him in the coming referendum campaign, arguing the case for the current electoral arrangements. I shall not comment further on his speech except to pay him a compliment. After a brief meeting with him, my wife said that he was far too nice to be a socialist.

That brings me to the comments of the hon. Member for Hemel Hempstead (Mr. McWalter), who, after a typically incisive, thoughtful and moderate contribution, declared that the principal argument in favour of electoral change—I take the point of the hon. Member for Braintree on that phrase—was that "something must be done". If that is the best argument for changing a time-honoured system that is well established, widely understood and highly effective, it is a poor show indeed, as I am sure the hon. Gentleman will admit.

I am disappointed that the hon. Member for City of York (Mr. Bayley), has left the Chamber, after attributing the difference between our growth rate and that of our European neighbours to the electoral system. We may as well relate the price of peas or England's fortunes in the world cup over the decades to the electoral system as talk about its direct correlation with the growth records of comparable—or non-comparable—economies.

Why change a system that is working well? That might be a sufficient contribution to the debate, but hon. Members will be pleased—perhaps some will be disappointed—to hear that I do not intend to stop there.

The debate must be seen in the context of the wider arguments about constitutional reform. Perhaps it is enough to say that the zeal of an unreasoning radical is just as unattractive as the extremism of a bigot, and certainly more dangerous than the caution of a conservative or even the obstinacy of a reactionary. I wonder whether what is being proposed is change for the sake of change. Informed by Edmund Burke, Conservatives understand that good government relies to an extent on resisting change unless there is a proven case for its efficacy.

There is no proven case for the efficacy of fundamental electoral change. It could be resisted on that ground alone. Having said that, we have had a range of electoral reform over the years. The system for nominating people, the conduct of elections, the process of elections and the nature of the election campaigns have changed repeatedly over the centuries, contrary to the assertion—in an earlier, less historically accurate, contribution—that the system had remained unchanged since the 17th century.

Proportional representation is used as shorthand for electoral reform, and the debate has therefore rightly focused on that subject. PR presents two main threats. The first is the creation of a confused, muddied system that will leave the electorate feeling disfranchised through incomprehension. Some will say that that is patronising, and that of course people will understand how to cast many votes. However, in the case of the Scottish Parliament, information is to be deliberately withheld from the electorate. Their incomprehension is understandable, because they are not to be given the full facts under a closed list system. An open list system is scarcely better for breaking down the relationship between the choice of the electorate for the person elected.

The second threat is even more important. It is the breach in the relationship between the elector and the elected. Let me be clear about the theme that runs through both these dangers. The clarity of a system for electing representatives in which a group of individuals in a given area choose another individual who represents their interests and is accountable to them is crucial for good democracy.

Moreover, the bond that is established between a Member and his or her constituency is arguably increasing significantly. That point was well made by the Home Secretary and others. People expect a relationship—directly or by proxy—with their representative. My hon. Friend the Member for Poole (Mr. Syms) cited living in one's constituency as an example of that change. Lord Jenkins may well have traversed the country because he clearly saw his relationship with this place as more important than that with any constituency; that such matters were of less importance. That was certainly true of Disraeli and Gladstone, who represented many constituencies all over the country during their long parliamentary careers.

However, these days, the relationship between electors and the elected is critical. The sense of ownership of their representative that people rightly feel is for many the hub of democracy. That is people's link to the exercise of political power. In turn, Members feel a sense of pride and ownership, which we should value and cherish. That bond is sacred, and we cast it aside at our peril.

The theme that runs through both the threats that I have described is that electoral systems are not just about votes or how one chooses one's representative, but about the subsequent relationship between the representative and those who elect him or her. It is not enough to say that the debate is about the voting system; it is also about the nature of government and of democracy itself.

I could rehearse the standard arguments about minority parties, the dangers of extremism and the deals behind closed doors, but I shall not. I shall simply deal with two of the other points that have been raised in the debate. First, it is undoubtedly true that PR would lead to a more anodyne Parliament. The characters and people of independent mind, who are our best guarantors against excessive Executive powers, would find it very hard to be

[Mr. John Hayes]

elected if party apparatchiks had more power than electors in their constituencies. PR would remove such safeguards against the abuses of Executive power.

Secondly, there is significant evidence that PR does not deliver the goods in terms of direct proportionality. The Plant report compared electoral systems in a number of countries, including Britain, the United States of America and most European countries, and found that, using Professor Rose's criteria, which are widely acknowledged, our system was more proportional than, for example, the one in Spain, and that the United States, Britain and Japan have, for the most part, delivered proportionality in greater measure than is ever acknowledged by those who criticise our system—certainly by those in minority and fringe parties, such as the Liberal Democrats.

It is curious that human experience suggests that people do not always value things until they have lost them. One hon. Member spoke about what brand of Conservatism was on display in this debate. I make no bones about the fact that I am a romantic idealist. I lack any cynicism about the principle of representing people and their needs, articulating people's problems and taking up their causes. I put that idealism to one side to say this: in terms of practical government and on the criteria of the so-called independent commission—not our words but those in the amendment tabled in the name of the Prime Minister—our current system measures up pretty favourably. There is no better example than the 1997 general election. Surely no one would argue that, in general proportional terms, the will of the people was not meaningfully exercised. I end where I began: if it ain't broke, why fix it?

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I intend to call the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman to make his winding-up speech at about 9.20 pm. I have no power to insist, but I appeal to hon. Members to speak for five minutes each. If they do so, at least four Members will be called before the Front-Bench spokesmen. I know that some hon. Members have been present throughout the debate, and five-minute speeches would allow them at least to make some contribution.

9.2 pm

Mr. Alan Campbell (Tynemouth): I shall try to be brief. I welcome the progress that the Government have already made in setting up the Jenkins commission. I am surprised that its mere establishment seems to have thrown the Conservative party into panic. I am pleased that the Government have resisted the temptation simply to accept the system that delivered them so much power, and have been prepared not only to consider reform but make such early progress in fulfilling our manifesto commitment.

By the end of the Parliament, voters will face a potentially bewildering array of choices for a London mayor, a London authority, a Scottish Parliament and a Welsh assembly. I do not share the scepticism of the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major), who seems to doubt the capacity of voters to understand what is expected of them. After all, the electorate show a high level of sophistication every time they vote tactically to remove or to promote a particular candidate or party. They did so when they removed the right hon. Gentleman's Government. If we are to have different systems, however, there is a need to educate the public, preferably before they leave school, on how to cast their votes and on how important it is to do so.

There is no overriding reason why we should not have an array of different electoral systems. Their complexity would reflect the society in which we live and the jobs that we expect them to do. The choice of any electoral system depends on the criteria that the body to be elected is expected to meet. We have already gone through the criteria for testing any change, one of which is the link between a Member and a constituency. During the general election, 88 per cent. of electors in Tynemouth said that they wanted a strong link between the constituency and its Member, and they wanted an MP who lived in the constituency. Unfortunately, not all of them voted for me, but enough of them did. A second criterion is the need to reflect as much opinion as possible. Thirdly, we must reflect public opinion without being unduly influenced by minority parties.

I welcome the investigation of alternative systems, and I want the widest possible debate. However, I am not yet convinced that the present system does not meet the criteria as well as any. It provides a clear link between a Member and a constituency, produces a definitive result, and usually means that the most popular party is not at the mercy of minority parties. Perhaps above all, it gives voters a choice of Government or Prime Minister, rather than delegating that authority to Members of Parliament who can do deals.

I concur with some of the points made by supporters of the present system, but their arguments have been well rehearsed, and will no doubt be repeated during any campaign. The difference on the Labour side is that we support investigation of options and want to give people a real choice between the current system and an alternative. I look forward to the widest debate on that, because I am worried that candidates and Governments are elected with a minority vote, and I am interested in the effect that the supplementary vote would have in allowing the winner to claim at least 50 per cent. of the vote. Provided that such a system fulfilled the criteria that I have mentioned, I would not lose sleep over its introduction.

Turnout and participation are also important. If we want to improve turnout, we need an Opposition who are offering a positive alternative rather than simply saying no, I am not simply pointing the finger at the Conservatives, because we, too, had to learn that lesson during the 18 years of the previous Government. I hope that I was not the only person moved by the high turnout in Northern Ireland, particularly among young people who are traditionally alleged not to vote. They were given a positive alternative, and they voted for it.

I welcome the new Conservative Front-Bench spokesmen, in the hope that they will do better than the last lot at providing a positive alternative. Perhaps we should not expect too much. To paraphrase the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe), they have something of the day about them, but, for many of them, that day was yesterday.

We need to consider how elections are conducted. Why are crucial decisions made about government in 15 hours of an often wet Thursday, rather than over a worker- friendly or family-friendly weekend? Why is it so difficult to get postal or proxy votes? Our electoral system has stood the test of time, but that does not in itself guarantee that the system is successful or fair.

The Conservatives have often been at the forefront of those who have simply opposed change: Peel not wanting to open the door in 1832, and summoning up the prospect of not being able to close it; Disraeli not wanting to make a leap in the dark. Those fears proved baseless, which is why, from time to time, we have to look at the British constitution to examine and modernise it. Now is such a time.

9.9 pm

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): Every electoral system has its imperfections, and the principal imperfection of the first-past-the-post system is that it is proportional only in a fairly broad interpretation of the word. I was heartened when my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) pointed out the respects in which it is proportional. I found that argument helpful. We must be careful about doing away with its imperfections and taking on other systems with even greater imperfections.

Most proportional systems have the profound imperfection of damaging the constituency link. One such system—the alternative vote system—does not do so. I can regard that system with some equanimity because I would have won my seat on 1 May under it, but it suffers from the huge disadvantage that it is even less proportional than our existing system. It must be counted out on that ground alone.

That leaves us with the other systems offered to us. To some extent, all would damage the constituency link. That has a profoundly pernicious effect on the whole body politic. Germany has a mixed system, with constituency members and list members. The pervasive effect on the political culture that attends the list has infected the rest of the body politic. On a recent trip to Germany, it struck me as extraordinary when I was advanced upon by people who knew that I was a British politician. Without any solicitation, they gave me to believe that they were deeply anxious about economic and monetary union. Many were profoundly hostile to it. I did not solicit those opinions; they were freely offered. However, I found when speaking to German politicians that those point of views were not reflected at all. Is it not extraordinary that there should be such a profound gulf between the political class and the people they represent that the anxieties of the people are not represented at all by their politicians?

The reason is that, if someone wishes to be elected as a member on a party list system, it is no good addressing the preoccupations of the electorate, because they will not determine whether that person is elected. One has to address the preoccupations of the party machine. That has a disastrous and pervasive effect that undermines democracy. That is the principal argument against proportional representation, but there are others, not least that mentioned by the hon. Member for Braintree (Mr. Hurst) about arithmetic.

I sat through the debates on devolution in Scotland and Wales, and asked the Minister concerned about the d'Hondt formula because I did not understand it. I said that at least voters understand our existing system. They understand the relationship between a cross in the box and a Member of Parliament being elected. They will not understand the d'Hondt formula. His answer was that the people did not have to understand, so long as the returning officer understood it. Nothing could be more calculated to undermine confidence in our democracy.

One of the arguments that has been advanced by Labour Members is that this is all a great rehearsal of the democratic process and that we are doing all this to refresh our democracy: we will give the people a choice by presenting the arguments dispassionately, letting them think about the arguments and holding a referendum on that basis. The hon. Member for Braintree put that case, which is attractive and persuasive in its own way.

However, it struck to me as rather odd that, from 7 March 1996, when I was selected to fight the constituency of New Forest, West, until the present day, I have had two inquiries about my views on proportional representation, both received before the election and both from members of Charter 88. The subject of our debate is not a matter that is exercising the minds of our constituents. No one ever asked me for a referendum on proportional representation, but multiply the number of people who asked me for my views on proportional representation by a factor of 10 and the result is the number of people who demanded a referendum on our relationship with the European Union or on capital punishment. That is what is exercising the minds of our people, not proportional representation.

As for dispassionately presenting an argument to the people, I do not want to cast any aspersions on the integrity of the commissioners, but I do not believe that one can properly call a commission independent that has someone so partial as Lord Jenkins at its head.

9.15 pm

Mr. Martin Linton (Battersea): The right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan) reminded us that the debate is actually about the first-past-the-post system, yet we have heard many speeches about New Zealand and about Germans advancing on the hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne), and few about the failings of the first-past-the-post system.

I find it remarkable that the Opposition can table a motion describing the first-past-the-post system as successful and fair little more than 12 months after suffering their worst defeat since the Duke of Wellington led them into the 1832 election. Perhaps their strategy is to make a virtue of misfortune.

Mr. Grieve: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Linton: No.

If the Conservatives still support the first-past-the-post system after the drubbing they got, perhaps it is a good system after all. I see the Conservative party as a brain-damaged boxer struggling to get back in the ring, oblivious to the cause of his misfortune.

When disaster struck the Conservatives in 1974—when they ended up with only 36 per cent. of the vote—they were so shocked that some of them actually started to think about the voting system. They set up an organisation

[Mr. Linton]

called Conservative Action on Electoral Reform, which claimed to have 41 members among Conservative Members of Parliament—some of them are still here, no doubt—but apart from Mr. Rathbone, the former Member of Parliament for Lewes, they are now queuing up to praise the system that has just clobbered them.

To have a sensible debate, we should start by admitting that there was a time when the first-past-the-post system worked quite well. People often describe the late 1940s and the 1950s as the golden era of the two-party system, when 97 per cent. of voters voted for one of the two main parties and, in 1950, 84 per cent. went out to vote.

We can see how the system has deteriorated from the fact that the 97 per cent. voting for the two main parties has declined to only 74 per cent. and the 84 per cent. who turned out in the 1950 election has become 71 per cent. Only 37 per cent. of people actually voted for their local Member of Parliament and the past four Governments have been elected by less than a third of the electorate—a figure that was worst of all for the Government elected in 1983.

Members of Parliament elected by a majority of their constituents have almost disappeared: the proportion used to be 94 per cent., but it is now only 50 per cent. and, on the Conservative Benches, only 10 per cent. The hon. Member for New Forest, West is right to say that he is one of the few who would have been elected under an alternative vote system, but only 13 per cent. of current Conservative Members of Parliament can say that the majority of their constituents voted for them. Over the past 50 years, people have become less likely to vote for their Member of Parliament, less likely to vote for the Government, less likely to vote for the two main parties, less likely to vote at all and less likely even to be registered.

In almost every other European country, voters have the satisfaction of knowing that, unless they vote for a very small party their vote will count towards the election of a Member of Parliament from the party of their choice who will be accountable to them. In the UK, most people go to the polling station knowing that their individual vote is highly unlikely even to count towards the result. Only one third of votes in this country count towards the result, and only about 90 constituencies out of 659 are marginal and therefore likely to swing the result.

The only telling argument advanced by supporters of first past the post is that PR can lead to coalition. I have some sympathy with that argument because although there is nothing wrong with coalitions, government is certainly simpler when a single party has a majority in Parliament. However, it is not true that PR always leads to coalition government. Several countries have for long periods had single-party majority Governments elected by PR. Throughout the 1970s, the Australian socialist party was elected with a majority by PR. The Portuguese socialists and social democrats have been elected with majorities, as have Fianna Fail, the CDU/CSU in Germany and the social democrats in Sweden. In Spain and Greece, under PR systems, almost every election in the past 20 years has resulted in a party winning a majority of seats, although that was not always based on a majority of votes.

I point that out not as a criticism of Greece, but to show that there is not a straight choice between coalition-prone proportional representation or coalition- proof first past the post. Our system can be prone to coalition—in the county council elections of the mid-1980s, the majority of councils were hung. Equally, as I have demonstrated, proportional systems can be almost coalition-proof, as they have been in Greece and Spain.

Only if we can detach the arguments about proportional representation from the separate argument about the desirability or otherwise of coalition government do we have any chance of even beginning to debate the merits of PR for the individual voter. The central point is that PR would make their vote effective wherever they live, remove the need for tactical voting and give them control over the political system.

9.21 pm

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): Seldom can a debate have been summed up so well as by the phrase used by my right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) when he said that there is no such thing as a perfect electoral system. That has been the thread running through much of the debate, which was of high quality. It was one of the best debates in the House for a long time. Most speeches were of a high calibre, they were not party political and they showed the House at its best. The debate was ample justification for the Opposition's tabling the motion to raise the profile of this important subject in the House and beyond.

We accepted from the outset—from the opening speech of my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram)—that there are flaws in the first-past-the-post system. We need look no further than our own Benches to see exactly what the effect of such a system can be, and we can look to Scotland and Wales to see exactly the wiping out that can occur under first past the post. We cannot be accused of defending the system because it is in our party's interests to do so. We defend it because it is in the country's interests to maintain it.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) asked earlier what our system is for. That is surely the question that we must all answer if we are to take this argument forward. He asked whether the purpose of the system is to provide an exact mirror of the minutest voting trend or to provide the people with an effective Government and the Government with an effective Opposition. He said, tellingly, that decision making is a first-past-the-post activity.

In government, it is not possible to make a proportion of a decision. Decisions need to be taken by Governments with strong views on how to tackle problems. The first reason, therefore, to support the first-past-the-post system is that it works: it provides stability and strength in government.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. Burden) made a typical point when he said that we need inclusive politics; problem-solving politics; soft and cuddly politics; new third-way inclusive love-in politics. It is true that we live in a deceptively calm political time, but that has largely been the result of challenging the political consensus previously. Throughout the Thatcher years, which so many Labour Members hated, we challenged the political consensus—the perceived political wisdom at the time.

How could we have achieved the things that we take for granted under the coalition mess that PR would give us? How could we have tackled the trade union reforms

that the country badly needed? How could we have made the defence changes that we had to, in defiance of the Soviet bloc, during the cold war? How could we have made our economic reforms? At the time, the status quo was supported by the conventional political wisdom. Sometimes Governments must be strong to defy the conventional political wisdom, not simply to pay homage to it.

Mr. Burden: I follow the hon. Gentleman's argument, but does it flow from what he is suggesting that Governments should deny what is clearly, in many cases, the majority view of the British people—such as on the poll tax?

Dr. Fox: It is becoming apparent to many Ministers in the present Government that, occasionally, things must be done that are unpopular. That is part of good government, and it is part of the strength of our system that, at the end of the period, we return to the electorate and say, "These are the decisions we took. We shall stand up for our reasoning, we shall stand up for what we did, and you can make your choice." However, we must avoid the debilitating consensus-ridden systems that some Labour Members who spoke tonight would land us with.

The second reason for supporting the current system is that it is better than the other options, especially on accountability. My right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) said that the first-past-the-post system gives people MPs to represent all the constituents. Several hon. Members have said that those who do not vote for the winner are not represented in our political system. I resent that insinuation, as I am sure do most Members, because we represent all our constituents the day after polling. No matter what their political persuasion and whoever they voted for, we deal with them all in the same way. The idea that all those who did not vote for us are disfranchised is insulting.

I was happy to hear the Home Secretary say that he had a strong affinity for the direct link between Members of Parliament and constituents, but he also talked of both the specific and the general relationship. We all find it strange that everyone we speak to believes that their MP is a good, hard-working MP but that all the others are thoroughly nasty creatures. It is like the finding that everyone believes that their local hospital and their doctor are very good but that the rest of the health service is falling apart.

The Home Secretary mentioned voter dissatisfaction and low turnouts. Rightly, he said that one cannot link general voter dissatisfaction, which occurs throughout the western world, with our specific electoral system, and that, in general, voter turnouts in many countries that have PR are a good deal lower than those in the United Kingdom.

However, a healthy system must have the approval of the electors and the elected. The hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) is not in his place; he had the courtesy to say that he would be leaving. He took the example of the multi-member constituencies in Ireland, where he said there was a perpetual beauty contest. Members were so afraid of what the others were doing behind their backs that they could not take their national duties seriously. Do we want such a system in the House of Commons? Do we want to be so busy being the glorified district councillors that Liberal Democrat Members are that we are unable take seriously the business of government?

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes said, under our current system voters know who represents them, whom to blame and whom to get rid of—as we found out to our cost. None the less, we defend the system that allowed it to happen.

Many concerns about the commission have been expressed today. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes said at the outset, it is not independent—it is headed by one of the most partial people in Britain on this subject. It has a flawed remit and a rigged membership, and it will produce an intellectually unsound outcome. We want the commission to take first past the post and test it against the criteria set down for the alternatives: the requirement for broad proportionality, an extension of voter choice, the need for stable government, and the maintenance of a link between MPs and geographical constituencies. We believe that first past the post will come out on top. If we go ahead with the Government's plan—simply to humour another of the Prime Minister's mentors—and if there is a referendum, we would hope for a firm commitment tonight that there will be equal funding and a balance in any such referendum.

In a telling speech, my right hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor) said that much of the PR debate is special pleading dressed up as political principle. Under PR, the party with the largest number of votes would depend on some minority party selling its principles for Cabinet seats, rather like some political streetwalker. The Home Secretary gave us some helpful historical insights into how the Liberals wanted first past the post until they became the third party, at which point the sense of humour of the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) understandably deserted him. I note that he is no longer in his place. I note also in a leaflet from the Westminster Forum that

> "Mr. Ashdown has chosen the Forum to make his most important speech on the constitutional reform debate since before the general election. The speech is likely to attract national attention."

It is a pity that we were not allowed to hear any of it in the House this evening.

I do not blame the Liberal Democrats for their position; it is the only way they will ever have the chance to become Ministers. Generations of going back to constituencies and preparing for government can be very tiring indeed.

We need to clear up one or two confusions and myths. The hon. Member for Cannock Chase (Dr. Wright) asked whether it was tolerable that a party with the most votes should lose an election. It has happened twice this century in the UK. Under PR, however, the party with the largest number of votes could be permanently excluded from power by the actions of parties with far fewer votes. That is surely a far worse system than the one we have now. I do not pretend that those two occasions were democratically defensible—but the alternative is much worse.

The hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Dr. Godman)—I do not see him in his place—gave us a good remark. He said that the pro-devolution camp would not have achieved their Scottish referendum result had they offered first past the post instead of PR. I cannot

[Dr. Fox]

remember people hurling themselves in front of us during the referendum campaign demanding a PR system—but there we are.

My favourite comment of the evening came from the hon. Member for City of York (Mr. Bayley)—he has given notice of his absence—who argued that our economic performance over the past two decades has been related to our lack of electoral reform. He said that countries with PR had achieved better growth rates, apparently forgetting that the United States, which has first past the post, has outstripped every other nation economically. As my hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes) said, we might do as well to compare our performances in football tournaments.

The hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) was the most vehement defender of what has happened in New Zealand, a country about which we have heard a great deal today. He claimed that PR there had failed because of a failure of the political parties—double dealing, dishonesty, betrayal and so on. His message was: "Don't blame the system, blame the parties." In other words, PR would work perfectly well if there were no politicians.

We have warned time and again today of the tyranny of minorities. That is a genuine threat which must not be dismissed lightly. The hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) said in an important speech that fascists and communists have generally not been elected here. The hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart) said that she would like them to be elected so as to be able to confront them head on in debate in the House. I say it is a good thing that they have not been elected, because, as the hon. Member for Walsall, North rightly said, every extremist party, from the National Front onwards, has longed for PR to be able to make its case with the oxygen of publicity in the House of Commons.

The French got a nasty shock when they flirted with PR and saw the advance of the National Front in France. That is surely not one of the aims of our system, which has thrived in a culture of political tolerance. It is dangerous to allow fashion to risk destabilising our political system. We must remember that threat as we move forward.

The third reason I believe we must maintain first past the post is that PR tips the balance towards political parties and away from the people. As has been pointed out several times, political parties are coalitions. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal said, with first past the post at least we know which coalition we shall get. We know from the manifestos what we are likely to receive in terms of policy.

The alternative, after PR, is that we get a huddle of politicians, go back to smoke-filled rooms and, rather than a manifesto for which the largest number of voters voted, end up following policies for which no one voted. I much prefer a system that reflects the wishes of the largest number of voters, with voters being satisfied that they are being delivered what they voted for on polling day, than some dreadful compromise that gives the politicians more power and the people less.

We have been told throughout the debate that, because voters vote for one party, they must be against the rest. That is as nonsensical as saying that, if we buy one type of good from a shop, we must hate everything else. On polling day voters are asked to express a preference. It is preposterous to suggest that, if one party gets 43 per cent. of the vote, the other 57 per cent. of the electorate hate that party and could not stomach anything in its manifesto.

Mr. Beith: When the hon. Gentleman speaks of coalition politics and agreements between politicians, has he forgotten how the Conservative Government were run? When they were trying to get the Maastricht treaty through the House, the part of the coalition of which he is a member, which was opposed to the treaty, would not allow it to go through, so his party's leadership had to come to my party and ask for votes to get the treaty through. That is what happens under the present system.

Dr. Fox: You will excuse me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if I am not moved to tears. The Conservative Government got through all their manifesto commitments on a three-line Whip, including a confidence vote supported by the parliamentary Conservative party in the previous Parliament.

The problem with PR moving power towards the parties is that parties tend to tolerate rather than welcome too wide a range of views. I say that having spent two years in the Government Whips' Office.

In Scotland at present, with the exclusion of any Labour Members who say the dreaded S word—socialist—under a list system the mavericks will disappear and there will be automaton politics. As my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) said, Members will exist not to look after the interests of constituents but to flatter the interests of the party machine. That is extremely dangerous. As the hon. Member for Braintree (Mr. Hurst) said, how are we to have the same respect for someone who we know is No. 4 from the south-east or No. 7 from the south-west when we could be talking to No. 3, 2 or 1 from the same area?

The hon. Member for Northfield said that we must change because there is an overwhelming urge for change. I do not know whether my constituency surgeries are unusual, but I do not find people banging on the door and queuing up to beg for a change in the electoral system. Since I was elected in 1992, not one constituent has asked for that. They might come about schools and hospitals, but a change in our electoral system is not high on the list of topics that they complain about. I do not believe that that urge for change exists beyond those whose interests are served by it.

The commission is part of a political strategy being pursued by the Government. It is a dangerous strategy, because the game is played with loaded dice. First past the post is not perfect, but it works. It has given us precious political stability in Britain. It is not perfect, but it offers more accountability than the alternative. It gives power to the people, not the politicians. PR is politics for politicians by politicians, but politics should be for the people, not politicians. Ultimately, it is the people's votes that matter.

9.39 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. George Howarth): I congratulate the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) on assuming his new responsibilities. I think this is his first time at the Dispatch Box in his new role, and I wish him well; he has made a good start.

This has been a very good speech—*[Interruption.]* That was a slip of the tongue, Mr. Deputy Speaker; I meant to say that this will be a very good speech. This has been a good debate in which—quite apart from the contributions by Front Benchers—22 Back Benchers have spoken. That is very useful. I congratulate the Opposition on raising an important matter which should be debated by the House. Most, if not all, the speeches showed a very good understanding of the issues involved, and were well and thoughtfully delivered. They were in the best traditions of the House.

The House has demonstrated an amazing knowledge of the ins and outs of politics in New Zealand—in fact, almost every hon. Member commented about the situation in that country. I am almost tempted to abandon my long-held dislike of long-haul flights and travel to New Zealand to see for myself—*[Interruption]*—although not for some time. Opposition Members are very rowdy tonight; I do not know where they have been.

All hon. Members are, by definition, experts in the systems to which we submit ourselves in order to get here. There is nothing wrong with that—it makes us very knowledgeable about those systems and how to get through them. In opening the debate, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary set out clearly the Government's view: any electoral system must be appropriate to the functions and role of the body that it is used to elect. That point is self-evident.

The Government were criticised for seeking to introduce several different systems into this country. There will be an additional member system for the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh assembly, a regional list system for the European Parliament and the prospect—I stress that word—of a different system for Westminster elections following the report of the Jenkins commission. Such criticism fails to take account of the test that I mentioned a moment ago: are the electoral systems under consideration appropriate to the roles and functions of the bodies that they will elect? That is the ultimate test.

In so far as decisions have already been made, I argue that those systems meet that test in every respect. The decisions that are still to be made must be judged against that standard. For example, the Scottish Parliament will be a different body altogether from the European Parliament. The members of those organisations perform very different functions, and it is only right that the different systems used to elect them should recognise that fact.

Yet the Opposition seem to believe that all Members should be elected in the same way, using the first-past-the-post system on almost every occasion for any election, regardless of the function of the body concerned. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] Opposition Members make my point. We have explained how we believe that British Members of the European Parliament and the new devolved assemblies should be elected. We shall undoubtedly have many more lively debates in future in this and another place when the relevant legislation is considered.

In respect of elections to this House, we have, as has been thoroughly debated tonight, established an independent commission to recommend the best alternative to the first-past-the-post system, if—I stress that word—there is to be any change. After that, we are prepared to let the people who elect us decide whether they want to change the system by which they do so.

Mr. Hayes: Will the Minister assure us that the Government would not take a partisan line in any such referendum, and would put the case for the status quo and for change objectively and fairly, without taking a line?

Mr. Howarth: The hon. Gentleman and the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) raised that issue, and my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary covered it. I shall cover the ground that the hon. Gentleman has mentioned in a moment.

Ultimately, the decision will be made by the electorate in a referendum. My right hon. Friend has said that the constituency basis of first past the post has served this country well for many years, and the Jenkins commission has been asked to take its retention into account. I shall say more about that in a moment.

Mr. Grieve: I find it difficult to follow the Government's reasoning. A number of my hon. Friends have said, and it is certainly my experience, that there appears to be no public demand for the change, so why are the Government opting for a referendum? Presumably, they have a view on the subject—what is it?

Mr. Howarth: The Government's view, which has received some support from both sides of the House, is that it is ultimately for the electorate to choose whether to change the system by which hon. Members are elected to the House. It would be wrong for hon. Members to take a view and to push through legislation to make a change without first consulting the electorate. It would not be useful at this point for me to say that one system is better than the other—otherwise, what would have been the point of our setting up an independent commission and asking it to go through the arguments?

A great deal of our legitimacy as Members of Parliament derives from the fact that we are elected for identifiable constituencies. Hon. Members have made the point that a lot of the experience that we accumulate as constituency Members makes us better Members of Parliament, and one or two former Ministers have said that decisions that they made in the Cabinet or as junior Ministers were influenced by such experience. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made clear, the independent commission should take the importance of the constituency link into account when arriving at its conclusion. That gives some fairly heavy hints about the directions in which it might have to go to satisfy the terms of reference.

Mr. Maclean *rose—*

Mr. Gummer *rose—*

Mr. Howarth: I give way, finally, to the right hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean).

Mr. Maclean: I was provoked to intervene when the Minister referred for, I think, the fourth time to the

[Mr. Maclean]

"independent" Jenkins commission. Does he share the Home Secretary's view that it is not independent, but only "relatively independent"?

Mr. Howarth: Who would I be to disagree with my right hon. Friend? I hope that the right hon. Gentleman agrees that the importance of the word "independent" is that the commission is clearly independent of the Government. It might not be independent in the view that it takes of the issue, but that is an important distinction, as my right hon. Friend explained. It would have been utterly pointless to ask the commission to consider what would be the most appropriate alternative to first past the post if there was known hostility to any alternative system.

The commission is not a creature of the Government. It will arrive at a view in the manner that it believes most fitting, and will make recommendations accordingly. Before Conservative Members jeer, they should at least see what the commission comes up with.

Mr. Gummer: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Howarth: I shall give way to the right hon. Gentleman, but then I must make progress.

Mr. Gummer: How many people have come to the hon. Gentleman's surgery in the past year asking for electoral reform?

Mr. Howarth: I shall give the right hon. Gentleman a direct answer: none. However, the people of Blackburn have an enormous influence on my right hon. Friend, and he tells me that he is regularly asked about it by his constituents. There we have it: the people of Blackburn speak, and my right hon. Friend acts. That is yet another example of the importance of the constituency link. *[Laughter.]* The right hon. Gentleman asked a question and I gave him an answer. I do not see what is so amusing about that.

The hon. Member for Woodspring and the right hon. Member for Huntingdon argued that Governments under any system must make unpopular decisions. That is a fair point. The Government have realised that on occasions it is necessary to make tough choices. No one would argue that they should slavishly follow the findings of every opinion poll. I am not arguing for a change to our electoral system; I am simply saying that we should not design a system on that principle alone. Electoral systems that lead to the creation of Governments must accommodate that process, but it does not necessarily follow that the system must give Governments carte blanche.

The right hon. Member for Huntingdon has apologised for not being present for the winding-up speeches because he had to attend an important charity function. I know that no discourtesy was intended. He talked about the need for strong government, consistency and stability. I do not want to be discourteous to the right hon. Gentleman: he is not present, and, although he may have become unpopular before the last election, he is respected in the House. It is a different matter for him to argue with any conviction that the Government of which he was Prime Minister was stable, however. They did not enjoy enormous popular support while he was Prime Minister. Former Chancellor Norman Lamont once declared that, although they were in power, they did not seem to be in control. *[Interruption.]* The previous Government had problems under first past the post. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Right hon. and hon. Members on the Front Benches must be quiet. I am listening to the Minister. If they do not want to listen to him, they can leave.

Mr. Howarth: The former Chancellor said that the previous Government were in office but not in power. That was a fair point. The problem was created by the electoral arithmetic and by the divisions in the Conservative party over Europe. The right hon. Member for Huntingdon cannot argue that the Government of whom he was Prime Minister were a strong Government.

Let me mention particularly the speeches of the right hon. Members for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor), for Fareham (Sir P. Lloyd) and for Penrith and The Border, who asked about the arrangements that would arise from the referendum. I cannot go a great deal beyond what was said by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary until the commission has reported to the Cabinet and it has had a proper opportunity to consider its report, but funding, and how the campaign will be conducted, are important questions.

We recognise the need for a system that will enable the electorate to make an informed decision about the best way forward, and how it should be handled. Parliament will have an opportunity to debate the report following its publication, and, subsequently, an opportunity to discuss how the referendum should be conducted.

Dr. Fox: Will the Minister confirm his belief that, in the event of a referendum, Ministers should be able to campaign on both sides?

Mr. Howarth: That decision will be made by the Cabinet at the time. It is not realistically possible to give any assurance before we know exactly what the recommendations will be, but of course that option will have to be taken into account.

This has been a useful debate. The Liberal Democrat spokesman—the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan)—made an elegant speech; indeed, he had some interesting comments to make, in his customary courteous manner. I can tell him, and the House, that as regards Westminster elections—understandably, that is the subject that has basically concerned hon. Members today—the arrangements will not be changed without the electorate being given a say first, by means of a referendum.

The question facing the Opposition—who tabled the motion and chose the subject—is not whether the public are willing to trust them. That decision is not in prospect for some years. In the first instance, the Opposition should wait and see what the commission has to say. The wording of their motion fails to take account of the fact that, whatever proposal the commission accepts, it will ultimately be for the electorate to decide. The real question that the Opposition must ask themselves is whether they are willing to trust the electorate.

That is the difference between the Opposition and us. Whatever views we may hold as individuals—whatever view I may hold, and whatever view my right hon. Friend

the Home Secretary may hold—we are clear about the fact that, ultimately, the electorate are the only group that should have the power to say aye or no to any change in the electoral system. In marked contrast, the Conservative party said in its submission to the Jenkins commission that the Government's four criteria were broad proportionality, voter choice, the need for stable government and the constituency link. It had argued, it said, that the British system met those criteria much better than the alternatives on offer; consequently, no referendum should be held on the electoral system.

That is the Conservatives' view: it is a matter for them to decide, and the electorate should have no say in it, because there should be no referendum. That is entirely wrong. It is wrong in principle for the House to have the power to change the electoral system—or, for that matter, to retain the present system—without consulting the electorate; but it would appear that that is what the Conservative party wants.

The Conservatives still show the contempt for the electorate that got them thrown out last year, and I do not think that tonight they have demonstrated their fitness to convince the electorate that anything has changed. I urge the House to put its trust in the electorate, and not to accept any motion tabled by the Opposition. They have shown that they do yet not even understand what they have done wrong.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 137, Noes 339.

Division No. 290] **[9.58 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Beggs, Roy
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hayes, John
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Caroline Spelman and Mr. Oliver Heald.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin, John
Ballard, Jackie
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bennett, Andrew F
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Breed, Colin
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Stephen
Cable, Dr Vincent
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Casale, Roger
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Ms Roseanna *(Perth)*
Dafis, Cynog

Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davies, Rt Hon Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Fisher, Mark
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Galbraith, Sam
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Gorrie, Donald
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Kirkwood, Archy
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonnell, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Peter
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Alun
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Norris, Dan
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Rendel, David
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'nis)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stott, Roger
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swinney, John
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Wallace, James
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Clelland and
Mr. John McFall.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 31 (Questions on amendments) and agreed to.*

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House congratulates the Government on its constitutional reform programme; welcomes the creation of the Independent Commission on the Voting System and its remit; and supports the commitment of the Government to consult the people of the United Kingdom by a referendum on the appropriate electoral system to be used to elect this House

PETITION

Proposed Prison, Winwick

10.15 pm

Helen Jones (Warrington, North): This is the petition of the electors of Warrington, North. The petitioners are opposed to the construction of a new prison at Winwick on the site of Winwick hospital. The petition gives the reasons for their opposition.

The petition has been supported by the majority of local people and many local councillors and is signed by nearly 4,000 people. It says:

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons oppose any plans for a penal institution to be built in Winwick.

To lie upon the Table.

George Atkinson

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Jamieson.]*

10.16 pm

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): Were you to have ventured on to the internet today, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and looked up the website for Dubai, you would have been struck by the prominence given to golf and the images of spectacular golf courses in the desert—courses that were built by my constituent, Mr. George Atkinson, who is a successful business man from Rockbourne, near Fordingbridge.

Mr. Atkinson left Dubai in 1993, but returned in March last year to watch the desert classic golf tournament—a tournament that he initiated on a golf course that he built. He was arrested, and has languished in a Dubai gaol for the past 15 months.

It was more than a year before charges were brought against him. I have a difference of opinion with the Foreign Office about what constitutes a charge, but I hold to the view that no charge that would be understood as such by an Anglo-Saxon mind was brought against my constituent for more than a year.

My constituent has now been charged and was in court on Sunday afternoon, where his case was remanded until 20 June. I fear that the case will be adjourned again and dragged out, just as the bringing of charges was dragged out. However, that will not benefit my constituent by giving him more time to form his defence, because he has been detained in unacceptable conditions. He has been subjected continually to petty harassment and bullying. All sorts of arbitrary acts of petty power have been used against him to undermine his morale and his defence.

My constituent faces complex fraud charges, which require him to have access to documents. He estimates that he will have to look through 12 filing cabinets of documents that are pertinent to building a defence. He also, of course, needs access to his lawyer. The access that he is afforded is very restricted. His solicitor must apply to see him three days in advance, and is finally granted a very short time in an open police office where the business of that office proceeds around him. It is a most unsatisfactory and unacceptable set of circumstances.

I should like to put on record my thanks to the Foreign Office for its assistance. The consul general, Mr. Armour, has been outstanding in his assiduous efforts on behalf of my constituent to improve the conditions in which my constituent is held. I mean that most sincerely. I should also like to thank Baroness Symons for the time that she has given the case. She has read a large volume of correspondence and consented to discuss the matter with me on no less than seven occasions, three of which were lengthy meetings and two of which were attended by members of Mr. Atkinson's family and his legal representative in this country.

Although I am very thankful for such assistance, I have some differences with the Foreign Office. I was shocked to see a letter from the Foreign Secretary to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) in which it was stated that my constituent, Mr. Atkinson, had been offered bail, but had refused it. My constituent has never properly been offered bail.

[Mr. Desmond Swayne]

At the outset, the bail set was extortionate. My constituent offered as surety a Dubai business man of some standing, but the authorities in Dubai rejected him as unacceptable.

Subsequently, when my constituent's solicitor tried to reopen the question of bail, he was told explicitly by the attorney general in Dubai that he would not permit it because he wanted to protect the confidentiality of the investigation. Now that charges have been brought, bail has been set at £1.6 million, which is vastly more than the sum that is the subject of the fraud. It is well beyond the means of my constituent or any of his supporters or friends.

Bail is a key component due to my constituent's need to consult a large volume of documents. In his cell, he is allowed only very limited access to documents and his solicitor. He also wants the use of a personal computer. Were he on remand in custody in this country, he would not have unlimited access to and storage of documents, he would not have unlimited access to his solicitor and he certainly would not have the use of a PC in his cell. But, were he remanded on such a charge in this country, he would not be remanded in custody. He would be held on bail and would not face such problems.

The Foreign Office has taken the view that it is not proper for it to approach the authorities in Dubai on the question of bail, that the decision must be for the courts in Dubai. Mr. Al Tamimi, my constituent's solicitor in Dubai, informs me, however, that approaching the courts for bail is a complete waste of time. Any such request must be made to the office of the ruler because that is where, in effect, the issue is being decided.

It is for that reason that I sought this Adjournment debate. I want to bring it to the attention of the Foreign Office that my constituent is detained in Dubai not as a consequence of any crime that he has committed, but because of a political problem.

The charge against my constituent is that he aided and abetted a Government official in defrauding the Government of Dubai of a sum equivalent to £1 million. There was no such official. There was a British expatriate, an employee of the construction firm Laing. The evidence of that individual is the basis on which charges were brought against my constituent, but that evidence has changed substantially between two sworn affidavits. The key change—the second affidavit is the basis of the charges—is the financial arm twisting and pressure brought to bear on that individual. It is extraordinary that he has not been charged, and his wife comes and goes freely in Dubai, where she still runs a business. I expect the discrepancy between the two affidavits shortly to become the subject of a police investigation in this country into perjury.

Even if the allegations against my constituent had been true, he had an indemnity against any action by the Dubai Government. When he left in 1993, he offered his thriving companies—they were healthy, despite being owed £1 million by the Government of Dubai for outstanding invoices—in full and final settlement against any claim, and that offer was accepted by the Government of Dubai.

Mr. Atkinson returned to this country. He had not given up his title to the desert classic golf tournament, and when he filed an action in the United Kingdom's High Court naming the Government of Dubai as co-conspirators in an attempt to take that title from him, he caused deep offence to that Government. My constituent's mistake—his contributory negligence—lay in his return to Dubai as a tourist to watch the desert classic. He was arrested, and he has been in gaol ever since.

My constituent is the victim of arbitrary power. Unless the Government address that issue, they will be of little more than marginal assistance to him. They should address this as a political question, not a legal one. They should bring their political influence to bear on the friendly Government of Dubai. The Foreign Office has done such things with similar regimes in the past, so why not do so for my constituent? I sincerely hope that our relations with Dubai remain friendly; it is with friendly states that we can exercise influence. If we cannot exercise such influence, there seems little point in having a Foreign Office at all.

10.28 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Derek Fatchett): I am grateful to the hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) for bringing this matter to the attention of the House. I welcome the opportunity to record the actions of the Government, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and our embassy in Dubai in this case. I shall outline our knowledge of the case to date, and shall refer to the help we have provided for Mr. Atkinson and his family.

To begin with, I wish to state in the strongest possible terms that the Government are fully committed to supporting and helping Mr. Atkinson and all British nationals who are detained or in prison overseas. We therefore respect the hon. Gentleman's strong commitment to his constituent. He has made his case powerfully. I am sure that his constituent's family will be pleased by that and respect the way in which he has acted on their behalf and on behalf of George Atkinson.

I shall offer an overview of the case. Many of the facts have been mentioned by the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Atkinson lived in Dubai with his family for nearly 11 years. During that time, he ran a successful local landscaping, construction and design business known as Gulf Landscape Services. In September 1993, Mr. Atkinson was accused of unlawfully paying bribes to Mr. Steven Trutch. Mr. Atkinson admitted having made payments to Mr. Trutch, who was employed by Sheikh Mohammed, in return for the award of Government contracts. He claimed that these payments were part of normal business practice in Dubai, that they were openly paid and received, and that they were paid with Sheikh Mohammed's full knowledge. According to his UK lawyer, Mr. Atkinson was told that, unless he was prepared to transfer all the business, good will and assets of Gulf Landscape Services to the Government of Dubai and Sheikh Mohammed, criminal and civil proceedings would ensue.

In January 1994, Mr. Atkinson signed a settlement agreement between Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid and a number of businesses, agreeing to transfer all their respective businesses to the Government of Dubai and Sheikh Mohammed. In return, Mr. Atkinson was allowed to leave Dubai. He believed that that settlement was a full settlement of all claims against him.

As the hon. Gentleman said, Mr. Atkinson returned to Dubai on 26 February 1997 to watch the Dubai desert classic golf tournament. On the weekend of 1 and 2 March 1997, he was arrested by the Dubai police and has since then been detained in the public prosecution detention centre of the public prosecutor's building for paying commission and bribing Mr. Trutch. The embassy was told that the public prosecutor's office was giving special attention to the case because it was filed by the ruler's office.

On 3 March last year, the British embassy in Dubai was told by the authorities about the arrest of Mr. Atkinson. Consular staff sought immediate access and visited him the same day. He maintains that his detention is unlawful and that he is being held only for political reasons—much the argument of the hon. Gentleman. At the time of his detention, Mr. Atkinson was pursuing a £4 million breach of contract and conspiracy claim against the Dubai Government and the Professional Golfers Association tour in the High Court in London.

Since Mr. Atkinson's detention, his family and supporters and his Member of Parliament have claimed that he was being held without charge. We sought clarification from the Dubai authorities, and were told by the Attorney-General that initial charges relating to bribery and fraud had been laid against Mr. Atkinson and that, when investigations into the case were completed, he would either be finally charged and the case referred to court or be released.

The United Arab Emirates has a well-developed, sophisticated judicial system. Initial charges are a recognised formal step in the Dubai legal process. On 5 April 1998, formal and detailed charges were laid against Mr. Atkinson, and the case was referred to court. The first court hearing took place on 19 April, the second last Sunday on 31 May. It was attended by the embassy's vice-consul. The case has now been adjourned until 21 June.

The hon. Gentleman referred briefly to the prison conditions in which Mr. Atkinson finds himself. He is being held in police detention cells in the public prosecutor's building. He has access to a doctor and a dentist when necessary, and conditions are generally better than in Dubai's prisons. The food is reasonable, and I understand from our consular staff that Mr. Atkinson is relatively fit and well. He receives a special low-fat diet, he is allowed regular visitors and he has access to a telephone. The embassy raises with the public prosecutor any problems he has concerning prison conditions.

The hon. Gentleman made kind comments about the help provided by the Foreign Office, and it may be useful to him, his constituent and his constituent's family if I put that help on record. We have been in the most regular and frequent correspondence with Mr. Atkinson's family and friends. They did not believe that Mr. Atkinson had been charged and were unwilling to accept statements from the Attorney-General and a press announcement issued from the UAE embassy in London confirming that initial charges had been made and that copies had been sent to Mr. Atkinson. Mr. Atkinson's wife and daughter visited No. 10 Downing street and discussed the case with the Prime Minister's private secretary.

My noble Friend Baroness Symons, the Minister responsible for consular matters, has met the hon. Gentleman, the Atkinson family and their UK lawyer twice, most recently on 22 April. She has taken those opportunities to explain the background to the case and to set out the action taken by the Foreign Office. In addition, the Atkinson family called on the Foreign Office consular division in London twice in the last year and spoke at length to the officials responsible for our interest in the welfare of Mr. Atkinson. We shall continue to do everything we can to ensure that Mr. Atkinson's rights are respected, but, as the hon. Gentleman knows, we cannot interfere in the Dubai judicial system, just as we would not allow them to interfere in ours.

The hon. Gentleman also spoke kindly about the role of consular staff, and I shall ensure that his words are brought to the attention of the consul. The job of our consular staff in Dubai is to ensure that Mr. Atkinson has access to a lawyer; that he knows his legal position and has information about the legal and prison system; that he receives the same level of treatment as other prisoners and is not discriminated against because he is British and a non-UAE national; and that any medical problems are dealt with quickly. Any complaint of ill treatment is taken up immediately and, I can assure the hon. Gentleman, vigorously with the police authorities.

However—this is where there may be a difference in understanding between the hon. Gentleman and ourselves—our role is essentially an humanitarian one. Consular staff visit Mr. Atkinson regularly—there have been 13 visits so far. He also receives regular visits from his friends and lawyer, and is in regular contact with the embassy by fax and telephone. The consul general is in regular contact with Mr. Atkinson's wife and has twice in the past three months met a group of Mr. Atkinson's friends. Our staff can and do pass messages and money for prison comforts from Mr. Atkinson's family and friends. The welfare of British prisoners is a high priority for the Government, but we are acutely aware that the needs of families are equally important and we do our best to help them to maintain regular contact.

I assure the hon. Gentleman that the embassy in Abu Dhabi and the consulate in Dubai follow Mr. Atkinson's case very closely. The consul general and his predecessor have raised it with Sheikh Mohammed, Dr. Khalifa, head of the ruler's office, and several times with the Attorney-General. As I have said, we cannot interfere in the Dubai justice system, but we have urged the Dubai authorities to release Mr. Atkinson or bring him to trial. Now that the trial has begun, I promise the hon. Gentleman that we shall continue to press the Dubai authorities to deal with this case quickly.

The hon. Gentleman said that the United Kingdom has close relations with the United Arab Emirates. He is right: we have good bilateral relationships on a range of issues—our economic affairs, the broader political issues in the region, on which we have much in common, and, in particular, defence. That close relationship means that we are in a very strong position to continue to raise individual cases. I assure him that we continue to raise Mr. Atkinson's case. I hope that he is reassured that the Foreign Office has been active on Mr. Atkinson's behalf.

Mr. Swayne *indicated assent.*

Mr. Fatchett: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's nod of approval to recognise the role played by the Foreign Office. We shall maintain the support that I have described, and we shall maintain contact with the hon. Gentleman. If he wants to see me or Baroness Symons on this issue, we will be delighted to meet him. We shall maintain our interest in the case and report to him what is occurring.

I hope that I have been able to satisfy the House that we are taking this case seriously and that the Foreign Office is working to help Mr. Atkinson. We cannot directly interfere in the judicial system, but I can assure the hon. Gentleman that the issue is on the Foreign Office's agenda.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at nineteen minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 3 June 1998

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Constitutional Referendums

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Janet Anderson.]*

9.34 am

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Mid-Bedfordshire): In the last 25 years, there have been eight referendums. Between 1973 and 1997, there were four—an average of one every six years. In the first year of this Labour Government, there have been a further four. It is clear that the Government believe in referendums; we all know that they plan many more. It is essential that the conduct of those referendums is above reproach, or else the suspicion will be that they are being used to direct public opinion for party political ends, rather than to determine public opinion for the public good.

There are three groups of questions which must be answered when considering referendums; why, when and how? First, why hold a referendum at all when we have a parliamentary democracy? Secondly, if the principle of referendums is accepted, when should they be held? Thirdly, if they are held, how should they be conducted?

There are those who say that it is a Government's job to govern, to make decisions and to be responsible for their effect. They argue that referendums are an abdication of that responsibility, and introduce danger and uncertainty, and that therefore they should never take place.

The alternative point of view is held by the Minister without Portfolio, who, earlier this year, said in Germany:

"It may be that the era of purely representative democracy is coming to an end."

He added that its place would be taken by

"plebiscites, focus groups, lobbies, citizens' movements and the Internet."

I do not subscribe to either of those extremist wings. I understand why the Government's thought policeman would want to bypass considered parliamentary scrutiny and control, and I deplore it. I agree that the Government alone should be held to account for the effect of their decisions, but there may be times when Parliament will want to consult the people. The question is when.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): The question is not just when. If my hon. Friend is going to argue in favour of referendums, I hope that he will address the question whether we can always reduce a complex issue to a sufficiently simple question to get a legitimate answer in a referendum.

Mr. Sayeed: I am profoundly grateful to my right hon. Friend for his question, which leads me very nicely to my next remark.

As a believer in representative parliamentary democracy, I am clear that referendums should be used only under certain circumstances. The first is when the matter is of great significance. The next is when its effect will be profound, enduring and not subject to a change of Government. The next criteria is when the detailed facts are widely known, understood and—to answer my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth)—capable of being reduced to a clear and simple single question.

How do we achieve that? There can be no definitive answer, because it depends on the circumstances, but guidelines can be formulated. First, referendums are not a substitute for parliamentary democracy. They must be used only to advise Parliament, not to dictate to or coerce it.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): Is my hon. Friend aware of the situation in Switzerland, where, because of the cantonal system, they prefer the idea of a referendum? Consequently, the most reactionary legislation—

Madam Speaker: Order. I should like to see the hon. Gentleman's handsome face.

Mr. Fabricant: I apologise, Madam Speaker.

Consequently, in Switzerland, the most reactionary legislation has been passed on immigration, women's suffrage and capital punishment—which my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) might welcome, but which does not lead to liberal democracy.

Mr. Sayeed: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. Referendums—such as proposition 13, in California—should be used only extremely sparingly, and not as a substitute for parliamentary democracy. This is the place where we can argue out the issues.

Referendums should be used only on matters of great and lasting significance, and when the consequences are appreciated and the need for change is demonstrable and coherent, and spans party political divides.

Referendums should be used only when all reasonable points of view have an equal chance of being heard. Electors affected by any decision in a referendum should be entitled to take some part in that referendum.

No referendum should occur until Parliament has considered, debated and amended the legislation that would implement the proposals that may be put before the people.

If those guidelines are not followed, referendums might be used—I believe that they are being used—to stifle debate and to bushwhack the Houses of Parliament. Therefore, to forestall any hint of such developments, the Government should, at the outset, clearly state what they consider to be the minimum threshold and participation rate of any referendum.

We should now consider whether the four recent referendums have met any of the criteria that any reasonable person would expect to be applied in a referendum. We should then go on to determine how we can ensure that, in future, conduct of referendums is not only fair but agreed to be fair. If we do not ensure such

[Mr. Sayeed]

agreement, I believe that the results of referendums will be in dispute and their consequences rejected, and democracy will be held in contempt.

In last year's referendum on Scottish devolution, six out of 10 eligible Scottish electors voted. Three quarters of those who did so voted in support of a Scottish Parliament. As a Conservative and a Unionist, I regret the result, although I accept that it reflected the Scottish view at that time. However, as an honestly conducted referendum, it failed. It was pre-legislative, so the detailed facts were not known. The result is being used to coerce Parliament. Public money was used to promote the yes vote, but there was no similar funding of the no campaign.

In the Scottish referendum, English electors were disfranchised. Yet—after that referendum, and even after the start of the Scottish Parliament—the poorer English regions will continue to fund richer Scottish regions. In this place, Scotland will continue to be over-represented by Scottish Members, with greater powers but fewer responsibilities than their English counterparts.

The referendum in Wales was an even greater fiasco. The result was a flop: the votes of one quarter of the electorate were deemed by the Government to be decisive. Worse still, that pitiful result—which was achieved only with public money given to the yes campaign—was placed in doubt because of allegations about how the ballot was conducted. Although some of the allegations were made by the Secretary of State for Wales's own constituency Labour party, the right hon. Gentleman refused to clear up the mess and establish an independent inquiry. In London, the turnout for the referendum was even lower than it was in Wales.

Unless the Government plan on using referendums as a party political tool—if they do, they must say so—they must mend their ways. I have stated some guidelines that I believe should be followed. The constitution unit's commission on the conduct of referendums has made even more detailed recommendations. Today, I hope that the Minister will give us his considered response to the safeguards that both the unit and I have proposed. Above all, we need today to hear from the Government an acknowledgement that referendums are too important to be entrusted to the self-serving whims of any one political party.

The House will want to hear the Minister accept that, if the results of referendums are to be above suspicion, beyond reproach and not treated with contempt, their conduct should be determined by an independent body—comprising the brightest and the best, encompassing all political parties but dominated by no one political party, and dedicated to the impartial questioning of our political masters, the people.

9.45 am

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): I should like quickly to make a few points, as I am aware that there is little time, and many hon. Members would like to speak in this debate.

As we have no constitution in the United Kingdom, it is doubly—trebly—important that, when we undertake to change our electoral or political arrangements, we have in place proper safeguards. Generally, I am rather happy that, unlike many countries, we do not have a written constitution, which tend to be a hidebound way of approaching matters. I think that, over the years and down the centuries, our friends in the United States have come to regret their written constitution.

Nevertheless, as we do not have such a constitution, surely it is incumbent on hon. Members—even more so on the Government—to guarantee that safeguards are in place when contemplating the type of changes described by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Sayeed), primarily to ensure that the Government cannot change the rules that govern their own election. Ultimately, that is what we are talking about.

My hon. Friend gave as examples the referendums held in Scotland, Wales and London. However, the background threat is that the Government might eventually propose changes to the very system by which they themselves will seek to be re-elected. That is the biggest danger of all. Today, at the very least, we must receive from the Government cast-iron assurances that they would do no such thing—that, without first establishing proper safeguards, they would never embark on a course leading them to change the rules by which they offer themselves for re-election. Such safeguards are essential.

My hon. Friend also discussed the questions that should perhaps be asked in a referendum. We have some good recent examples of how the choice of questions can go badly wrong.

The example foremost in my mind—I suspect that it is foremost also in the mind of my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway), who is in the Chamber—is the question, or lack of questions, asked in the London referendum. We believe that, at the very least, the people of London were entitled to a say in whether they wanted an executive mayor in London and/or an assembly. However, the Government out-manoeuvred everyone else, and insisted on asking only one question, whereas two quite separate issues were bundled into one question—for the sake of political expediency. The example demonstrates the type of danger that we face.

Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have been or will be asked what they want, but England has never been asked what it wants. When will the English be asked a question in a referendum? That question has to be answered. To date, the Government have been able to decide—on the basis of political convenience—what they ask, when they ask it, and whom they ask. What we need to know is, when is the bulk of the United Kingdom's population going to be asked some questions and have an opportunity to give an answer? We might find the answers interesting, if the right questions were asked.

The only other matter I want to mention in this context is European economic and monetary union. It is obvious that the Government are going to wait until such time as they consider propitious for the answer they want before putting the questions, which illustrates all too well the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Bedfordshire.

There is also the issue of reversibility, or, when can we return to the question? New Zealand is the most interesting example available of this issue. A few years ago, the people of New Zealand were asked the wrong question about changing their political electoral system, and they answered that they wanted something different. They got something different—a proportional system, which did not give them the Government they expected,

because of back-room deals between political parties. Already, only a few years later, serious consideration is being given to asking the questions whether the change has proved satisfactory, and whether they should go back to what they had before.

That raises an important question: does a referendum answer last for ever? Surely not, but that raises the question, at what point can we legitimately return to the issue and say that, although we decided something by referendum, we now believe in the light of experience that we made a mistake, and that we should return to what we had before or move on to something else?

Mr. Fabricant: On the issue of getting it wrong, does my right hon. Friend not find it ironic that market research companies have found that asking simple questions with yes or no answers results in the most inaccurate response? If the Government have their way, are we not likely to see a drift away from referenda and towards focus groups; and would that not be far worse?

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. I suspect that the Government may say that the country is just one enormous focus group, and that endless referendums are an adequate way of consulting the people.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. George Howarth) *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Forth: The Minister may say no—in any case, it would be interesting to hear his response to that point.

I hope that, at some stage, the Minister will give a strong indication of his view on the extent to which it would be legitimate—indeed, necessary in many cases—to return to the issue once the question had been asked, and in the light of further experience. Any of us who have been to New Zealand know well how bitterly disappointed the people are at having been misled by the question put to them and by the change in their electoral system, and how desperately they want to go back to what they had before.

Mr. Alan Clark (Kensington and Chelsea): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I am most grateful for your allowing me to raise a point of order that relates to the language in which we communicate in this Chamber. Your predecessor once rebuked me for using the language of the Common Market: I said "faute de mieux", for which he immediately called me to order. The word "referendum" is being scattered about, but, although my hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield (Mr. Fabricant) used the correct plural, I have often heard colleagues refer to "referendums", which is an exceedingly ugly term.

May we have from you, Madam Speaker, a ruling, or at least an expression of preference, as to whether we continue to use the Latin word, which many would think historically appropriate in the Chamber, or whether you have no objection to the continual anglicisation of the term and the use of the word "referendums"? Were you to express a preference for the Latin form, which I hope you will, you would certainly be striking a blow for classical revivalism.

Madam Speaker: The right hon. Gentleman raises an esoteric point, albeit hardly a point of order: more a matter of taste. I notice that, in the public Bills list, the word "referendums" is used in relation to Scotland and Wales. The word "referendum" was first used in English 150 years ago, according to the Oxford English dictionary, which I have just consulted, and I imagine that, after 150 years, the House is now used to it. The plural is a matter of taste, but I have always preferred the use of the English language to any Latin form; I hope that that provides some guidance.

9.54 am

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): Coming from the right hon. Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Mr. Clark), that was a wonderfully communautaire point of order. In France, they have Government bodies that determine how the language should be used, but that is the first time I have ever heard the Speaker of the House of Commons being asked to rule on which words are appropriate to the English language. The House is indebted to the right hon. Gentleman for raising the interesting question of "referendums" versus "referenda", because the subject is a topical one, with several referendums already having been held, and more in prospect.

I take the view that, in general, in a parliamentary democracy, Parliament should decide, but there is obviously a case for saying that it is appropriate to refer major constitutional issues to the people. The risk is that one can get into a la carte choices on which decisions are appropriate to be referred to the people, and which should be left to Parliament.

It should be possible to take such decisions on an objective basis: for example, many people outside would love to have a referendum on whether capital punishment should be reintroduced, but that is a policy issue, which is most appropriately dealt with by Parliament; but there is a case for referring amendments to the constitution and to the way in which the country is governed to the people, as we have done.

The speeches so far have addressed specific concerns that I share about the current status of referenda in our constitution. The idea of having a referendum on the establishment of a Parliament in Scotland was sold as a means of entrenching the position of the Scottish Parliament, but Conservative Members have shown that they cannot wait for an opportunity to overturn the decision of the Scottish people.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): I just wanted to pick up on the hon. Gentleman's use of the word "referenda". Further to the point of order raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Mr. Clark), I wanted to point out that "referendum" is the gerundive—in other words, it means "requiring to be discussed"; therefore, in English the correct plural is "referendums", not "referenda".

Mr. Home Robertson: It is quite a long time since I failed my Latin A-level, so I shall not pursue that point.

The questions that require clarification are: what the criteria for holding a referendum should be; how a referendum should be conducted; who should decide which issues are appropriate to be referred to the people by referendum; and, above all, what the status of a referendum result is at the end of the day.

[Mr. Home Robertson]

The hon. Member for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Sayeed) acknowledged that we have just had a fairly dramatic and conclusive result to a referendum in Scotland, on a perfectly respectable turnout of 61 per cent. of the people, 75 per cent. of whom voted yes to the establishment of a Scottish Parliament within the United Kingdom. Politically, that should be the end of the story—the subject was debated for many years, and a conclusive decision has been given, not only in the referendum, but in the results in Scotland at successive general elections. However, constitutionally, it is still technically possible to dismiss that result, and for Parliament to legislate in a different direction altogether.

Speeches from Conservative Members—the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) used the term "reversibility"—show that they are already questioning the validity or the binding nature of the outcome of the Scottish referendum, so I ask my hon. Friend the Minister whether it would be possible to ensure that, when legislation is enacted with the specific endorsement of a referendum, that fact is acknowledged on the face of the Act; and to ensure that any repeal of that legislation is also subject to a referendum.

It would be scandalous if, after 20 years' debate about home rule for Scotland, successive general election results endorsing the establishment of a Parliament for Scotland, and an overwhelming referendum decision to establish a Scottish Parliament, some future Government, simply on a political whim, could turn the whole thing on its head.

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that that argument would have much greater force if one had post-legislative referendums rather than pre-legislative ones? Is not part of the problem, which casts doubt on what is expressed in referendums, the way in which subsequent legislation often differs from promises made before the referendum?

Mr. Home Robertson: That is an illustration of the sort of problem that I have in mind. If there is any doubt, anywhere, there is always somebody, usually on the Conservative Benches, who wants to nit-pick. Who better than the hon. Gentleman to fulfil that role?

Endorsement of legislation by referendum should be specifically referred to in that legislation. There should be an implicit requirement that any radical repeal of the legislation—I am not saying that it should not be possible to amend legislation—should also be subject to a referendum, so that no future Parliament can repeal an Act that is entrenched by a referendum.

I fear that Conservative Members are doing themselves no good when they call into question the validity of the result of the referendum in Scotland. A Parliament is to be established in Scotland, and we want it to be a success and to play its role in the framework of the United Kingdom. Endless nit-picking can only endanger that settlement.

10.1 am

Mr. Richard Allan (Sheffield, Hallam): I am glad of this timely opportunity to speak on the subject of referenda—the option to my taste—since, under this Government, they have once again become a familiar part of our political life. We have had referenda in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, which we fully supported as clear issues of constitutional significance.

The referendum on London government was less clear-cut, but, on balance, still necessary as a means of moving to regional self-government. Liberal Democrats shared many of the concerns expressed by the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) about the question that was used. We would have preferred two questions, and believe that the Government cheated, to an extent, by using the one-question device.

People continue to be concerned about the use of referenda, mainly because the power to hold or withhold them is still in the Government's hands. There is a complete lack of rules on when or where referenda may or may not be used, although they are perfectly legitimate in an open democratic society with a strong constitutional framework. Indeed, we want it to become mandatory that constitutional change is contingent on support in a referendum. The hon. Member for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Sayeed) described that as the "why" decision on holding a referendum. We would ultimately like that enshrined in a written constitution which sets out conditions for holding such a referendum.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): I heard what the hon. Gentleman said about consulting the people over major constitutional change. He will know that, in Wales, the decision was taken—although only one in four people wanted it—to set up a non-tax-raising assembly. Why did his party try to amend the legislation so that, in future, the Welsh assembly could introduce tax-raising powers, without consulting the Welsh people?

Mr. Allan: The specific measure to which the hon. Gentleman refers was part of my party's open, stated position at the general election—our manifesto commitment. Colleagues in the Welsh team decided to take that forward to air the issue during the passage of the legislation. It is perfectly acceptable if they choose to do so.

Mr. Grieve: Does not that precisely illustrate the point that I was trying to make about the problems of pre-legislative referendums? In, for example, the Welsh referendum, the Welsh people were offered a committee form of government as the great selling point, yet, by the time the legislation had gone through the House, a sort of cabinet government was proposed. How can the wishes of people be reflected in pre-legislative referendums?

Mr. Allan: Although I do not disagree with the hon. Gentleman's fundamental point that post-legislative referenda are preferable, there were precedents—Labour and Liberal manifesto commitments and a pre-election agreement—for the legislation that has been taken forward in this Parliament, which meant that the measures would progress quite rapidly. That was made clear at the general election.

Rather than using examples of perverse use of referenda in countries such as Switzerland, which I accept has not been helpful, we should look across the sea to the Irish example. They have a written constitution, which they have successfully amended and updated through the

use of referenda. They have managed to avoid many of the European arguments that we have had in this country, because every stage of ceding power to the European Union has been accompanied by a legitimate decision of the Irish people through the use of referenda.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): Is it not important that there should be a separate constitutional body to make regulations to control referenda? In the Republic, the funding for both the yes and the no campaigns is equal, whereas, in our situation, Government funding tries to manipulate the will of the electorate. Ministers make promises during the referendum campaign that are not normally fulfilled.

Mr. Allan: The hon. Gentleman must have picked up a copy of my speaking notes. I was about to say that we should have an independent electoral commission to oversee the use of referenda, particularly as we are expecting one on the fundamental issue of moving towards a more proportional voting system, with all that that entails, and—possibly—one on the single European currency, which will be hugely contentious, not least on the Opposition Benches.

We need rules that are accepted by all sides, and an independent statutory commission to oversee them. We have made clear our support for a permanent electoral commission to oversee the administration of elections. Such a body was recommended by the 1991 all-party Hansard Society commission on elections. Parliament could give an electoral commission such responsibility for referenda. The commission would organise matters such as the poll, the count and the declaration of results, as well as overseeing the wording of questions. Parliament could pass primary legislation on matters specific to particular referenda as they arise.

The commission would be a procedural body. It would not help to make the decision about the constitutional status of referenda. We should consider whether referenda are mandatory or advisory. The Government certainly have enough access to private polling and focus groups without the need to transform the people of the United Kingdom into yet another one. I very much agree with the hon. Member for Mid-Bedfordshire that referenda should not be used as focus groups. Their role needs to be clearer.

Given our present lack of a constitution, we need to consider thresholds. I am convinced that they have standing neither in constitutional theory nor in electoral practice. We would all like 100 per cent. of the electorate to vote in general elections. The precise percentage of voter turnout in a general election in no way affects the binding quality of the result. I would be interested to know at what levels hon. Members who propose participation rates and thresholds think they should be set for the House in order to give the Government legitimacy—the same principles apply.

We should like Parliament to set up an effective information campaign on a referendum, and for a decent period to be provided for it. We would suggest three weeks—as there is before a general election—to debate a referendum.

In that time, the electoral commission would ensure that both yes and no campaigns had equal access to resources. It must introduce the kind of legislation that applies to a general election, covering limits on spending and broadcasting, and the way in which literature is produced. Having advanced toward a written constitution and an electoral commission, an agreed role for referenda could be established, so that there would no longer be any need to nit-pick over thresholds or the conduct of campaigns, as we have unfortunately seen over the important constitutional referenda since the change of Government last year.

10.8 am

Mr. Martin Linton (Battersea): I congratulate the hon. Member for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Sayeed) on raising this subject. Many points need to be clarified about the use of referendums—starting, of course, with the plural of the word. In our own referendum on the plural of the word, the House is 3:2 in favour of the use of "referendums".

I can report to the House that, during my former employment at *The Guardian*, a long, almost religious debate took place over many years, before the issue was finally settled in the style book in favour of "referendums". The argument was that the word "referendum" is a Latin gerundive, not a noun, but has been taken into English as a noun, so the Latin plural is not relevant.

Mr. Home Robertson: When did *The Guardian* ever spell anything right?

Mr. Linton: The days when misspellings frequently appeared in *The Guardian* are many years in the past. My hon. Friend shows his age by remembering the days of bad proofreading, before new technology arrived. Certainly *The Guardian* always had an intended spelling—an ideal spelling to which it aspired and which, in the later editions, it usually achieved. Perhaps my hon. Friend, in Scotland, may have read the earlier editions, which were always riddled with literals.

There is a good argument for the use of "referendums", which is that, in Latin, the word "referendum" is simply a heading for a list to be referred. "Est referendum" means simply that something is to be referred. If there were two items, the heading would be "Sunt referenda", but if there were only one—*[Interruption.]* It is simply a Latin phrase.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will agree with me that, in Latin, the gerundive is much stronger than in the English language. Its use implies not simply something to be discussed, but something that should be discussed—that the discussion must take place.

Mr. Linton *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. Before the hon. Gentleman responds, may I say that although this is an interesting debate about the origin of the word "referendum" and its plural forms, I should be grateful if we could now return to the substance of the debate? I also remind all hon. Members that many people still want to speak, and if others make their contributions reasonably brief, more will be able to do so.

Mr. Linton: I take the point, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

[Mr. Linton]

My substantive argument is that several features of referendums in this country need to be established. One is the funding of the two sides. Another is entrenchment, in the sense discussed by my hon. Friend the Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson). Surely a measure passed as the result of a referendum should be repealed only after a subsequent referendum. There is also the question of reversibility, as raised by the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth)-although the issue is not always as simple as he made it seem.

On thresholds, I agree with the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan) that it is nonsense to try to insist on a particular participation level for all referendums. As we saw in the London referendum, the turnout depends on the level of controversy or opposition to the proposition being put forward.

In a sense, a referendum is a safeguard for the public, enabling them to scream, "No, we don't like that." In London, the issue was, correctly, put to a referendum, because it was assumed that there would be party political controversy, or at least public controversy, on the subject, and there would be a lot of publicity and a high participation rate.

As it turned out, that did not happen. My local authority spent thousands of pounds issuing a glossy leaflet to put through every front door opposing the referendum, but one week later it announced that, as the leader of its party had said that the Conservatives would support the referendum, their opposition was of no avail, and the council tax payers of Wandsworth should forget about the glossy leaflet and support the referendum.

The promised opposition never materialised. Television crews from London Weekend scoured London looking for plausible groups to advocate a no vote, so that they could cover it on their evening newscasts. Without an opposition, the media could not cover the two sides of the debate, so they gave it no publicity. Consequently, although the turnout was reasonable, considering that the referendum was held on the same day as the local elections, it was not very high.

That does not invalidate the result. It simply means that, because it met so little opposition, the issue referred to the people of London did not spark off the kind of debate that would have produced a high turnout. The result should not be condemned on the grounds that the proposal received so little opposition. It would be nonsense to say that, because the turnout did not reach a certain level, the result should not be accepted.

The corollary of that argument would be that only on hotly controversial issues would the turnout pass the threshold. Indeed, that idea affected what happened with the Scotland Bill in the 1970s, when a threshold was inserted.

Mr. Fabricant: Would the hon. Gentleman say that the Welsh referendum had passed that threshold?

Mr. Linton: I am arguing against the use of thresholds. Thresholds are nonsense, because participation will depend on the degree to which people disagree with the proposition. Often, something put to the people in a referendum sparks little controversy and is passed easily. People would go and vote if they thought that the proposition was likely to be defeated, but as it is not they do not bother. That does not invalidate the result.

There are two further arguments about the New Zealand and London referendums. I do not recognise the description by the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst about the New Zealand "preferendum". There were two referendums on the voting system. In the first, the people of New Zealand clearly indicated that they wanted a change—[HON. MEMBERS: "Of what?"] They wanted to change the system.

A commission was set up and recommended an alternative—the mixed member proportional, or MMP, system. That was put to the people in another referendum and they voted in favour of it, despite a well financed campaign for the first-past-the-post system. That campaign spent much more money than its opponents could find, but, despite the overwhelming superiority of resources behind the first-past-the-post system, MMP won fairly and squarely. It was clearly the expressed view of the New Zealand people that that system should be used.

The fact that Winston Peters, the leader of the New Zealand First party, allowed himself to be elected as an opponent of the National party only to announce three weeks later that he would support that party, is a function not of the voting system but of the fact that Winston Peters changed his mind. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) should speak for himself.

In the previous New Zealand election, carried out under the first-past-the-post system, Winston Peters would have been in exactly the same situation—holding the balance of power—had it not been for a handful of votes. Only after the final recount under first past the post did it turn out that he would not hold the balance of power. Had he won that vote, he would have been able to do exactly the same after the previous election. That shows that the situation was a function of the behaviour of Winston Peters rather than of the voting system.

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset): Could the hon. Gentleman tell us what that has to do with today's debate, as opposed to yesterday's debate?

Mr. Home Robertson: Does the hon. Gentleman think that he is the Speaker?

Mr. Linton: I look to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We are arguing about the use of referendums, and the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst said that what happened in the New Zealand referendum showed that the use of referendums was invalid. I am pointing out that the use of referendums in New Zealand was perfectly legitimate. The decision was clearly arrived at, despite the overwhelming superiority of the resources deployed against it. Nothing in the New Zealand experience should disillusion us about the use of referendums; rather, it should disillusion us about the election of politicians who subsequently change their minds.

10.17 am

Mr. Christopher Fraser (Mid-Dorset and North Poole): I am sorry that I was slow to rise to my feet, Mr. Deputy Speaker; I was stunned by the prospect that the debate might be returning to the track on which it started.

Today the House has the opportunity to reassert its authority. One of its principal functions is to hold the Executive to account. With a Government majority of 179—and, I must add, the comfortable pact between the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats—such issues are left to the Conservative Opposition to raise. They are of vast importance, and I am appalled by the low attendance on the Government Benches.

Not content with the mathematical domination of this place, Ministers, especially the Prime Minister, have decided to ignore the House. They declare that the people should decide. Of course, there is a compelling argument that a Government should listen to the people and consult. Certainly it would be wrong to proceed otherwise on issues such as the single currency.

I believe that my constituents have already made a choice—having heard, questioned and endorsed my views, they sent me to Westminster to decide. Now, however, the peoples of the nations that make up the United Kingdom are being sent to the polls again and again. A referendum was held in London about whether to have a mayor, and the Prime Minister promises that more will follow.

I do not rule out referendums altogether, especially on matters of major constitutional reform, but where does one draw the line? Why, having had referendums on Scottish and Welsh devolution, should not we have a referendum on English regional government? Perhaps the Government draw the line where they fear that they will not win, even though they have the power greatly to improve the chance that a referendum will go their way—they set the question and the programme for the vote, and decide how the vote should be construed. In reality, the people do not decide—the question is rigged, and the answer is therefore open to interpretation.

Leaving aside the point that referendums undermine the power and the authority—and, indeed, the sovereignty—of Parliament, I believe that the time has come to set out some rules. A framework is now needed—that is the point of this debate. There must be firm rules, so that the system cannot be abused. Issues of time allocation and broadcasting must be addressed.

We must tackle four key areas. First, we must decide what subjects are appropriate for a referendum. For example, having voted on a tartan tax, should the people of Scotland—and the rest of us—now have the opportunity to vote on all new taxes? Secondly, should the result of a referendum be binding on the Executive? At what level does a referendum have moral authority—is it 50 per cent. of those who vote, or 50 per cent. of those who are eligible to vote? If a threshold based on those who are eligible to vote is good enough for trade union membership, should not that principle be extended? I hope that the Minister will answer those questions.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Many people in Scotland are interested to know why the Conservative party did not call for a threshold in the London referendum, given that it so loudly called for one in the referendums in Scotland and Wales. Why does it not argue that the result of the London referendum is invalid, as no great threshold was reached?

Mr. Fraser: We called for a 50 per cent. threshold, although I shall not dwell on that, as we do not have much time.

Thirdly, we should ask how the question should be framed to command universal, or near-universal, acceptance. I believe that an independent body should devise the question, so that the charge that the question had been fixed can be avoided.

Fourthly, and most important, has the issue been closely defined? How do the people know, in detail, what the consequences of a yes of no result will be? Has a problem with existing arrangements been identified before the referendum takes place? Has a White Paper been published or a Bill drafted? Unless we deal with those questions, it will continue to seem as though the purpose of the referendum is to short-circuit debate in the House, so that Labour Members can repeat, parrot-like, "The people have decided."

The referendum has been used by every dictator in history. It would be most inappropriate to suggest that the Prime Minister is a dictator—I would not dream of doing so—but one has to question whether the plebiscite is a vehicle for true democracy or a vehicle to dupe the people, so that the Government receive blanket approval to do what they please. I fear that experience since May last year suggests the latter—as my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Sayeed) said, in Scotland and Wales the referendums were held before Parliament could scrutinise, amend and enact the legislation.

The Labour Government were elected to govern, to make decisions, and to be responsible for the effects of those decisions. Why do they accept the responsibility of government, but avoid the responsibility of making decisions? As Lord Lawson once said, quoting Pierre Mendès France:

"To govern is to choose. To appear to be unable to choose is to appear to be unable to govern."

10.24 am

Mr. David Maclean (Penrith and The Border): Constitutionally in this country, decisions have been made by Members elected to the House of Commons. The public have never questioned the integrity of the decisions made in the House by a majority of the governing party—*[Interruption.]* They may question it at times, but they accept the validity of the right of the majority party to implement measures—they know that there are rules to govern the election of Members of Parliament.

There is a brief period after elections when individuals may be challenged on their election expenses, but no one challenges the Representation of the People Acts, which lay down rules governing our election. All the important decisions that are taken in the House have their roots in a system of rules laid down in legislation to deal with how Members are elected, the expenses that may be incurred and the broadcasting of elections. That system has worked exceptionally well.

I do not intend to quibble with the results of the various referenda, although I understand why some people nit-pick—to use the word of the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson)—the results, given the way in which the Government chose to conduct the referenda. We are moving into a new political landscape—I do not particularly like it, as it has not benefited my party in the past year—but, if that is to involve the regular use of referenda, we must have rules

[Mr. David Maclean]

to govern how they are conducted, just as we have legislation to govern how we, the current decision makers, are elected to the House of Commons.

As many of my hon. Friends want to speak in the short time available, that is the only argument I want to make today, but the Minister must address it in all seriousness. I regret that this is the second consecutive day when I have had to say that the Home Secretary is an honourable and decent man, but he must see the validity of the argument. If referenda are to become a regular part of the political scene, they must be governed by detailed rules on timing, the question asked and all the other points that have been raised today—whether the referendum should be pre-legislative, whether it should be binding, and whether there should be a threshold.

Even though, God help us, there are already 150 review groups and task forces telling the Government what to do, we need one more. We need a properly independent commission, not the partial—or, as the Home Secretary described it yesterday, "relatively independent"—Jenkins commission.

Unlike the Cookie whitewash inquiry, the commission should be chaired by a properly independent judge; it should comprise not necessarily the great and the good, but those who understand these things and who can recommend the procedures that should be followed. All players in the House will accept the recommendations of a commission only if that commission is independent, with the Home Office acting as an able secretariat; we shall accept referenda only if there are rules, guidelines and legislation to govern how they are conducted.

It is no good for the Labour party to complain that individual Members of Parliament are quibbling about referenda. Of course Members of Parliament from other parties will quibble, as, at the moment, referenda are perceived to be set by Millbank and the Labour party hierarchy—they are phrased, timed and manipulated by the Labour party. I believe that the Government want to use referenda as a legitimate tool of government, but referenda can be a legitimate tool of government only if they are legitimised through legislation.

10.28 am

Mr. Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South): Despite a leaflet being put through the letter box of every house in London, and despite the Minister for Transport in London handing out scratchcards at tube stations encouraging people to vote in the London referendum, there was a derisory turnout. Only 35 per cent. of the public voted, and about 75 per cent. either said no or expressed no opinion. In my opinion, the London referendum lacked legitimacy: its result cannot be considered representative of the overall view of Londoners. If we are to continue to have referendums as a matter of course, there should be a threshold.

On Report on the London Referendum Bill, the Opposition tabled an amendment calling for a 50 per cent. turnout, so that at least half the electorate should express a view on the proposals before them.

Mr. Allan: Is the hon. Gentleman therefore of the view that all London borough councillors should resign, since there was a similar turnout at the local elections? Is he also aware that 75 per cent. of the voters in Westminster did not vote for the Conservative council there?

Mr. Ottaway: The hon. Gentleman's intervention brings me to the second part of my point. I have no idea how many people voted for him at the general election, but I understand that it was not very many.

Mr. Allan: It was more than 50 per cent.

Mr. Ottaway: Then I wish the hon. Gentleman the best of luck.

If a proposal is of such extreme constitutional importance that it is the subject of a referendum, that raises it above the tone of normal council or parliamentary elections. If we are to change the constitutional basis of our country, surely a 50 per cent. threshold is appropriate.

Mr. Salmond: The hon. Gentleman proposes a 50 per cent. turnout, but the threshold that the Conservatives tried to introduce in the Scotland Bill involved not a 50 per cent. turnout, which is normally easily surpassed—for example, in Scotland in 1979—but 40 per cent. of the total vote. Why do the Conservatives propose one threshold for London and another for Scotland and Wales?

Mr. Ottaway: The hon. Gentleman should consider our proposals as alternatives. We are an Opposition party putting forward our ideas. I am not that familiar with Scottish affairs, but I think that a 40 per cent. yes vote was a feature of the 1979 referendum, so it would seem not illogical that the Scottish team should make a similar proposal. It is a different matter in London.

Mr. Home Robertson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ottaway: No. I am very short of time, and I have already given way twice.

I do not find it illogical to suggest that more people should express a view than not for a proposal to become binding.

My second point was touched on by my right hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean) and relates to the representation of the people legislation. If a television broadcaster running a London current affairs programme supported one side of the referendum, should he come off the airwaves?

In London, Mr. Trevor Phillips, the presenter of a programme called "Crosstalk", was an active member of the yes campaign. Indeed, it is rumoured that he will be a mayoral candidate for London. I make no criticism whatsoever of Mr. Trevor Phillips—indeed, I have much praise for him. He conducts his programme in a genuinely neutral way, and when I have been interviewed by him, I have never felt that his party allegiance has in any way prejudiced what he has to say. However, there was nothing in the London Referendum Bill that gave any guidance on whether he should be allowed to stay on the airwaves.

I referred the matter to the Independent Television Commission, which has a code of conduct on such matters. Its view was that the principles enshrined in the

representation of the people legislation should apply in a referendum. I do not know how it happened, but within a matter of days, Mr. Phillips came off the airwaves. However, it should not be left to Opposition Members to raise such matters with the ITC. They should be dealt with in the Bill. The position of the representation of the people legislation is far from clear. If nothing else happens, it should be incorporated into future referendum Bills.

My third and final point is whether or not there should be funding for a no campaign. In London, some £3 million was allocated to a so-called awareness programme, including the leaflets to which I referred. There was an awareness programme on the radio, and leaflets were put through every door, but there was no funding whatsoever for those who wanted to make counter-proposals or to express outright opposition. The Government believe that their proposals were put forward in a neutral way, but they were actually saying, "This is what we think—take it or leave it. Say yes or no in the referendum."

There is no justice in that attitude. It is like a jury at the Old Bailey being asked to make a judgment after hearing just the case for the prosecution, not the case for the defence. In truth, it is impossible to be neutral about a positive set of proposals. Therefore, I believe that a no or counter-proposal campaign should have the opportunity to express a view, given that so much taxpayers' money is being spent putting over the positive set of proposals.

We have had four referendums so far, and on the strength of their results, the Government believe that they have a mandate for action. There are at least two more to come—on monetary union and electoral reform. The issues require clarification. There should at least be some legislation setting up an organisation, so that they can be addressed.

10.36 am

Mr. Robert Syms (Poole): Referendums are becoming very much a part of our political life; they are much more common than they were, and the practice of treating the electorate as an opinion poll sample is likely to continue in future. That is dangerous in our constitution, especially as there may be a big question mark over the future of the House of Lords. A two-House system provides a check on the Government, and if the other place is weakened, watered down or abolished, the referendum may become a far more dangerous constitutional innovation.

In many nations, referendums result from citizens' action and petition; the referendum is a bottom-up procedure. In the British political context, however, it is a device of the majority party. Governments institute referendums; they decide the wording and the timing. With all the temptations of power and of government, that is pretty dangerous.

I shall not dwell on what has happened in the past; it is more important to look to the future. It is important to establish an independent commission, or at least a code of conduct, so that we all know where we stand. That is a matter not only for the Opposition but for the Government, as the majority of today may be the minority of tomorrow, and a future Government may well use the lack of rules to reverse or change the position or to promote a very different agenda.

It is sensible that rules that we all understand should apply to the body politic. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean) said, we make almost a fetish of rules for parliamentary elections, and agents spend all their time telling us what we can or cannot do. Yet referendums are open season: there are no tight rules.

Referendums must be seen to be fair and legitimate. If we are to face the expense and upheaval, it is in everyone's interests that they are seen to be so; that requires the establishment of a code of conduct or an independent commission.

Certain questions need to be addressed. Who may initiate a referendum, and on what issues? We must not forget that referendums can be very bad news for minorities—and in a democracy it is important to protect minorities. Who will decide the wording—the Government or a special commission? How many questions should be asked? How will the referendum be organised and financed? How should money be raised, and should there be expenditure limits? What constitutes approval? Should it be by a majority or by a percentage of the electorate? Can a question be put again? Denmark, for example, was forced to hold a second referendum, having given what might have been thought the wrong answer. Should a referendum be pre-legislative or post-legislative? Finally, what rules should govern television and media access?

Those are all important subjects. Since we started to hold referendums, many academic conferences have been held on how they should be structured. We in the political class should set ground rules that are clear, transparent and widely accepted. Then we will know when people are cheating and when they are not. If referendums are to be held, they must be fair, legitimate and accepted by all participants at least as a democratic exercise in which everyone has a chance to put their point of view.

10.40 am

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset): I find myself in an unaccustomed position. Luckily, the organ grinder is here should the monkey fail.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Sayeed) on bringing an enormously important subject before the House. Now I come to think of it, I am amazed that we have not debated it many months, or even years, before now. This is a useful and timely debate.

My right hon. Friends the Members for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth), and for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean) and my hon. Friends the Members for Mid-Dorset and North Poole (Mr. Fraser), for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway) and for Poole (Mr. Syms) all made significant points.

I can summarise the consistent theme that has run through the debate in five points. First, a range of questions clearly remains unanswered. There is no doubt that there are issues that have not been resolved concerning the holding of referendums. Secondly, it is abundantly clear—for this we also have to thank hon. Members from other parties—that there needs to be cross-party agreement on a framework; the issue should be raised above party politics.

Thirdly, there needs to be an independent commission to conduct referendums. As several of my hon. Friends said, it is implausible that a fair referendum—or at least one that would be seen to be fair—can be conducted at

[Mr. Oliver Letwin]

the behest of a Government who are necessarily a participant in that referendum and in the arguments within it.

Fourthly, there needs to be a set of rules governing access to the media, as there is for general elections, although the rules will have to be different, because equal access to the media needs to be provided for the yes and the no campaigns—which may be a quite different proposition from equal access for political parties. For example, all political parties could be on one side in a referendum, but the other side should be equally represented in the media. Finally, there needs to be a settled decision—the will of the British people—about what should constitute a fair threshold for a result.

None of that is new; the issue has been studied by a group of people, under the aegis of the constitution unit of University College London and the Electoral Reform Society—not, as the Home Secretary's phrase, a relatively independent group, but a genuinely independent group. It is chaired by Sir Patrick Nairne and includes Dr. David Butler, representatives of all the political parties, and a number of distinguished academics.

That group sat for some months and considered the issue in great detail. Its findings have been much spoken of in the other place. It recommended, among other things:

"It is essential that referendums should be conducted in a manner which enables all competing views to be heard . . . special guidance should be drawn up . . . An independent statutory Commission should be established . . . A balance should be maintained between the 'Yes' and 'No' viewpoints rather than between the different political parties . . . Every household should receive a publicly funded leaflet giving general information on the holding of the referendum and statements of the 'Yes' and 'No' cases".

If an independent commission has reached such a conclusion, if there is broad cross-party agreement that such rules are necessary, and if—as the Home Secretary graciously came close to telling the House yesterday—the Government impose an orderly procedure on the referendum on proportional representation, we have every reason to hope that, in just a few minutes, the Minister will tell us that the Government have at last concluded that it is necessary to impose such order on referendums generally.

I want to take the debate one step further and ask a question that has not been sufficiently explored—why is all this so important now? Why was my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Bedfordshire right to raise the matter today? One point that has been raised, by implication, in the debate is the dizzy speed of constitutional change under this Government. Indeed, constitutionally they are the most radical Government since 1688—

Mr. Home Robertson: Thank God for that.

Mr. Letwin: I would not echo the hon. Gentleman's sentiment. I regret almost every aspect of the Government's agenda for constitutional change. However, that is not the burden of my argument today. Whether one welcomes it or disdains it; whether one regards it as unsettling to the whole nature of our constitution and our democracy or the best thing since sliced bread is neither here nor there. It has happened and is continuing to happen at a dizzying pace. It is happening by means of something which is itself a constitutional innovation, on which we do not yet have a settled view or settled rules. We cannot be confident that fair play will be involved—a necessary tool of any referendum. It behoves the Government, much more than their predecessors, seriously to take this question in hand and do something about the structuring of referendums.

There is a second point, of equal importance. The most important referendum that will be held—perhaps not in this Parliament, but shortly thereafter if the Government have their way—is that on a European currency. Many of us see that as a Rubicon. In that referendum, if none of the action recommended by the independent commission and many of my hon. Friends and other hon. Members is taken, there will be a severe danger that that critical referendum will not be, and will not be seen to be, fair.

In that case, there will be an awesome power of money behind one position. There is a great danger that a Government allied with the European Commission would use taxpayers' funds and a set of rules that did not have cross-party support or national acceptance to distort the likely result. Whether we fall on one side or the other of the argument in that referendum, it is of the greatest importance to all in this country that the result is seen to be fair and to have been fairly obtained.

There is a further point. It is not simply a matter of the European referendum; we were told yesterday that there is likely to be a referendum on proportional representation. In respect of the conduct of this House and the British constitution, that referendum will probably be, in its long-term effects, the biggest issue to be faced in this Parliament. The Home Secretary gave us at least a hint that the Government might impose rules that would establish fairness in the conduct of that referendum. However, that is not enough.

The Government want to seek parliamentary approval—unfortunately, they are likely to obtain it—to constrain the way in which political parties are funded at general elections. We understand that the Government will try to establish a position in which internal political debate, when it is conducted outside the context of a referendum, will be constrained by the amount of money that can be spent by either side. Yet within the referendum itself, there will be no rules to preclude the Government spending not politically raised money, but taxpayers' money, on trying to persuade the public to take one view rather than another.

It is therefore wholly possible under the current regime—although the Home Secretary has assured us that he does not want this—for the Government to issue large-scale information on one side of the issue, in reality propaganda posing as information, in a referendum on proportional representation. If the Government were to act in that way, they would be undercutting the rules on political funding, using taxpayers' money to distort a constitutional outcome. That would seriously undermine the structure of our democracy and people's faith in it.

The Government must translate the Home Secretary's hints of yesterday into the reality of guidelines and an independent commission that would make it clear that taxpayers' money will not be used to distort the critical outcome of a referendum on proportional representation or any other referendum, whether European or domestic. If the House takes heed of that, and if the Minister conveys that to the Home Secretary so that the Government can take heed of it, my hon. Friend the

Member for Mid-Bedfordshire will live in history as having contributed, through a debate that has hardly been attended by Labour Members, to a major constitutional improvement.

10.49 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. George Howarth): I congratulate the hon. Member for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Sayeed) on securing the debate and on having, for the most part, presented his arguments thoughtfully and interestingly. I also commend him on his timing, as it is less than two weeks since the fourth referendum of this Parliament was held. Each of the constituent countries of the United Kingdom has recent experience of a referendum, and this is a good time to reflect on that experience.

Most of the points made in debate were thoughtful, and I shall shortly say a little about the general principles raised. I should cover two points immediately, however, because they do not fall under general headings. First, the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) asked, under the heading of reversibility, how long referendum results will last and when questions can be reconsidered. It is open to Parliament to reopen any issue on which it has already legislated, whether or not it has been subject to a referendum.

I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will accept it in the spirit in which it is intended if I say that I am confident that the referendums we have had have been popular and reasonably successful. I do not think that there will be any immediate demand from the people of Scotland or Northern Ireland—possibly even the people of Wales—to revisit those issues. However, if there is at any time such popular demand, the House will debate the matters, and further action will flow from that. The option is always open.

The second point, raised by several hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan), was the question of thresholds. Different circumstances require different rules, and it is not possible to generalise. In some cases, a threshold may be appropriate, but in others it will not. Even where it might be appropriate, different levels might apply in different cases, as my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Linton) said.

It was not appropriate to set a threshold in any of the referendums that we held over the past year.

Mr. Salmond *rose—*

Mr. Howarth: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman, but I do not intend to give way often, as I have very little time.

Mr. Salmond: I certainly agree that there should have been no thresholds in the referendums that we have had. However, the Minister seemed to suggest that there might be some reasons for having a threshold. I plead with him not to do that. Thresholds have caused any amount of trouble in Scotland, and if a threshold had been imposed on the London referendum, it would, by any description, have been considered a failure. I want a principled statement from the Government that they will not indulge in any fancy franchise at any referendum.

Mr. Howarth: My point was that I do not want to prescribe the position for every set of circumstances. So far, we have seen no case for a threshold. My hon. Friend the Member for Battersea spoke very clearly on the general principle of thresholds, but I would not want to rule them out in every case, because we cannot see what will happen in future.

Mr. Home Robertson *rose—*

Mr. Howarth: I will give way to my hon. Friend, but I ask him to appreciate that my time is very limited.

Mr. Home Robertson: Yes, but this is a very important point. This is a minefield. A 40 per cent. threshold was imposed in the referendum held in Scotland in 1979, and, although there was a clear yes vote, that artificial rule meant that the decision of the people of Scotland was thrown out. We had to wait nearly 20 years before we got our Parliament. That sort of fancy franchise cannot be tolerated anywhere.

Mr. Howarth: My hon. Friend is quite right, and that is why it was not considered right to set a threshold in the Scottish referendum this time. That supports the point I am making about what is or is not appropriate.

Referendums are not a new device. Indeed, their use can be traced back to Roman times, and we have had an interesting diversion on the origin of the word itself. In the last century and until quite recently, there were temperance ballots in Wales. I believe that the last dry area went wet last year; if I am mistaken on that, no doubt someone will write to me. A so-called border poll in Northern Ireland 25 years ago under a Conservative Government produced a yes vote of 98.5 per cent., but its usefulness was undermined by the fact that it was boycotted by the nationalist community. The very high turnouts in the north and in the south of Ireland in the referendums on 22 May show the progress we have made since then.

In 1975 we had the United Kingdom's first, and so far only, national referendum, when there was a two-to-one vote to stay in the Common Market, as it was then called. That was followed by the first Scottish and Welsh devolution referendums. The recent referendums in those two countries make it possible to measure how far public opinion has moved. In 1979, the people of Wales voted four-to-one against devolution, but by 1997, a majority—albeit not a large one—of those who voted were in favour of the Government's devolution proposals. On the present crop of referendums, we made a clear manifesto commitment that our devolution proposals would be subject to referendums, and they were.

I was remiss earlier in not congratulating the hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) on his first outing at the Dispatch Box. I am sure that there will be many more. His speech was very clear and, though partisan, thoughtful. I have no doubt we will hear much more from him.

The hon. Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole (Mr. Fraser) and others raised the question of the single currency referendum. We are committed to a referendum on that. What characterises these subjects is that they involve a transfer of power away from central government, and bringing decisions closer to the people.

The hon. Member for Mid-Bedfordshire made a key point about the conduct of referendums. Overall, the experience of the recent referendums has been very

[Mr. Howarth]

positive and it is a considerable tribute to those responsible for the conduct of elections that everything went so smoothly and efficiently, particularly bearing in mind the fact that the referendums in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland went ahead with relatively little notice, and the poll in London was combined with local elections. I certainly pay tribute to the electoral administrators involved.

The hon. Gentleman also suggested that there would be merit in establishing a permanent referendum commission to oversee the operation of regional and national referendums. I am not wholly persuaded of the merits of that suggestion. It was considered by the Electoral Reform Society and UCL constitution unit. In the recent referendums, we considered it right that Parliament should determine the wording of any question in a referendum being conducted by central Government. The number of amendments tabled to subsequent Bills bore out our contention that that was the right way to act. The polling and counting arrangements were not subject to any criticism as far as I am aware.

The hon. Gentleman suggested, unless I am mistaken, that public money was spent to fund the yes campaigns in Scotland and Wales. I flatly refute that allegation: no public money was spent on those campaigns. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will check the facts and retract that statement.

Mr. Letwin: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Howarth: No I shall not give way—it is very late.

The position is clear: there will be occasions when referendums are appropriate, and occasions when they are not. They cannot create unity where no unity exists, and they cannot change the fact that Parliament is a sovereign body. However, they provide a unique way of consulting the people on specific issues, particularly on policies that are important in particular countries or parts of the country. That is why the Government committed themselves to holding a number of referendums. The electorate endorsed that principle and elected this Government, and we have carried out those promises.

We have had a useful debate, but we should be clear that referendums have a place and will not always be used in every circumstance. They will be used where appropriate.

Turnberg Health Proposals

10.59 am

Mr. Tony Colman (Putney): The Labour party welcomed the Turnberg proposals in February this year. As I could not ask questions of the Secretary of State following his statement in the House, I will concentrate the bulk of my comments on the effects of the proposals on my constituency. Some of my hon. Friends have said that they will touch on the report's wider implications and what has happened since February. The report was widely welcomed, not least in Putney, whose residents suffered years of cuts in services and uncertainty, particularly in the provision of hospital services.

May I make a declaration of interest? Since 1966, my family and I have been treated at Queen Mary's hospital, Roehampton, my local hospital. I have fought for its retention almost all my adult life. My predecessor also fought for it, but in the last two years of the Tory Government, Queen Mary's suffered severe cuts. Under the Tories, and before I became the Member for Putney, the hospital lost acute surgery, paediatrics, orthopaedics, maternity services—my sons were among the last to be born there—gynaecology and obstetrics. Also before the last election, the accident and emergency department was downgraded. Those cuts totally undermined the viability of the burns and plastics unit remaining on site.

I state those facts because the local Conservatives have been reinventing history in the recent local elections. It is worth reminding the House that those cuts in services were not opposed by my predecessor or by the local Conservative council at the time. It is only since the general election that the Conservatives have done a U-turn, conveniently forgetting that they made the cuts themselves. The cuts were not opposed by the Conservative nominees on the community health council, with the honourable exception of the late councillor, Duncan Hawkins.

The doctors and nurses at Queen Mary's hospital, Roehampton have coped brilliantly and have performed miracles over the past year to cope with those Tory cuts. The Turnberg report gave a vision for a new, secure Queen Mary's hospital—a secure community hospital for the 21st century. I shall devote the remainder of my speech to the future of Queen Mary's and how it has fulfilled that vision in implementing the Turnberg proposals.

More than 90 per cent. of the services previously provided on the site will continue into the next millennium. The transfer of the remaining acute services to neighbouring hospitals is proceeding to plan and the new wards at Kingston hospital will be available in August. However, the out-patient services, which form the vast bulk of the services available to my constituents, will be immeasurably strengthened and improved by a new, integrated care centre offering rapid diagnosis and treatment, out-patient and clinic services in ENT, gastroenterology, elderly care, dermatology, gynaecology—including ante-natal, post-natal and assisted conception—neurology, oral and orthodontics, ophthalmology, orthopaedic and fractures, paediatrics, pain control, plastics, rheumatology, urology and HIV-AIDS, haematology, and a beta-cell diabetes service.

Some 200 in-patient beds will cover rehabilitation and respite care, mental health and elderly continuing care. Day units will continue, including the Bryceson-White

unit for elderly people, the mental health resource centre and the Bader rehabilitation unit. The nationally renowned skin bank will remain.

I could go on with a laundry list of all the services available at the new Queen Mary's, but suffice it to say that it is a substantial hospital. I thank the Minister for his rapid and positive response to the referral of the proposals from Wandsworth community health council this year. I am grateful for his support for the rapid diagnostic centre, the minor injuries unit, the day surgery up to level 9 under local anaesthetic, and primarily for his support for the financing of brand new hospital buildings through the private finance initiative under a successful business case. A project manager has been appointed; the business case is being worked on and should go to the Minister this autumn. We all hope that building will commence within the next three years. In the meantime, the hospital will continue to use the existing buildings that have served the area well for so long.

The number of acute beds moving from Queen Mary's is 172 but, as I said, more than 200 non-acute beds will remain; 137 replacement beds will open at Kingston, 34 will open at St. George's, 12 will open at Chelsea and Westminster, and two will open at West Middlesex. Those new beds reflect the range of choices that the people of Putney should have. I obtained those figures before yesterday afternoon's announcement of additional beds for London.

The movement of the burns and plastics unit will be accompanied by an identical number of beds in its new location. The new wards that will be available at Kingston in the autumn are of the portakabin type, and it is important that capital is made available for permanent buildings at Kingston and elsewhere. It is also important that the once-an-hour bus service between the two hospitals becomes a half-hourly service. Kingston out-patient services are becoming overcrowded. With shorter waiting lists at Queen Mary's hospital, local health care experts should perhaps look at transferring all out-patients to Queen Mary's hospital from Kingston, thereby releasing space for the required permanent acute care facilities at Kingston.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): I reassure the hon. Gentleman that we have one thing in common: both our sons were born in Queen Mary's hospital. However, I am not sure what the hon. Gentleman is trying to convey to the House. He has listed new services and said that many of the services have been moved to other hospitals around Putney. Is that not precisely what is necessary to give rationality to our health service? The hon. Gentleman complained about Tory cuts at Roehampton, but have any of those services been restored on-site? If not, is he not saying that the Labour Government are continuing the previous Government's policies of rationalising the NHS?

Mr. Colman: Clearly, the hon. Gentleman does not realise that, once services are moved off-site, doctors, nurses and facilities are also moved. That has happened. If he suggests that the Tory cuts can easily be reversed, he should go to his local hospital and ask how transferred services can be brought back.

Sir Sydney Chapman: The hon. Gentleman asks me to understand that point; it is a pity that some of his hon. Friends did not make that point when Edgware hospital was closed. They gave the impression that the accident and emergency department at Edgware could be reopened.

Mr. Colman: I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) will make his point adequately if he is able to attend this debate. I must make it clear that what happened at Edgware and Queen Mary's happened under the Tory Government, and they were responsible for those changes.

The transfer of acute beds from Queen Mary's to Kingston created a balance, but it is important that, as soon as practicable after the transfer of those acute beds, the transfer of beds from Putney hospital should take place. There must not be a gap when Queen Mary's hospital is not used to its full capacity. Following that transfer, I look forward to new health care facilities in a public-private partnership with the local council, housing associations and the private sector, ensuring that Putney hospital continues to be a health care facility for the people of Putney. I further endorse the use of accommodation at Putney hospital by students of the Roehampton institute, a university that has a number of proposals on how it can work in partnership with the hospital across the road.

There is an urgent need to train general practitioners and hospital staff in management issues, particularly in the development of primary care groups and trusts. That could dovetail well with the Roehampton institute's plans for the expansion of health care subjects.

As I said, Queen Mary's continues to have the world famous Bader rehabilitation unit for amputees, with associated prosthetics and orthotics manufacturing workshops, and wheelchair manufacture and service. The workshops have been provided by two private companies—RSL and Steepers—which, in the past few days, have merged. I am pleased to tell the House that I have received assurances from Stephen Horam, the finance director of RSL, that there will be no reduction of the continued operational work force of more than 500, and Roehampton will continue, through the public-private partnership of the NHS and those companies, as a world centre for prosthetics and orthotics.

I welcome the White Paper on the future of the health service, particularly because of the way in which it backs up the principles outlined in the Turnberg report. I especially welcome the encouragement of trust mergers, and I look forward to a reconfiguration of trusts in south-west London, potentially based on the Queen Mary's site. A dialogue has now opened in south-west London between trusts, health authorities, GPs, local authorities and local communities. That dialogue must continue and seek ways in which to achieve a more holistic approach to community services in particular. With the development of larger hospital trusts, there must follow the development of a larger critical mass for community services, to provide an appropriate balance.

The next five years should bring much larger trusts, in terms of geography and service provision. Their roles will include co-ordinating and providing health promotion services, professional development of nurses and other clinical staff, provision of specialist managerial advice and support and, of course, the efficient running of comprehensive primary and community health services.

Queen Mary's and other hospitals like it in London have a key role to play in providing a more local and accessible service for their communities, while seeking

[Mr. Colman]

ways in which to achieve greater flexibility in developing partnerships in care, and shaping local health services to meet the future needs of local people.

On a contentious note, as a former local authority leader, I feel that health authorities should be replaced by joint commissioning by primary care groups and local councils. The Berlin wall could then finally be removed from health care. Local health authorities, forced as they were under the Tories continually to cut back services, often did so in ways unacceptable to local residents—as is the case with Queen Mary's, as fully described in the Turnberg report. It is important to realise that local councils have been managing care in the community for the past six years with considerable success, and with at least 85 per cent. of services purchased from the not-for-profit or profit sectors. That has worked. Local councils should replace local health authorities in London.

I also welcome a single London-wide health authority, as recommended by the Turnberg report, but I hope that on the back of successful trials of local council purchasing of health care, the Greater London authority could take over that London-wide role. I realise that that may take time.

In the meantime, I pay tribute to the work of Sir William Wells, chairman of the South Thames regional health authority until its demise next year. He has done a huge amount in the past five months to ensure that the Turnberg proposals have been put into action in the South Thames region. I wish him well in his new role outside London.

Queen Mary's hospital has been through a difficult period over the past three years, but the time since February has been managed well. The new chief executive, Veronica Cotterill, has led her staff well into a secure future. I pay tribute to Dr. Elizabeth Nelson, the new chair of the Richmond, Twickenham and Roehampton trust, who has done so much to lead from the front and who has plans way beyond those that I have mentioned today. Finally, I pay particular tribute to Mrs. Alex Elliott, chair of the Queen Mary's League of Friends, who is sitting in the Gallery. She represents the most important people—the Queen Mary's community. She spoke last Sunday about an exciting new future for Queen Mary's and the friends' plans to support it. She has been brilliant.

After Turnberg, Queen Mary's has a different future. In the 50th year of the NHS, Queen Mary's future has been not only secured, but strengthened as a model of how the national health service can adapt itself to reflect new patterns of health care, while serving local residents in the most appropriate way for the 21st century.

11.13 am

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): I thank the hon. Member for Putney (Mr. Colman) for securing this debate, which is the first since the Government's announcement on the Turnberg proposals four months ago. On 3 February, I generally welcomed the report. It was also widely welcomed in the House and outside, as the hon. Gentleman said. It set out many good paths for the health service in London, and we can see that progress has been made.

First, I congratulate the Government on acting speedily on one of the recommendations, by accepting the logical proposal that London should have one strategic health authority. Many of us have argued that case for many years, and the Government have announced that it will be set up next year. Like the hon. Gentleman, I welcome that, but, as the Minister knows, I also believe that we should go further and make the Greater London authority, when it is set up, the strategic health authority for London. In all logic, that should be the case. I know that there are implications concerning what should be done in the rest of country, and that different management structures would be in place, but it would be far better if strategic planning were done by elected people rather than by people whom nobody knows or chooses.

Chapter 4 of the Turnberg report examined locality commissioning, and work is being done on that. I hope that the Minister will accept that there will be a problem if there is not a common set of boundaries with local government. There is a desire to have such common boundaries, within which locality groups fit, and for health authority and local authority boundaries gradually coming together. That would be common sense. However, there is a democratic deficit, and some people have a problem with the idea that developments in primary care will be led by practitioners, rather than by the public, who would make sure that practitioners did what the patients wanted.

The Secretary of State and I had an exchange yesterday on public involvement in health services. He was wrong to say that no party has ever proposed that there should be democratic management of the health service. My party believes that health and social services should be merged under local government control, and that the local authority should therefore also be the health commissioning body. The Government have not come that far, but they are moving in that direction.

The hon. Member for Putney rightly said that the Berlin wall in health care must be broken down. I ask the House and Ministers to accept that there will come a time when we merge health and social services commissioning, as in Northern Ireland. Those services deal with the same people at different stages in their treatment and need, and the illogicality of one service being a local government social services function and another being a separate health authority function does not work for the patient or the practitioner.

I hope that the Government will also seriously consider making more democratic the representation on trusts and health authorities, as well as evaluating the idea of health commissioning eventually being merged with local government. The Government are committed to reforming local government structures; let us not ignore health structures.

The Minister is well aware of the problems in primary care alluded to by Turnberg. In London, we face a severe prospective crisis in the number of doctors and GPs and, in some areas, of nurses and other practitioners. That is very worrying. Some areas of London have staff shortages of up to 20 per cent. By the end of the next five or 10 years, the health service must deal with these problems, particularly in the capital, where pressures are greater and travelling and housing are more expensive.

Ministers probably say privately to their colleagues over the road that they do not want Chancellors, including the present one, to insist on pay awards being staggered, as was done this year. Pay awards should not have been staggered this year. It has not helped; nurses were furious

and other workers were unhappy. If the economy allows it, as it currently does, pay awards should be made in full to encourage people to come into nursing and the other professions in public services, such as medicine and therapies. I hope that the Minister will tell us—if not today, then soon—how he plans to deal with recruitment needs in London. If we do not meet those needs, we shall be unable to implement all the proposals made by Sir Leslie Turnberg and his colleagues.

On intermediate care, the health service is at an interesting stage. We now realise—as do the Government, and I commend them for it—that the community does not need only intensive care beds, high dependency beds or long-term beds, for respite care or convalescence, or to reduce blocking hospital beds. It needs a network of community hospitals in London, which we used to have. I do not blame this Government for closing them down. I should be interested to hear how the Government plan to respond to that need and open them up.

All areas of London should have a community hospital. To take a local example, I know that, when people, particularly the elderly, from the north of Southwark no longer need acute care, or need other care, they often cannot find it locally. They are cared for at home, if that is possible, or sent a long way from their community, where their partners, spouses, families and friends cannot easily visit if there is no public transport or they have no private transport. I hope that the need for a second tier of in-patient care in London, with and without nursing help, will be addressed.

Sir Leslie's report rightly concentrates on the needs of mental health care in London. Ministers understand the pressure, but the long-awaited paper on mental health has still not been published. It has been much delayed, and we keep being told that it is imminent. The Minister may make an announcement on that. The Under-Secretary of State, who is responsible for mental health matters, has promised to announce the Government's policy in this area.

My plea to the Government is that they ensure soon that London has the 24-hour services that Sir Leslie and his colleagues recommend. People's crisis needs can be greatly alleviated if there is somewhere they can go at any time. Mental health provision for people who are not in-patients is extremely under-resourced.

Some welcome announcements have been made about bed closures. Will the increase in the number of establishment beds in London be permanent? Yesterday's announcement referred to the new beds as beds to deal with the waiting list and waiting times problem. I welcome that, but will they be available next year and the year after? Turnberg said—thank goodness—that we could no longer afford any further closures of hospital beds in London. The NHS Confederation says that, between 1990 and 1996, the number of acute in-patient beds fell by 2,761, which is a hell of a lot of beds. It would be helpful if the Minister could tell us whether it is Government policy to have a particular number of beds and what that number is, and whether the new beds will be included in future projections.

The report considers that the sensible way in which to deal with the planned five parts of London is a separation of acute and elective care to ensure, among other things, that people's planned operations are not cancelled. If that can be achieved—it is the logic of the Bart's decision—it will be welcome. The two services should not be muddled.

The Minister would be surprised if I did not say something about the largest hospital trust in the country, Guy's and St. Thomas's. On or near his desk is a set of papers awaiting his decision about the final configuration of services. We must all try to ensure that no health service money is wasted. The Minister knows that, if we do what the trust proposes and move the paediatric department from Guy's to St. Thomas's, a new building will have to be built at a cost of about £50 million, and seven floors of a relatively new building at Guy's will be left clinically empty. The plan is to use them for administration, which is nonsense.

People in charge of the cardiac centre have told me that, at the same time, they do not have enough money to do their job properly. We must ensure that the money is used where the need is, which, I would argue, would require paediatric services to stay at Guy's without huge additional expenditure, and the cardiac centre to have the money it needs, rather than buildings to be built that are not needed.

I hope that the Minister will make people happy, will make the health service more effective and will use money more wisely by making the popular decision that Guy's shall have 400 to 500 beds and the elective care, while acute care is concentrated be on the St. Thomas's site.

The hon. Member for Putney was trying to ensure that Labour was not blamed for Tory decisions. In my part of London, we still believe that Labour should take its responsibility because it endorsed the Tory proposal to close accident and emergency services at Guy's. The Government cannot get out of their responsibility. That may not apply in the hon. Gentleman's part of London, but it was as much a Labour as a Tory decision to close our accident and emergency services. It was certainly not the platform on which the Labour party campaigned against me at the general election. People were told that Guy's would be saved on day one of a Labour Government. If that did not include saving the accident and emergency services, I do not know what they thought people believed they meant.

Yesterday, the Chancellor said that he would continue to be an iron Chancellor. The health service requires a Chancellor who understands its resource needs. Sir Leslie has said that the health service in London needs the resources to do the jobs that we all want it to do. Health ministers will make their case, but the proof of the effectiveness of the Government's health service pudding will be whether the Chancellor next month announces significant increases in resources for the health service in London and elsewhere. Without them, much of what is in this excellent report will not come to pass.

11.25 am

Mr. Keith Darvill (Upminster): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Mr. Colman) on securing this important debate. I should like to confine my remarks to two aspects of the report: chapter 11 on Harold Wood and Oldchurch hospitals, and chapter 6 on primary care.

Harold Wood hospital is in my constituency, and Oldchurch hospital is in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Mrs. Gordon). Both hospitals come under the Barking and Havering

[Mr. Keith Darvill]

health authority and are in the London borough of Havering. The Turnberg report made a firm recommendation. On page 71, it states:

"We endorse the single site Oldchurch area proposal as optimal on the grounds of access to a large proportion of the most deprived population and the strong support from the local authorities and GPs."

Those words, brief as they are, have been taken wrongly by some, including the BBC, to mean the closure of Harold Wood hospital, but that is not the case. I have had numerous discussions with the executives of the Havering hospitals trust, the BHB trust, the area health authority and the regional health authority about the implementation and recommendations of the report and its knock-on effect on Harold Wood hospital. It will undoubtedly mean different health services at Harold Wood, but it does not mean closure.

I could go on at length about the services that are planned and will be delivered in the future at Harold Wood, but that can wait for a more appropriate time, especially in view of the imminent launch of the local consultation process on the future of hospital services in the area. The indications are that positive proposals will be forthcoming, which will be welcomed by my constituents.

Ms Linda Perham (Ilford, North): As my hon. Friend knows, Members from north-east London have worked well on local hospital issues, but the report acknowledged that its recommendation for Oldchurch will have an impact on King George's hospital in Ilford, which most of my constituents use. Will he join me in urging the Minister to consider the impact on my local services and on services in the whole of the north-east London area?

Mr. Darvill: I am pleased to urge the Minister to consider the impact on hospitals in the surrounding areas.

Health care services will be fit for the new millennium under the proposed package of measures. It will ensure the maximum use of facilities developed through limited investment over the past 10 years. Despite the scare stories that have emanated from some quarters—mainly from our political opponents in the lead-up to the local elections—my main concern is about the time it will take to implement the report's recommendations. The proposals referred to in the report have been developed locally. They are exciting and will provide a new general hospital at Oldchurch close to the existing hospital and just four miles from Harold Wood. The new hospital will be built on land currently owned by the London borough of Havering, which will be exchanged for area health authority land.

After the new hospital has been built and services have decamped from the old hospital to the new, the old hospital will be demolished, leaving Havering council free to build its long-awaited sports stadium. A new hospital close to a public sports facility would enable the link between healthy living and sports injuries facilities to become more than a vision; it would become a reality. Such public facilities, developed in partnership across agencies, would be welcome.

I am concerned about procrastination and about delay which, unfortunately, has been the hallmark of past Administrations. There has been some investment, but it has been piecemeal, and there does not appear to have been a coherent strategy, which has understandably led to public scepticism and frustration. Procrastination and delay in implementing necessary changes have left health services deteriorating, which has affected the constituents of my hon. Friends the Members for Barking (Ms Hodge) and for Dagenham (Ms Church) especially harshly. I fear that further years of delay will fail the populations further, so I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to ensure that this recommendation is high on the list of priorities.

There is a popular misunderstanding about outer east London, which is considered to be a leafy suburb without deprivation. That is not the case, and the area is often overlooked because of that misconception. Recent reports commissioned by the area health authority and the local authorities contain ample evidence of serious health needs that must be addressed.

My constituents and those of my hon. Friends the Members for Barking and for Dagenham need and deserve the new facility, which will provide improved services closer to the centre of population that it would serve. Further delay would do our constituents a disservice; a quick advance would enable the partnership that has developed between the area health authorities, the hospital trusts, the London boroughs, the community health council and Members of Parliament to flourish, in marked and notable contrast to years gone by.

Lack of investment and failure to recognise the area's health needs, especially the almost crisis position of primary care, are evidenced by the Turnberg report, which states on page 33:

"Despite considerable investment in primary care services in the last few years, services lag woefully behind those in the remainder of the country. The number of practices below recommended standards remains high, too many premises remain poor, single handed practices represent a larger proportion than elsewhere, recruitment is difficult and the total number of GPs has fallen slightly in the face of a rise across England."

The table on page 36 shows the acuteness of the problem in east London: only 8 per cent. of premises in the Barking and Havering health authority area are above the minimum standard, and across east London generally, only 20 per cent. are above the minimum standard.

There is a considerable shortage of GPs: the area health authority is 50 short, which has a knock-on effect. GPs who practise in the area have to work under difficult circumstances with long patient lists, crowded surgeries and heavy demands. That has a contributory effect on the average demand on accident and emergency access services.

For those reasons, I welcome the report's recommendations in chapter 6, paragraph 23, especially paragraph 23.6, which states:

"London's health authorities should be required to ensure that the proportion of practice premises which are below minimum standards should be reduced from the current 50 per cent. by 10 per cent. annually. Funding for cash-limited GP premises nationally should be related to the proportion of practice premises which are below the minimum standards. The Regional Offices should ensure that there is co-ordinated advice and support for general practitioners on all aspects of premises provision for London."

In view of that, I invite my hon. Friend the Minister to comment on the timetable for the implementation of those recommendations, for only when they are implemented will we, as politicians who have been elected to improve the health service, have honoured our pledges.

I welcome the debate and the report, which was ordered speedily after the general election and delivered promptly by the independent panel. Its recommendations have been

widely welcomed, and we have to implement them with urgency of purpose, so that the people of London have their health services improved and restored.

11.34 am

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): I also pay tribute to the hon. Member for Putney (Mr. Colman) for giving us the opportunity to comment on the Turnberg report and to make observations on the future of the health service in London, especially hospital services.

I represent a constituency on the edge of Greater London. Mount Vernon hospital, about which I initiated an Adjournment debate on Friday 6 March, is located there. Earlier this year, the Minister of State, Department of Health was good enough to receive a deputation which I took to the Department to discuss its future. On Friday 29 May, Hillingdon health authority produced a consultation document, "A Contract With Local People", which makes drastic recommendations about Mount Vernon hospital and other hospital services, especially Hillingdon hospital in the north of Hillingdon borough.

I fear that the Turnberg report and the Government's plans for the future of the health service in London do not take sufficient note of hospitals such as Mount Vernon, which, historically, have drawn patients from well beyond the Greater London area. I must repeat what I said on 6 March: Mount Vernon is the largest cancer centre in the south-east on a single site. More important, it is probably the premier cancer treatment location in the south of England, if not the country, and combines fantastic clinical facilities for the treatment of cancer with research facilities of international repute, especially the Gray laboratory and the Marie Curie centre.

Furthermore, there is an outstanding hospice, Michael Sobel house, and a scanner centre, the Paul Strickland centre, which have been built up largely by private contributions from generous people over many years. Another charity, the Reconstruction of Appearance and Function Trust, is at Mount Vernon, as is the Cleft Lip and Palate Association. Mount Vernon is a genuine centre of outstanding excellence, but such a cancer centre cannot stand on its own: it has to have a range of supportive services in general medicine, surgery and many other disciplines. They are being put at risk by wide-ranging reviews undertaken for reasons of supposed rationalisation and supposed better organisation of services in the area; but the conclusions are highly questionable and would be prejudicial to the long-term future of the hospital. Indeed, they would call into question its viability beyond the next 10 years or so.

The hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), from the Liberal Democrat Benches, and the hon. Member for Putney suggested that the health service in London would be better administered by the Greater London authority than by the single health authority for the capital proposed by Her Majesty's Government. I do not understand how the Greater London authority could have the range of competence and the professional expertise to run London's health service. How it would administer the budget is unclear to me.

The suggestion of the hon. Members for Southwark, North and Bermondsey and for Putney is contrary to the proposals of Her Majesty's Government for the future governance of London. The proposals are directed at the strategic development of the capital in terms of industry and commerce, transport, strategic planning and so on. They have nothing to do with the health service, and it would be a retrograde step if Her Majesty's Government took their advice. It would not, as they somewhat disingenuously suppose, constitute an advance towards democratic control of the health service.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas (Harrow, West): The hon. Gentleman used the phrase "retrograde step". Does he accept, with the benefit of hindsight, that his failure to oppose the closure of the accident and emergency unit at Mount Vernon hospital when his party was in government was a retrograde step, and will he take this opportunity to apologise to his constituents—and, indeed, mine—for his failure in that regard?

Mr. Wilkinson: I have no reason to apologise. I initiated an Adjournment debate calling for the accident and emergency unit to be kept open at night when there were plans to close it at night. The then Minister—now my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young)—acceded to my request, and the unit was kept open at night for a while; but the health professionals believed that its closure would constitute a better use of resources. They felt that it would be better to concentrate on A and E services at what they considered to be better-equipped hospitals, such as Watford general, Northwick Park and Hillingdon. Hon. Members are extremely rash if they arrogate to themselves a professional competence in matters of health service clinical judgment which are rightly in the domain of health service professionals.

I was not happy with the proposal. It went against the grain. Local people, however, were informed that the unit had to close; they were told that the cancer treatment service would be built up, and that that would become the hospital's specialist role—which indeed it has, to the credit of all concerned. I am arguing that organisational changes in the health service in London are putting at risk even the long-term future of the cancer centre.

The proposed changes are fundamental. Paragraph 4.34 of the consultation document proposes that

"from April 1999 inpatient services for acute medicine and care of the elderly, including those provided in the medical assessment and coronary care units, be transferred from Mount Vernon Hospital to The Hillingdon Hospital".

That is to happen at the beginning of the next financial year. The document continues:

"inpatient services for non-acute medicine and care of the elderly, together with medical day care, medical outpatient services and the minor injuries service remain on the Mount Vernon Hospital site".

However, the next paragraph states:

"from April 2001 the above inpatient services of non-acute medicine and care of the elderly, medical outpatients and minor injuries, plus other services, e. g. children's services, should transfer into the community hospital in the north of the borough".

In other words, there is a stay of execution. In the early part of the next century, Mount Vernon will be deprived of much of its bread-and-butter work.

Paragraph 4.37 states:

"Medical staff would work together as a joint team covering both The Hillingdon and Mount Vernon hospitals, providing acute inpatient care at The Hillingdon Hospital and outpatient and day hospital services across the borough."

That is all very well, and a reasonable person would commend such proposals to make better use of skilled personnel; but, at the same time, it is proposed that

[Mr. Wilkinson]

Mount Vernon hospital—which currently forms a joint trust with Watford general—should merge with Hemel Hempstead and St. Albans NHS hospital trusts in Hertfordshire. That will complicate the cross-London boundary dimension of the health service still further.

The North Thames regional executive dealt with both the home counties north of London and London north of the Thames. That allowed co-ordination, which was thoroughly healthy—especially for hospitals such as Mount Vernon, which took patients from north of Greater London. How things will work under the new regional authorities has yet to be defined: I hope that the Minister will be able to explain.

I am particularly perturbed about the future of the burns and plastic surgery units on the Mount Vernon site. Those specialties are crucial to the underpinning of the cancer centre. The possibilities under consideration appear to be the resiting of the entire unit at Northwick Park hospital in Harrow, the resiting of the plastic surgery centre at Northwick Park—with the burns element going to Chelsea and Westminster hospital—and division of the work between Northwick Park and Chelsea and Westminster, with the burns element going to Chelsea and Westminster. I do not comprehend why those changes are proposed; I do not see how they will help to ensure the long-term future of Mount Vernon as a cancer centre.

The same applies to Hillingdon health authority's further proposals. According to paragraph 4.54 of last Friday's consultation document,

"from April 1999 complex elective inpatient surgery, especially vascular surgery, should be transferred from Mount Vernon Hospital to The Hillingdon Hospital. From April 2001 all elective inpatient surgery should be transferred from Mount Vernon Hospital to The Hillingdon Hospital. Day case surgery for selected patients, together with surgical outpatient services, should remain at Mount Vernon Hospital until such time as a community hospital is developed in the north of the borough."

Again, there is only a stay of execution.

All in all, it would seem that the powers that be have it in for Mount Vernon hospital—God alone knows why. Mount Vernon is an outstanding institution. Most people who have been treated there, have visited the hospital or have the privilege of working there describe it as a centre of excellence. This death by a thousand cuts would be a tragedy.

I am convinced that my constituents, and those who benefit from the hospital's services, will fight for its future. They believe that it ought to be built up rather than run down, and that the fact that Her Majesty's Government—who have made such play of their commitment to the NHS, during their election campaign and since—should contemplate damaging a premier cancer centre beggars belief. I hope that wiser counsels will prevail.

11.47 am

Mr. Roger Casale (Wimbledon): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Mr. Colman) on obtaining the debate. I know how hard he has worked to secure the future of Queen Mary's hospital, both before and since his election. I, too, campaigned, in my neighbouring constituency, to keep Queen Mary's accident and emergency unit open. We did not claim that it would automatically be restored if we were elected, but I venture to suggest that had my hon. Friend been the Member for Putney since 1992 rather than 1997, the situation at Queen Mary's might be very different.

The Tory Government left the new Labour Government an appalling legacy of underfunding and huge regional disparities in health care. However, we also have another inheritance: the Labour party set up the NHS, and initiated the principles and philosophy behind it, along with the commitment to rebuild it. If there was one reason why support for Labour was so strong in my constituency last May, it was the belief that Labour would rebuild the NHS.

Underfunding in London, including my area of south-west London, is a particular problem, as the Turnberg report makes clear. Some time ago, my health authority, Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth, produced a report called "The River Runs Dry". According to the health author ty, that phrase

"most accura ly describes our financial position . . . We do not believe that it will be possible to achieve an income and expenditure balance"

in the next financial year

"without major reductions in staff and other costs of our providers."

Since the publication of that report, the Government have made additional resources available, and detailed negotiations to secure a bridging loan have taken place with the NHS regional executive.

I do not share the rosy view of the South Thames regional executive that is held by my hon. Friend the Member for Putney. I hope that proper funding arrangements for the Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth health authority can be secured. Difficult and acrimonious negotiations have been taking place. A local GP told me, "The deficit is being passed from the trusts to the health authority and back again. Nobody wants to be left with the deficit when the music stops."

If the Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth authority cannot get a bridging loan to cover the non-recurring part of its deficit, the consequences for my constituents will be severe. They will look to the Government, in responding to the Turnberg report, to address the specific problem of resource allocation in London. The NHS needs more resources nationally and more must flow to where they are needed most.

My constituents welcome, as does Turnberg, the Government's commitment to a review of the national distribution of funds for the health service. Page 26 of the Turnberg report suggests that that should be done

"through the creation of a working party to review the resource allocation formula and to study the implications of its findings for London."

In the report "The River Runs Dry", Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth health authority states:

"We have major concerns about aspects of the capitation formula. We spend the vast majority of our resources on what we would regard as high priority unavoidable need and the allocation that we receive does not appear to adequately reflect the needs of our population."

That assessment is consistent with Turnberg's findings for London as a whole. All is not well with London's health service, and the problems must be sorted out.

Coming to grips with the immensity of London's population and the diversity of health needs and life situations of Londoners will be no easy task. One could do worse than consult the list of special factors that are

part of the everyday reality of health care in south-west London and which are cited in the Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth report. Do other areas spend the same amount on AIDS and HIV treatment and care, on serious mental illnesses, on people with learning disabilities and on mentally disordered offenders? Do other regions have the same diverse cultural mix, the same mobility and the same age profile of the population as London does? Does the present capitation formula adequately reflect those factors? My interpretation of Turnberg is that it does not.

If those factors had been taken into account in the Government's review of the formula, the health needs of my constituents would have been more truly reflected, the Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth deficit would be reduced or eliminated, and local health care resources would be increased.

There are some important proposals in the Turnberg report for cutting the cost of administration by the merger of South Thames and the North Thames regional health executives. In the short term, I am sure that the South Thames executive will ensure that my local authority gets the bridging loan that is needed. In the longer term, we must move away, as my authority wishes to do, from the continuing need for such transitional arrangements by making sure that the formula more truly reflects local health needs. We must also increase the share of national income that is spent on health.

Mr. Colman: Does my hon. Friend agree that one of Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth health authority's major problems is underfunding of the treatment of mentally disordered offenders, and that that underfunding amounts to almost £7 million a year? That dates back to the previous Government because I understand that those costs were moved from the Home Office to the Department of Health, and that the issue has never been properly dealt with. Given the importance of Springfield hospital, which is within the Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth health authority—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Order.

Mr. Colman—that matter should be addressed.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. When I rise the hon. Gentleman should sit down immediately.

Mr. Colman: I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has already made a speech and he is starting to make another one.

Mr. Casale: I understand that the non-recurring deficit is down to about £5 million. The £7 million to which my hon. Friend refers, if properly reflected in the formula, would solve the immediate funding crisis. I have cited some other pressing underfunding issues, but the one to which my hon. Friend refers would in itself deal with the health authority's current problems.

However, it is not just a question of more money for the NHS, although, of course, more for London and especially south-west London is crucial. As the Turnberg report makes clear, we must also involve and consult local people in deciding how that money is spent. As Turnberg puts it, the problem is not whether the public should be involved but how they should be involved.

The report is rightly critical of old-fashioned and out-moded methods such as public meetings, circulars and so on. It criticises the NHS Executive guidance on public consultation, which, as Turnberg says, needs to be urgently reviewed. Some of the suggestions in the report, such as focus groups and citizen juries, will be familiar to students of modern-day consultation techniques, but consulting the public is a difficult and many-sided job, and deciding how best to do it is difficult. I congratulate the local health authority on setting up a series of regular meetings with hon. Members in my area. They have been valuable, and, as Turnberg acknowledges, the community health councils also play an important local role.

Local civic forums and health forums, and consultations with voluntary and community groups also have a role to play, but the overall question of how genuinely to involve the public remains difficult, given the immensity and diversity of London's population. Moreover, a sustained effort is needed if consultation is to be effective.

My community health council and the health authority produce excellent leaflets from time to time, but, after one or two issues, they peter out. When there is a funding crisis, the flow of information dries up because there is no money to pay for consultation materials. Just when maximum consultation is needed, there is silence followed by cuts in services.

I congratulate the Government on opening the meetings of health authorities and trusts to the public. With the help of my local community health trust, I have obtained the dates of public meetings and, in the coming months, I plan to distribute a list to all interested parties for wide circulation in my constituency. However, we must go further, by having lists of such meetings posted in GPs' surgeries. Perhaps every surgery should have a television set, which could also show films and videos to inform local people. We must grapple with this difficult subject of consultation, so that we can formulate a coherent, sustainable and effective strategy for consultation of local people. It will be a daunting task. The Turnberg report gives pointers, but we need to go further.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: The report states that a positive communication strategy is necessary to facilitate pan-London debates on the capital's health service. Does my hon. Friend agree that the excellent result in the recent London referendum augurs well for such a debate under the auspices of a Greater London authority? Does he further agree that one of the reasons for so much under-investment in London's health service is precisely because London has not had a voice?

Mr. Casale: I agree. Londoners are not as aware as they should be of regional disparities in health care. Although the authority may not have a direct role in the expert provision of health care, it should give Londoners a greater say in the shaping of local health care. The Greater London authority will be valuable, as will the London civic forum, in informing Londoners about the key issues of strategic health care in the capital. Involving local people will be the first hurdle that we must surmount, and it is part of the wider consultation strategy on health services in which those bodies will play a vital role.

Local commissioning groups are mentioned in the Turnberg report and they are beginning to take shape in my constituency in line with the White Paper proposals.

[Mr. Casale]

There is a potential cluster of important primary health care trusts in my constituency. At its heart is the Nelson hospital which can be a hub for the services and a future high-quality community hospital. I am working on that with the full co-operation of the St. Helier trust and I should also like to involve the Government and my constituents in that process. I was delighted by the recent visit to my constituency of the Minister's PPS, my hon. Friend the Member for Salford (Ms Blears), to discuss how we can proceed.

It is the 50th anniversary of the NHS, which should be allowed at least to voice a wish list of what it wants for its birthday. For my constituency, I should like to see not only a start made on improving services at Nelson hospital, making it the hub of new services, linking it with the new primary care trusts, but a review of the capitation formula and more resources nationwide for the health service, so that my constituents and those throughout London receive the health services that they certainly deserve and desperately need.

11.59 am

Mr. Tony McNulty (Harrow, East): I wish to make just three quick points under the auspices of this debate, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Mr. Colman) on securing the debate. As has been said, it is much needed.

The three quick points that I want to make are, first, that I think I sit somewhere between those who suggest that we should have directly elected borough health representatives and those who suggest that the Greater London authority should fulfil the role. I said on Second and, I think, Third Reading of the Greater London Authority (Referendum) Bill that it was crucial that the Greater London authority had a key scrutiny role at least in relation to strategic provision for London's health. I still adhere to that view and hope that that comes out when we get to the legislation, but I agree that it should have a strategic role rather than a specific Londonwide commissioning role.

Secondly, it is interesting that the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir S. Chapman), who mentioned me carte blanche, I suppose, with other north-west London Labour Members in relation to Edgware, has now gone. It is touching that he is now suddenly involved and concerned about Edgware's accident and emergency department. I was a key figure in the campaign for that department for four years and can say happily, hand on heart, that we saw the hon. Gentleman precisely zero times throughout that campaign.

Guilty men were involved in that campaign, but happily we have seen their demise as Conservative Members of Parliament. They are Messrs Gorst and Dykes, who—I choose my words extremely carefully—have lied through their teeth to the public in the past year about some silly bit of paper that they had by way of a promise from the then Secretary of State for Health, the right hon. Member for Charnwood (Mr. Dorrell), about the A and E department remaining open.

The only honest person—again, I choose my words carefully—in the whole process in the then Government was the right hon. Member for Charnwood, who said in June 1996 that the A and E department was closing and that he would do all that he could to ensure that it closed long before the general election ensued. He stuck to his promise and, on April fools' day 1997, the department was closed beyond redemption in terms of buildings, legal contracts and assorted other tendering processes. Therefore, we will take no lessons from the now absent hon. Member for Chipping Barnet or from any other Conservative Member—the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) should please rub the bit about Edgware out of his debut speech from the Dispatch Box.

The third point concerns specialisms, one particular sector on which Turnberg does not really touch; it was not in the brief, which is fine. I have the great pleasure of having the Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital NHS trust slap bang in the middle of my constituency. It carries out orthopaedic work of international repute, which is beyond any challenge. The hospital is a fairly substantial one and carries out a major specialism.

The hospital has been waiting for the best part of 15 or 20 years for the regional health authority to secure its future on the current Stanmore site. The latest bureaucratic nicety from the authority is a musculo-skeletal review, which will determine whether that orthopaedic provision will be available on the Stanmore site, or otherwise. There will be serious ramifications and knock-on effects for surrounding local hospitals throughout north-west London if the future of the Royal National Orthopaedic is not secured.

Happily, the Minister of State, Department of Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn), has agreed to meet me and other north-west London Members to try to resolve the situation. For such a significant national treasure in the NHS still to be floundering after 15 or 20 years with its future not secured is wrong; that situation must come to an end at the earliest possible time. If it does not, and it lingers on and on, the hospital will fail. It will fail ultimately to attract key international personnel, who happily come to it for some work experience and training, and it will fail to attract the brightest national brains in terms of orthopaedic provision and musculo-skeletal work.

I hope that the Minister of State—not necessarily in his winding-up speech, but subsequently, when we meet—will tell us that the position of the Royal National Orthopaedic is assured. I know that His Royal Highness the Duke of Gloucester, who opened a significant scanner on the site yesterday and had the pleasure of visiting a ward there that was named after his father, would endorse the proposals. Everyone in north-west London would. I hope that that proposal, which is, I accept, a non-Turnberg proposal, is addressed sooner rather than later, for the betterment of health provision.

12.5 pm

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): The hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. McNulty) kindly referred to this as my first attempt to reply at the Dispatch Box, and indeed it is. It is a great pleasure at last to be dealing with doctors rather than spin doctors.

The hon. Member for Putney (Mr. Colman) has done the House a service in raising this topic for debate. It is a matter of great importance and, of course, of legitimate constituency interest to him. However, he suffered something of a memory lapse when he said that Queen Mary's hospital would enjoy a different future. Indeed it will, but it is very different from the future that his party promised in the run-up to the general election.

The Conservative health team will endeavour at all stages to be constructive. As we approach the 50th anniversary of the NHS, our mission is to help to develop and to improve it. It may be fertile territory for political combat, but our side will never join battle at the expense of the NHS. This issue requires mature attention. A capital city is a complicated area for health provision. The issue is politically charged, but where there is rapid medical progress, where there are demographic and infrastructure changes, where there is deterioration in buildings and development pressure around them, there is a need from time to time for a fundamental review, which is exactly what we did with the Tomlinson report and, for rather different reasons, what the Government are doing with the Turnberg report.

It is sad that the response to Tomlinson when we were in government was not mature. The then Opposition did not attempt to improve the health service. It was low party politics. The result was that the present Government became boxed in, which is why the Turnberg report was necessary in the first place. It was designed as something behind which the Government could hide. Perhaps the most cynical would say that it was designed as a convenient dustbin for their pre-election promises. It was not about saving hospitals: it was about saving the Minister's face. It is no thanks to the Government that Sir Leslie Turnberg managed to convert his task into such a useful exercise. His starting point was that primary care in the capital matters. I think that we all share that view and recognise that the debate principally centres on hospitals.

The Government came to office with a pledge to review London's health service. They came with a certain amount of pre-election baggage because they had promised an enormous amount to local communities. They played on the fears about the future of local hospitals; many of those who voted Labour believed that a Labour Government would save those hospitals, just as Labour had promised, only to find that they are now severely disappointed.

Ms Margaret Hodge (Barking): Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that it was a mature decision by the previous Government to close Bart's, and that it is part of the pre-election baggage of this Government to ensure that it remains open as a facility for Londoners?

Mr. Duncan: I will come in a moment to the deceit that the Government have shown on the issue of Bart's and the promises that they made in the run-up to the election which have not been met.

In opposition, the Labour party complained that London had too few hospital beds. One function of the Turnberg report was to allow the Government to claim that London now had about the right number of hospital beds. That was the first step towards their current programme of closures and cuts. The paltry number of extra beds announced the other day by the Secretary of State does not make up the 200 that the Government have slashed from our plans for the new Royal London hospital.

As the hon. Member for Barking (Ms Hodge) has suggested, the Government needed to be able to claim that they had saved Bart's. Turnberg has given them an excellent public relations formula for doing so, despite the fact that Bart's is now closed as a district general hospital for the local community—a fundamental element of the campaign to save Bart's.

Mr. McNulty: Will the hon. Gentleman tell us exactly when he will start being mature and constructive?

Mr. Duncan: The hon. Gentleman should perhaps listen to the facts and feel ashamed that the Government he supports have betrayed so many of the promises which, no doubt, helped him get elected.

A raft of promises were made to the people of Edgware and Roehampton, and the Turnberg report has been able help here, too—offering a convenient way of removing accident and emergency facilities from local people.

I should like to ask the Minister certain specific questions which it is his duty to answer. The Turnberg report recommends the downgrading of Queen Charlotte's hospital, with Hammersmith taking on most of the extra work load. We are concerned, as is Turnberg, about the clinical base of Hammersmith hospital. If it is to be able to handle the extra work caused by the transfer of Queen Charlotte hospital's facilities, significant investment in Hammersmith will be needed, and there are concerns about the suitability of the Hammersmith site for such work. May I have an assurance from the Minister on his plans for investing in Hammersmith?

I should like the Minister to explain how the interim period before such investment occurs will be handled. What plans does he have for increased co-ordination with Queen Charlotte's hospital and Charing Cross hospital? How will the financial base for the hospital be managed? Those are important questions which I hope he will answer.

The Secretary of State was proud to have saved Bart's. He admitted as much in the original debate on Turnberg, when he said that one of his principal reasons for commissioning the report was to avoid the history books recording that it was he who closed that ancient hospital. That was noble of him, but Bart's, in the way he promised, has not been saved. Bart's has been closed as a district general hospital for local people. It will no longer serve the community. To its traditional patient base, Bart's no longer exists.

In addition, health care in south-west London was a significant pre-election battleground for the Government. The people of Roehampton—who the hon. Member for Putney conveniently seems to have forgotten—were given specific assurances by their Labour candidates, and they must feel disillusioned that they put their trust in them. The decision in effect to close Queen Mary's hospital, with the removal of its accident and emergency facilities, has broken Labour's pre-election promise to keep that institution open.

Mr. Colman: I see this as a personal attack on me. Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that the decisions to close the acute surgery service and other acute services and to downgrade the accident and emergency department were taken in the November before the general election and were acted on on 1 April, all fools' day, one month before the election?

Mr. Duncan: All Labour candidates who had an interest in the hospital—and in the party's campaign

[Mr. Duncan]

nationally—led the country to believe that such a decision would be reversed. That has not happened, and it is that deceit which I find so contemptible.

The Turnberg reforms have many merits. There are questions that I hope the Minister will answer, but it is difficult to trust the Government on something like this in the climate in which they are running the NHS today. People should be aware that, when the Government say that they have increased funding, they have not. There is £940 million less going to the health service than would have been the case had the Conservative party returned to office. Waiting lists have gone up by 137,000.

What in Sir Leslie Turnberg's proposals will suffer as a result of the Minister's panic and efforts to restore waiting lists to the levels that the Government inherited from us? I have high hopes for health care in London, but little confidence that the Government will deliver. They are spending less, closing more and making people wait longer. In that context, it is unlikely that the Turnberg proposals will deliver the health care that we all expect.

12.15 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. Alan Milburn): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Mr. Colman) on securing this debate. This debate is extremely important, not just for his constituents and for him, but for the House as a whole—and particularly for hon. Members representing London constituencies.

The Government share my hon. Friend's aim of ensuring that Londoners in all parts of this capital city have access to the highest-quality health care possible—not just in hospitals, but through primary care and community health services.

For the first time in decades—thanks to Sir Leslie Turnberg and his team, and the Government's adoption of all the recommendations—there is now a clear agenda for health, health services and social care in London. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said when announcing the Government's acceptance of the Turnberg report on 3 February, the time for action on London's health service has arrived.

Sir Leslie Turnberg's team did a remarkable job, and I pay tribute to him and them. The comments of the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) were astonishing. He must be the only person in this building—he is probably the only person in London—who supported the Tomlinson report, which found no favour with the public, politicians and, most important, with the people who work in the NHS in this city. As the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) rightly said, there has been universal praise for the way in which the review was carried out, and there has been broad agreement on the diagnosis of the problems.

The recommendations not only tackled major strategic concerns—to which the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton referred—but dealt in a hard-headed way with extremely difficult operational issues. As the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) reminded us, those issues do not go away. Change is endemic in the NHS. Turnberg, and the Government's acceptance of the report's recommendations, does not put a halt to change in the NHS; it is the start of a 10-year modernisation programme for the NHS in London and its environment.

Watford and the surrounding hospitals are the subject of consultation. We will bear in mind what the hon. Member for Ruislip–Northwood said and ensure that, when the final decisions are taken, they will be in the best interests of patients in his constituency and others served by those hospitals.

We are at the start of the programme which will see London's health service getting better step by step, year by year. It is important that we make it clear from the outset that there is much on which to build. We often concentrate in these debates on things that are wrong, and there is much that is wrong in London's health service. However, there is a great deal of which to be proud as well—great hospitals at the cutting edge of medicine, science, teaching and research, high-quality local hospitals, GP surgeries and more. There are also formidable challenges for London's NHS. The best services in the land sit cheek by jowl with some of the worst.

Turnberg reversed the absurd Tomlinson position that London was over-bedded compared with the rest of the country. The Government seek to build on that important recognition. The hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey asked whether the commitment to improving waiting lists was continuing. I remind him that Turnberg called for more detailed work on ensuring that we have the right number of beds. That work is being done, and the evaluation is continuing. We will have to ensure that we have the right resources, staff and bed numbers to ensure that we get waiting lists down—we want to do that not only this year, but in subsequent years.

Mr. Simon Hughes: There was a recommendation that the panel should examine the bed issue. The Minister said that that work has already started. Does he have any idea when he will receive recommendations on bed numbers and the implications of those numbers?

Mr. Milburn: I do not, but I shall let the hon. Gentleman know as soon as I do. If he contacts my office, we can arrange a response.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Mr. Casale) spoke about the sheer size of London and the problems that that creates. Our capital city has a unique health service, which has unique problems in serving massive health needs. We are determined specifically to tackle London's deprivation and inequalities. The fact is that 40 per cent. of Londoners are among the most deprived 10 per cent. of our country's population. Sir Leslie and his team rightly highlighted the special needs of many groups in London, such as elderly people, the mentally ill, ethnic minorities, homeless people, refugees and asylum seekers. We have to translate our good intentions for those groups into action.

Mr. Wilkinson: From the Minister's statement today, may we have confidence that there will never be a translation of financial resources out of London into the provinces? The old resource allocation working party system did the health service in London great damage.

Mr. Milburn: If the hon. Gentleman will bear with me for a moment, I am about to deal with the resource allocation issue, partly in response to the issues raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon.

The action necessary to deal with problems cannot occur without partnership. Working together in partnership, across boundaries, is vital if we are to improve services, improve the health of Londoners and—most important—tackle the appalling health inequalities that scar our capital city. We are therefore fostering co-operation in the NHS, by getting rid of the internal market introduced by the Tories when in government. To tackle those inequalities, we are also breaking down the Berlin walls between health and social care, the NHS and local authorities, and the public and voluntary sector.

New ways of joint working are being pioneered in London's two health action zones—which represent a recognition of the fact that the job of improving health is one for local government, employers, community organisations and the NHS. Such an approach to partnership is in line with the Turnberg recommendations.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: Will my hon. Friend mention the widely supported proposals on pooling health and social services budgets?

Mr. Milburn: My hon. Friend raises an important point. We will soon produce a consultation document on how to ensure greater flexibility in the provision of health and social care services—for the benefit of patients, especially those who are at the interface of those services, such as elderly people, people with metal health problems and people with disabilities. The document will deal with the pooled budget issue.

The Government accepted all the Turnberg recommendations, and we have acted quickly to create a programme to implement them. We will deliver better services for Londoners through investment and modernisation. The two go together.

We are committed, first, to sustained investment in health services and facilities in London. Since we came to power—to contradict the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton—the Government have invested £300 million in London's national health service. Last year, £26 million went to the capital, to ease pressures on health and social services provision. This year, £48 million has been targeted specifically at lowering waiting lists in London. As a consequence of the tough targets that we have set ourselves in reducing waiting lists, by March 1999 London's national health service should have more than 10,000 fewer patients waiting for treatment than the record level of March 1997 which we inherited from the Tories.

The extra money for this year includes £30 million targeted on primary care, mental health, intermediate care and community services. We will provide at least an additional £140 million of investment in those services for London over the lifetime of this Parliament.

Today's debate has rightly concentrated on London's hospitals. However, primary care is the primary point of contact with the NHS for the overwhelming majority of Londoners. As we know, there is much to commend primary care services in the capital. However, there is also much that is wrong with the services, which we are determined to put right.

My hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Mr. Darvill) and the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey mentioned the problem of recruiting a sufficient number of general practitioners in the capital. We fully endorse the need for Londoners to receive their fair share of GPs. A national group—which includes Professor Jarman, who was a member of Sir Leslie's team—is working to identify a formula that would accord every area its proper share of family doctors. The results should be available in the summer.

Ms Hodge: Is consideration being given to introducing salaried general practitioners in those London areas where it is extremely difficult to recruit people into general practice?

Mr. Milburn: I assure my hon. Friend that we have successfully reached an agreement with the British Medical Association, and have—for the first time in the history of the NHS—introduced a salaried doctors scheme, which I believe will be the way forward in many areas where it is currently difficult to recruit GPs. The scheme will bring new, younger and energetic GPs into general practice, which will be a great improvement in primary care in many parts of London.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon asked about resource allocation, and how we can ensure that London receives its fair share of resources. As he knows, a working group is dealing with the matter and will report later this year. I expect that its recommendations will be implemented in the next financial year.

As part of a modernisation programme, there is more investment in London's front-line health services. Moreover, that money for front-line services is backed by capital investment, as we cannot build a 21st-century NHS in London in 19th century hospitals. The Turnberg report paved the way for £800 million of new investment to build more new, modern hospitals and to improve existing ones—such as at the West Middlesex, University College hospital, King's and St. George's. It paved the way also for a proper, 21st-century hospital in Whitechapel. Furthermore, we are not only saving Bart's—which the previous Government intended to close—but giving it a great future.

There will also be a great future as a local community hospital for Queen Mary's hospital, Roehampton. Five years of uncertainty is at an end. Queen Mary's will have a robust and healthy future, providing services for local people into the next century. I pay tribute to the work done by my hon. Friend the Member for Putney and by the hospital league of friends. Most of all, I pay tribute to the work done by the hospital's staff, who have ensured that services are delivered throughout a most difficult period of uncertainty and confusion—which is now at an end. Our plans will give staff and the local community a new hospital for a new century.

We have also endorsed the London review recommendation that a new hospital should be built in the Oldchurch area. The Havering Hospitals NHS trust is producing a strategic outline case for that investment. We expect the case for making the investment to be a strong one. If it is, the trust will be able to take forward procurement in 1999.

My hon. Friend the Member for Upminster expressed concern about the Harold Wood site. Harold Wood's future will have to be considered in the light of the Oldchurch development. Similarly, I assure my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, North (Ms Perham) that plans for the new hospital will take account of the

[Mr. Milburn]

relatively new facilities at King George's hospital, and that clinicians from King George's are actively involved in helping to plan services at the new hospital.

I am aware that, because of work done by the trust, submissions on Guy's and St. Thomas's will be made to me. I also realise that the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey has an alternative proposal. As I said when I met him, I should be more than happy to consider his proposal. I should be happy to meet him again, if he thinks that that is necessary.

I also assure the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton that Hammersmith is a very important hospital and that it has a secure future. However, we have to assess how best it should play its part in delivering local health services within the overall context of services in west London. That is why we are reviewing services in the area and the Hammersmith is part of that review.

Those are all far-reaching changes for London's NHS, which will not be easy to achieve and which will require time and careful management. We have faced difficult decisions and an unenviable legacy from our predecessors of uncertainty and failure, but we are making considerable progress, with new hospitals being built, extra cash being invested and a new direction for London's health service being implemented. There is a long way to go to deliver the first-class NHS that the Government want to be available throughout London, but we have made a good start and we are determined to make rapid progress. We believe that Londoners deserve no less.

Newhaven Port

12.29 pm

Mr. Norman Baker (Lewes): I am pleased to have this opportunity to initiate a debate on a matter that is vital to my constituency and, as I shall try to shows, to the economy of a much wider sub-region.

This is a critical time for Newhaven. The port is at a crossroads, if the House will forgive the mixed metaphor. It has the potential to become a major success story of the next century, but might also slip away, leaving a shell of derelict buildings, rusting metal and high unemployment. It could go either way, and which way it goes will depend, at least in part, on the events of the next few months. The Government, local councils and, crucially, the private sector must all deliver if we are succeed, and I see it as part of my job to ensure that that happens.

Let me deal with the port's potential. First, there is the its geographical location: it is not, as some tend to portray it, at the periphery, but well inside the triangle that takes in London, Paris and Brussels; if one draws a line from London to Paris, Newhaven is the port closest to that line. The port's potential is shown by the fact that 1.2 million people live within an hour's drive of Newhaven. However, when people think of channel ports, they think of Dover, Southampton and Portsmouth, and consistently underrate Newhaven's potential.

Secondly, there is the Newhaven Economic Partnership which, as the Minister will know, is a private company, limited by guarantee, set up to revitalise the port. All the town's major employers are represented, including Sea Containers, which owns the port; P and O Stena, which operates the ferry service; James Fisher and Sons, which has in Newhaven the largest cold store for imported fruit and vegetables in the country; and companies such as Parker Pen and Concord Lighting, which are major employers in Newhaven.

All three levels of local council are represented—the county, the district and the town—and so am I, as the local Member of Parliament. In addition, Lewes tertiary college is also an active member, giving valuable help on employment training.

The NEP has been successful in securing single regeneration fund money from the Government, capital challenge funding for a new port access road and Interreg money earmarked for local schemes. In addition, the partners, especially the local councils, have committed funds to the partnership's pot. That has helped with several valuable local projects, such as saving the Hillcrest centre, which is a focal point for the community.

Thirdly, there is the unique and strong relationship with Dieppe. The ferry crossing between the two ports goes back well into the last century. In recent years, Dieppe has had a huge amount of investment in its port, and the French now want the same to happen in Newhaven. To that end, a joint action group was formed between Dieppe chamber of commerce and Lewes district council. More recently, the chamber became a full member of the NEP, which is the first time a French chamber has voluntarily put itself under the jurisdiction of English law. Dieppe believes in the crossing and in Newhaven; it is now time to show clearly that people on this side of the channel also believe in Newhaven.

That leads me to the current situation. An improved port is absolutely essential to the future of Newhaven and to the wider sub-region, including Brighton.

The regeneration project in Newhaven is a complex jigsaw, which will not work unless all the pieces are in place. An improved port is the key piece, to which all others are connected.

The port in its current configuration is limited in capacity in a way which, if it remains unimproved, spells bad news for Newhaven tomorrow. The present generation of ferries can only just negotiate the port, and, with bigger ferries coming on stream elsewhere, Newhaven faces a loss of competitiveness against other south coast ports if it cannot match any increase in size.

Furthermore, the depth of the port—only 5m—means that James Fisher and Sons is operating well below capacity, because boats are getting bigger, and now touch the bottom when they arrive. That in turn makes it difficult for shippers to obtain insurance cover, with the result that business goes elsewhere. Time and again, contracts have been won by Fisher, only to be lost at the last minute because of the insurance problem. Put bluntly, there must be a possibility that Fisher, a major employer in the town, will close and the ferry operation be scaled down, with the loss of numerous jobs, if an improved port cannot be provided soon. It was that fact that provided a major impetus for the setting up of the NEP.

The good news is that many of the jigsaw pieces have been assembled, and some are fixed together. Planning permission has been achieved for a new outer port, subject to a few final details being ironed out by the district council as the planning authority. Planning permission has also been granted for a new port access road, which will link the trunk road network with the port. Those two proposals are inextricably linked to the port's future. Formal withdrawal of outstanding objections to compulsory purchase orders has been achieved, so that obstacle is out of the way.

The existing road winds around residential streets, passing a nursery school and local shops. It is the most inappropriate port access imaginable. The new road will not only solve that problem and link the trunk road network with the new outer port, but also open up access to the biggest unused piece of land identified for industrial purposes anywhere along the south coast—at least between Eastbourne and Worthing, and probably further. The land will be used to provide an Eastside business park. The road scheme is estimated to cost £7.8 million, with £6.8 million coming from a successful capital challenge bid and the rest from Interreg funding.

It is worth noting that East Sussex county council has already spent around £500,000 on design and securing planning permission for the road. The council also says that it is prepared to shoulder the debt payments from servicing the capital challenge funding, which will come to another £500,000. The county council tells me that it is fully committed to building the road, and I and the people of Newhaven intend to hold them to that commitment.

That is the background; I apologise for the fact that I have taken some time to set it out, but I thought it best to put matters in context. I come now to what I should like the Government to do to help Newhaven.

First, it would be helpful if the Minister could set out exactly what the Government's strategy is for ports, especially their vision for the south coast. The hon. Lady will no doubt be aware of the European Union Green Paper on sea ports and maritime infrastructure, so I presume that she has already given that key matter some thought. Currently, 80 per cent. of cross-channel traffic goes through Kent. Does the Minister agree that it is sensible not to put all one's eggs in one basket? The benefits of diversity alone suggest that Newhaven should be protected and enhanced—small ports have an important role to play. Will the Minister confirm that the Government are committed to a diversity of ports, and that they will oppose any contraction of the number available on the south coast?

Given that Newhaven is already on the trans-European rail network, will the Minister undertake to help to put together a case for EU funding for Newhaven port, which might well be available under the proposals in the Green Paper, as I understand them? In short, I am asking for an assurance that the Government, like people in Newhaven and Dieppe, believe that Newhaven port has a solid future in the next century. If the answer to that is yes, I ask the Minister to put that on the record today, because that assurance alone will help in the current circumstances. In addition, it is unclear what is to be the role of the regional development agencies in port policy and support, so some clarification would be helpful.

I said that the trans-European rail network includes Newhaven, and I ask for the Minister's help in that respect. Is she aware that Railtrack's published plans for the next 10 years do not even mention Newhaven? That is despite the trans-European link, despite the fact that major redevelopment of the port would give an opportunity to combine the current three railway stations—which are a shambolic first sight for visitors arriving in Newhaven from the continent—into one brand-new one, and despite the fact that there is considerable potential for moving freight by rail from Newhaven. The infrastructure from decades ago still remains, and the rail lines literally go down to the quayside.

There is still plenty of land for expansion, and, as the Minister knows from our correspondence, English, Welsh and Scottish Railfreight has expressed considerable interest in the site. Indeed, the company's No. 2 in this country, Julian Worth, has met me and others from the Newhaven Economic Partnership on site to discuss the potential. He went away interested in Newhaven port.

The Government are rightly committed to shifting the bias of transport away from the private car and lorry and on to more environmentally friendly transport, including rail. Does the Minister therefore share my view that plans for a new port in Newhaven provide a wonderful opportunity to achieve the Government's objectives? If a new port were almost totally dependent on private road transport, a great opportunity would have been missed.

My requests of the Government in respect of rail are as follows. Will they continue to support Newhaven's place in the trans-European network? Will they give support today for the principle of rail freight movements from and through Newhaven? Will they make representations to Railtrack in order that it assesses the potential for Newhaven, with a view to putting the scheme in its forward programme?

Will the Government please reconsider their decision not to stop the sale of so-called redundant rail land in the town, the loss of which might jeopardise the development of rail freight in the port? I apologise to the Minister for raising that yet again, but I am working on the basis that,

[Mr. Norman Baker]

if I raise it frequently enough, I may get the answer for which I am looking. Even limiting sales to companies with rail interests would help. The policy of disposal of land that was identified as surplus by the Tories, who were not interested in rail and are not present for today's debate, is so out of line with the Government's mainly refreshingly sensible transport policy.

On the wider transport infrastructure, will the Government examine what is being done in Dieppe to see how improvements in Newhaven might dovetail? Will the Government undertake to consider the A26 and the parallel rail line as part of a corridor study on the route north of Newhaven, in line with proposals for such studies in the Government's forthcoming White Paper on transport—if newspaper stories are to be believed?

I return to the key aspect of the debate: proposals for an improved port and a new port access road. The start of construction on the port access road has slipped due to uncertainties over the new port and the merger of two ferry companies. The merger has also made it very difficult for P and O Stena Line and Sea Containers to reach a long-term agreement, given the merger's restrictive conditions.

Under those circumstances, it is being discussed whether, in the interim, it may make sense for the road to access a new deeper berth in the existing harbour rather than a brand new port immediately. That could well cut through some of the problems, deliver an improvement in time to safeguard the port, and achieve the aims that the Government originally set out when approving capital challenge funding. I am advised that such a modified route for the road would not require a new planning application.

I ask the Government for time and flexibility to tie up negotiations among the various partners. In the past few days, as the Minister will imagine, I have spoken to several partners in the public and private sectors to assess progress, and I believe that a solution is in sight and achievable. It is therefore crucial that the rug is not pulled from under our feet by rigid adherence to a timetable that was set under different circumstances.

The Government office for the south-east has been constructive and entirely helpful in the process, but can obviously go only so far without a ministerial steer. Will the Minister use her contacts to put pressure on the private sector in particular to reach agreements that will enable investment to proceed? The public sector locally has, by and large, delivered its part of the bargain.

Newhaven has suffered from years of under-investment. The merger of P and O and Stena Line, although representing a strengthening of the position in Newhaven, has nevertheless caused short-term uncertainty. The forthcoming loss of duty-free trade has added to that, and could be bad for the town. I cannot emphasise enough, however, that Newhaven's potential is enormous as a cross-channel ferry port and railhead, a back-up to the channel tunnel—the only potential one—a major import-export location, and an economic engine for the entire sub-region as far north as Haywards Heath and East Grinstead.

Like a game in a Christmas cracker, this matter is a question of getting all the silver balls into the holes at the same time. The Government's attitude to Newhaven, how flexible they are in funding the port access road, how seriously they take the potential for rail freight, how hard they are prepared to lean on those in the private sector, the signals that they send out and the stance that they take, are all crucial. I ask the Minister to respond positively and helpfully to my points—I am sure she will—in order to let the people of Newhaven know that the Government are on their side and will help them.

12.44 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Ms Glenda Jackson): I congratulate the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Baker) on obtaining this Adjournment debate. As he so rightly says, the topic of Newhaven port is of importance not only to his constituents but to the entire region.

The port of Newhaven is a major local employment provider through companies such as P and O Stena Line and James Fisher, employing several hundred people. As the hon. Member pointed out, it plays an important role in linking the south-east region with the markets of continental Europe, and, like neighbouring Shoreham, is a key port in handling marine aggregates for the construction industry. As the hon. Gentleman also pointed out, it handles a variety of traffic, including passengers, fruit and vegetables, forest products and fish. As he further pointed out, there has been recent investment in a cool storage facility for fruit and vegetable traffic. In all, the port handled 1.3 million tonnes of cargo in 1996, with a passenger throughput of 841,000 and about 160,000 vehicles.

In December 1996, East Sussex county council was awarded credit approval of £6.8 million under the capital challenge towards the £7.8 million cost of the port access road. The road, as the hon. Member for Lewes also pointed out in great detail, is seen as the key to the regeneration of Newhaven. The wider regeneration scheme for Newhaven amounts to more than £80 million, which includes £6.5 million single regeneration budget challenge funding. Most of the private sector investment—Sea Containers Ltd. and P and O Stena Line—will be in the renewal of Newhaven port, including the construction of the outer harbour. The road, the harbour and the wider regeneration of the town are inextricably linked.

East Sussex county council has also submitted a bid through the European funding programme, Interreg, for a £1 million contribution towards the port access road. The application has been received, and is being considered by the Government Office for the South-East and my Department.

In addition, Lewes district council has applied to the Ministry of Agriculture for grants to aid the fisheries aspect of the port's modernisation. Up to 50 per cent. grant is available from MAFF for work including rebuilding the fishermen's jetties and a new fish market building. The application is under consideration by MAFF. Grant for a feasibility study for the development of the port has already been made available under the PESCA scheme for restructuring fishing dependent areas.

Although I am aware of such plans for a major redevelopment of the port facilities at Newhaven, and cognisant of the pleas of the hon. Member for Lewes, I cannot comment on the detail of the plans, because they may be subject to approvals from my Department,

for which formal applications have yet to be made. The environmental impact of such a project will be carefully considered as part of the approvals procedure.

As well as raising several detailed points about Newhaven port, the hon. Member raised a number of points about the Government's general policy towards ports and port development. As he will be aware, and as the House knows, we are shortly to publish a White Paper setting out the Government's integrated transport policy. We fully recognise that our ports are a vital link in the supply chain. Some 95 per cent. of our international trade by volume, as well as considerable domestic traffic, goes through them. We must ensure that they are integrated into our transport networks in ways which contribute to the aims of a more effective and more environmentally friendly transport system.

It is important to recognise that our ports are competing vigorously both in the United Kingdom and the European market. We therefore support measures to develop a level playing field throughout Europe, and we will continue to support policies that encourage competition and efficiency in the ports industry on a fully commercial basis. In doing so, we will also seek to ensure fair employment standards and better, more effective regulation of safety issues and environmental safeguards.

Our broad aims are to ensure that ports play a full role in supporting the competitiveness of their regions: that any port development is sympathetic to the surrounding natural environment and local communities. Ports can enhance sustainable freight distribution by their connection to more environmentally friendly modes, and increased port efficiency can increase the attractiveness of those modes.

Newhaven, like almost every other port, depends for its business on freight movements by road—but, as the hon. Gentleman pointed out, it is one of the many that also has rail access. We agree with him that we must try to ensure that in future advantage is taken of that fact wherever possible in encouraging the transfer of freight from road to rail.

The context for those broad aims is a forward-looking integrated transport policy that supports a strong economy, contributes to a sustainable environment and helps to create a just and inclusive society. That is a huge challenge, and one of the encouraging aspects of an ambitious task is the degree of consensus throughout the nation on the need to change.

I understand the hon. Gentleman's interest in good access to the port of Newhaven. He will know that we are carrying out a review of the role of trunk roads, including the A27. We have involved a wide range of advice and expertise, including local authorities, businesses, trade unions, transport professionals and transport users. As he also knows, we are developing a new appraisal methodology that takes a wider view of accessibility by all modes in terms of the economy and the environment.

Against the background of increased congestion, we have three broad options for roads. To make better use of existing infrastructure is the obvious first choice. It has been provided at substantial cost in both financial and environmental terms, and we must make the best use of that investment. We need, however, to be realistic about what the various options can deliver.

We must also look seriously at other harder options, such as managing demand and providing new infrastructure. Managing demand is a vast topic. It encompasses reducing the need to travel, an assessment of the extent to which a shift to other modes can be encouraged, and, inevitably, the question of controlling demand by pricing or rationing mechanisms.

Providing new infrastructure is a difficult option, both financially and in terms of the impact that it may have on the environment. Our starting point is that we will not proceed with major new road construction unless we are satisfied that there is no better alternative; even then, there will be difficult choices to be made within the limited resources available.

We have held regional consultations to elicit views on whether the schemes in the inherited roads programme address the most important transport problems, or whether other problems deserve greater priority. We envisage two outputs from that part of the review—a firm short-term investment programme and a programme of studies to look at the remaining problems, out of which the medium and long-term investment programme will emerge.

The hon. Gentleman raised the question of the proposed access road to the harbour. As he said, that scheme, designed to link the trunk road network to the proposed new port and ferry terminal, received credit approval of £6.8 million through the capital challenge pilot scheme in December 1996. Capital challenge is a three-year pilot, and all funding is programmed to terminate at the end of March 2000.

Cognisant of the plea that the hon. Gentleman has repeated, I must tell him that there are no plans to extend that deadline at present. Proposed changes to the scheme, resulting from any revision of the development plans, would have to be consistent with the initial aims of the capital challenge bid. I understand that to date no firm proposals have been received, although there have been some preliminary discussions of different options.

The hon. Gentleman also talked about the possibility of the scheme's slipping. I understand that the county council has resolved not to proceed with the road until there is valid planning permission for the port and a firm commitment from Sea Containers to proceed with the port improvements. Of course, as he rightly pointed out, the road network is only one piece of the transport jigsaw. He also mentioned freight to and from Newhaven port.

The Government are determined to encourage greater use of the railways for passengers and freight. We want to see improvements in existing rail services. As the hon. Gentleman knows, we inherited a fragmented rail system with no strategic vision for the development of the network, a confusing regulatory system, and a need for leadership and direction.

The Government have already demonstrated their intentions by conducting a fundamental review of rail regulation, including the Rail Regulator's inquiry into the rolling stock leasing market. We have also taken action within the existing regulatory constraints. Last November, my right hon. Friend the Minister for Transport announced an interim package of measures designed to boost regulation of the railways, which included new objectives for the franchising director. Those require him to manage existing franchise contracts tightly in the public interest, by making sure that train operators live up to their contractual commitments.

We have made it clear that our overriding goal is to get more freight on to rail. We are currently considering what further action we may take to boost rail freight in the

[Ms Glenda Jackson]

context of the integrated transport policy White Paper. Action has already been taken to encourage more freight on to the railway by overhauling the freight grants scheme. Shortly after coming to office, we doubled the grant available for moving freight from the roads, and we have increased it by a further £10 million for the year 1998–99. An initiative to publicise the system has resulted in nearly all last year's £30 million being taken up, and £28 million of this year's grant money is already accounted for.

Railtrack is investigating the scope to develop several major routes for freight, and, with a group of local authorities, is studying congestion on the south coast rail route from Weymouth to Dover with the aim of improving services to encourage more use of the route. We are watching that study with interest. The new freight companies have adopted positive attitudes and ambitious targets that would quadruple the proportion of freight tonne kilometres by rail over the next 10 years. Rail freight volume has already shown a 5 per cent. growth in tonne kilometres over 1996–97—the first such increase in many years.

We acknowledge there is more to be done. We are committed to the creation of a new rail authority, and will announce our proposals in the White Paper. The authority is likely to have responsibility for, among other things, managing and enforcing existing franchise contracts, developing a strategic vision for investment in the network, promoting integration between rail and other modes of transport, and balancing the needs of passengers and freight users, as no one body currently can.

I understand that a community partnership venture between the operating company Connex South Central and Newhaven Economic Partnership has been set up, as a result of which the station at Newhaven will receive a face lift later this summer. The hon. Gentleman mentioned the bad state not only of the network but of stations in his area. We too recognise the importance of clean, smart, comfortable and safe public transport facilities in helping to encourage people to switch from their cars to using public transport.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the abolition of duty-free sales, and its anticipated effect on the port of Newhaven. I can only say that the decision to abolish intra-European Union duty-free sales was taken unanimously by the Council of Finance Ministers in 1991 as part of the single market programme. It is primarily a fiscal matter, and not a matter for the United Kingdom in isolation but subject to unanimity among the 15 member states.

We have said that we would not oppose any move by the Commission to set up a study into the effects of the abolition of duty-free sales. There is, however, no consensus of support among the member states for a continuation of duty-free sales, or even for a study of the impact of abolition. We are, through Customs and Excise, in discussion with UK trade interests and the Commission to explore the practicalities of implementing the successor regime after June 1999, when abolition takes effect.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for bringing Government support for Newhaven port to the attention of the House. As I have said, more than £13 million in Government funding has been committed so far to assisting the regeneration of Newhaven, and I can assure him that the Government are fully aware of the importance of Newhaven port to the local, regional and national economy.

I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is aware that many of the specific issues on which he wanted a direct commitment on my part will be covered in our White Paper on an integrated transport system. They will also be covered in the more detailed documents on regional development. He rightly raised the subject of the sale of railway land, and, from a sedentary position, I responded by referring to the "drip, drip" technique. He is well aware that, when the railways were privatised, the land deemed most essential for the future expansion of our railway system went into Railtrack's ownership—that is, the remaining lands in Railway Properties Ltd.

All such land is advertised before sale, and the freight companies are advised of proposed sales. I understand that the piece of land that the hon. Gentleman mentioned is shortly to go out to tender, and I know that Railway Properties Ltd. has made it abundantly clear to interested parties that it is available. I well understand his argument that such land should be reserved, but I am sure that he will understand that freezing the land could have a most deleterious effect on the market for such properties, and that Railway Properties Ltd. has a duty to ensure that such sales are for the benefit of the public purse.

Although I cannot give detailed responses to many of the pleas that the hon. Gentleman made in a most interesting speech, I assure him that the Government are fully aware of the importance of Newhaven port—as he rightly said, it is important to the economy not only locally, but regionally and nationally. I have little doubt that, when he sees our White Paper, he will be very pleased with its content.

Western Sahara

12.59 pm

Ms Tess Kingham (Gloucester): I am grateful for this opportunity to draw the attention of the House to Western Sahara, which is under Moroccan occupation. I should be interested to hear the views of my hon. Friend the Minister on that sadly neglected country.

I first became aware of the situation in Western Sahara in 1985, when I was an aid worker with the charity War on Want, the first United Kingdom organisation to provide assistance to Saharawi refugees from Western Sahara. Since then, I have followed events in the area with interest and, since I was elected to Parliament, I have had the honour to serve as chair of the all-party group on Western Sahara.

I hope the House will forgive me if I indulge in a short history lesson and give the background to the situation, as I am sure that many people, even many hon. Members, are not fully aware of the plight of Western Sahara and the Saharawi people. That is itself a scandal, as the Moroccan invasion of Western Sahara closely mirrored the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. The Iraqi invasion attracted worldwide condemnation and swift international intervention, whereas the Moroccan invasion was swept under the international carpet—there was no international uproar or military force to liberate Western Sahara, although cynics may say that that was because there are no working oilfields in Western Sahara.

Western Sahara lies on the Atlantic coast of Africa, between Mauritania and Morocco. Historically, the people who lived there—the Saharawi—were nomadic and had a life style similar to that of their Tuareg neighbours. The area was colonised by the Spanish in the 19th century and named Spanish Sahara. The indigenous people, as in most other African countries that were colonies, set up an independence movement to resist colonisation, the Polisario Front. In 1966, the United Nations General Assembly called on Spain to organise a referendum of self-determination for the people of Western Sahara. Spain organised a census in 1974, which revealed that 74,000 Saharawi people were living in the territory—that figure was supposed to serve as the basis for an electorate for the referendum, which, it was planned, would happen speedily. The road to independence seemed to be laid out.

Morocco did not like that one bit, and laid claim to the territory. The International Court of Justice was asked to deliver an opinion on whether Morocco or Mauritania had any claim to the area; it found that there were no historic ties that could debar Spanish Sahara from decolonisation or from self-determination. Again, the way seemed clear for the Saharawi people to move forward to independence.

In response, Morocco almost immediately invaded Western Sahara. Tens of thousands of Saharawi people fled. Women and children were bombed by Moroccan forces and napalm was used against them—it was an international scandal, but, sadly, the international community turned its face away. Around 180,000 refugees fled to southern Algeria, where they have lived in enormous camps—huge tented cities—for the past 23 years.

The Saharawi refugees are mostly dependent on food aid administered by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Despite the dire conditions in which they live, however, they have created a society in their camps whose rates of literacy are unparalleled in Africa. They have created a good health system and a democratic structure that ensures that women play a full part in running and managing the camps. The fact that the Saharawi people have survived those conditions for 23 years demonstrates their deep desire to secure their right to self-determination—many other groups would have packed their bags and gone home.

For more than 20 years, the Polisario Front waged a guerrilla war against the occupying forces. It had steadfast support from the Organisation of African Unity. When, in 1985, the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic—the state in exile—was admitted to OAU membership, Morocco promptly walked out of the organisation.

In 1990, the United Nations—freed from the shackles of the cold war—turned its attention to Western Sahara. A peace plan was drawn up, calling for a referendum based on the 1974 Spanish census to be organised and supervised by the UN. A ceasefire between the warring parties was agreed, and, yet again, all looked set for the Saharawi people to decide whether they wanted their territory to become independent or to be part of Morocco. Sadly, eight years later, the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara—MINURSO—is still in the area and the Saharawi people are still waiting for their referendum.

In the intervening years, the UN has failed to enforce its peace plan for Western Sahara. I believe that the main problems have been Morocco's refusal to accept the 1974 census as the basis for the referendum, and its continual disruption of the peace process. The UN mission has faced criticism from its own members. In 1995, Ambassador Frank Ruddy, the former deputy chair of the MINURSO voter identification commission, said that, during his time in Western Sahara,

"Morocco conducted, without a raised eyebrow from Boutros Ghali's hand picked representative who ran the referendum, a campaign of terror against the Saharan people. I had not seen anything like it since I observed the apartheid government in South Africa."

In October 1996, Douglas Dryden, the former United States military representative to the special liaison office of MINURSO, said:

"the atmosphere at the MINURSO force HQ in L'Ayoun is practically a siege mentality. The mission is not allowed to function independently, but as a creature of the Moroccans. It is the only UN mission that I am aware of where the flag of one of the parties"—

he means the Moroccan flag—

"is required to fly alongside that of the UN."

Thankfully, the appointment of Kofi Annan seems to have galvanised the UN into action, giving it a new willingness to make a reality the Saharawi referendum for self-determination. In March 1997, Kofi Annan appointed James Baker, the former US Secretary of State, as his personal envoy to Western Sahara. James Baker moved quickly and, following meetings in London—which were facilitated, I am pleased to say, by the new Labour Government—Lisbon and Houston, Morocco and the Polisario Front agreed to a proposal on voter identification and a code of conduct guaranteeing the UN authority to oversee a fair and free referendum for the Saharawi people.

That agreement, known as the Houston agreement, was endorsed by the UN, and, in December 1997, voter identification was under way. Once again,

[Ms Tess Kingham]

the referendum seemed to be back on track. Unfortunately, however, things are not progressing smoothly—in his recent report to the UN Security Council, Kofi Annan admitted that the referendum was unlikely to take place in 1998 as planned. I believe that much of the delay is caused by the Moroccan Government's stalling tactics.

Morocco has, for many years, been engaged in a sustained campaign of intimidation against the Saharawi people in the occupied territory. Saharawi people who call for independence have been systematically detained, tortured and subjected to extra-judicial killings. Amnesty International continues to receive reports of disappearances and torture. Morocco is also pushing for the registration of 12,000 extra voters from specific tribal groups, all of whom live in Morocco; none of them appeared in the 1974 Spanish census, which was, as I said, the agreed basis for the electorate for the referendum.

Like many other organisations, the Labour party has long supported the right of the Saharawi people to self-determination. I welcome the role that the Government played in helping James Baker to put the peace plan back on track, and I strongly welcome the part that they have played as president of the Friends of Western Sahara Group at the UN Security Council. I now welcome the chance to ask my hon. Friend the Minister for his response to some questions, whose resolution would, I believe, strongly help the peace process to move forward fairly and speedily. I believe that the British Government can play a dynamic role in moving the peace process to a free and fair referendum and in ensuring that both parties in the dispute keep to the spirit of the Houston agreement.

I understand that the Minister recently visited Morocco, and I should be interested to hear how his discussions with Moroccan Ministers went. In line with our ethical foreign policy, I should particularly like to know whether he has raised the issue of Morocco's continued human rights abuses against the Saharawi people—the arbitrary detentions and torture—with the Moroccan Government. I understand that our Government's position is one of positive engagement with countries with poor human rights records such as China and Indonesia, and I hope that we have been consistent with that in respect of Morocco's poor human rights record. I should also like to know what plans my hon. Friend has to meet representatives of the Polisario Front in order to obtain a balanced view of the current situation in Western Sahara.

My hon. Friend is also aware that, at the beginning of the UN peace plan, the United Kingdom provided personnel to MINURSO, but, for some time now, we have had no presence. We are the only one of the permanent five countries on the UN Security Council not to be providing military or civilian personnel. I feel quite ashamed, given our long-term support for the peace process, that we are not providing that support. I hope that the Minister will be able to give me some encouraging news on that.

I also hope that we shall send a United Kingdom delegation of election monitors to cover the run-up to the referendum and the referendum in Western Sahara. As a former election monitor in Albania for the United Kingdom Government, I know how important that is.

Finally, I should like my hon. Friend's assurance that we shall continue to do all we can to ensure that a free and fair referendum happens speedily for the Saharawi people. They have waited long enough. I am sure that the British Government will never allow strategic interests and EU trade negotiations to muddy our view of the justice of the issue. The parallels between the invasion of Western Sahara by Morocco and the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq are indisputable. I sincerely hope that the Government will be as tough in their dealings with Morocco, in persuading her to abide by UN resolutions and international law, as they were with the Iraqi regime. The Saharawi people deserve nothing less from a Labour Government.

1.11 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Derek Fatchett): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Ms Kingham) for the way in which she introduced the debate. We all know of her long-term interest in and keen commitment to the issue, and I am grateful for her opening comments.

My hon. Friend asked a number of questions, and I shall try to answer them fully. She gave us a useful background to the current situation. I shall repeat some of the points she made in the context of my response, but not in any sense to deny the historical background that she set out.

My hon. Friend asked about the Government's policy towards Western Sahara. It is very simple: we seek a just and lasting settlement and we support the United Nations' efforts to bring one about. We want to see a clean, fair and transparent referendum that will give the people of the territory the opportunity to decide whether their future lies with Morocco or as an independent state.

Our commitment to do all that we can to help underlies our support for the United Nations Secretary-General, his personal envoy James Baker and his special representative Charles Dunbar. We have also used our presidency of the European Union to bring the on-going developments in Western Sahara into sharper focus. I hope that my hon. Friend recognises that we have played and will continue to play a positive role.

My hon. Friend rightly said that the dispute in Western Sahara has lasted too long and needs to be brought to a swift, mutually acceptable conclusion. We welcomed the United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan's appointment just over a year ago of James Baker as his personal envoy to Western Sahara. That was an important step forward. As hon. Members will know, James Baker was charged with the task of assessing the situation and considering whether the United Nations' settlement plan for Western Sahara, which at the time had been stalled for more than a year, could be fully implemented.

James Baker visited the region and decided that, if he was to make any progress, he would have to bring together the parties to the dispute—Morocco and the Polisario—for talks. When he asked the British Government whether we would be able to assist him in his first steps towards achieving that, we were, of course, pleased to help. We provided a suitable venue and logistical support for meetings that he wanted to hold with Morocco, the Polisario, Algeria and Mauritania. I am delighted that we were able to assist in that way, and I can tell my hon. Friend that James Baker was delighted with the support he received from the United Kingdom Labour Government.

The two days of talks that followed, in summer 1997, concluded with Morocco and the Polisario taking the landmark decision to meet face to face, under United Nations auspices, in an attempt to iron out their differences. I hope that, along with James Baker, we can take some credit for that progress. There followed a series of meetings to which my hon. Friend referred—some in London and some in Lisbon—which made valuable progress. In particular, the talks quickly established that both Morocco and the Polisario had no interest in pursuing any political solution other than implementation of the settlement plan. Neither party showed any enthusiasm for any kind of autonomy for the people of the territory within the kingdom of Morocco.

Differences over how the eligibility of individuals to vote might be assessed remained—and remains—the key issue. When they were resolved at the final session of talks in Houston, the Moroccan authorities and the Polisario signed what is now termed the Houston agreement, to which my hon. Friend referred. It included a code of conduct for the referendum. The Secretary-General's report of 13 November 1997 set out the plan and timetable for the referendum, which is scheduled for 7 December 1998.

I hope that I have been able to persuade the House that the Government have been active in respect of Western Sahara. Let me set out some further initiatives and responsibilities that we have pursued. Whenever Western Sahara is discussed at the United Nations, we firmly support the United Nations Secretary-General and his personal envoy. We are also responsible for co-ordinating the Friends of Western Sahara Group at the United Nations. We therefore have played, and will continue to play, a central role in New York and elsewhere.

Although we are conscious that Western Sahara is inevitably an agenda item on which the United Nations has the lead, we have sought to raise its standing within the European Union. During our presidency of the European Union, we have ensured that Western Sahara regularly features on the agenda at the monthly Maghreb-Mashreq working group meetings in Brussels. I am delighted that my hon. Friend is pleased about that. I am sure that many others will be, too.

As a result of one United Kingdom initiative, the European Union heads of mission in Rabat are now permitted to visit Western Sahara to see things for themselves, whereas previously visiting was restricted to junior members of embassy staff. We believe that not only visits but the level of those visits is important. Additionally, we know that many of our European partners do not enjoy the range of information on events in Western Sahara that we possess, so we have circulated comprehensive reports from our ambassador in Rabat.

We were pleased that the United Nations Secretary-General was able to put together a timetable for the run-up to the referendum so quickly, and that MINURSO in Western Sahara was able to recommence the voter identification process at the beginning of December last year. That has continued, with few interruptions.

It is very encouraging to note—I shall come to my hon. Friend's points—that the United Nations Secretary-General's report of 13 April 1998 included the 60,112 applicants identified during the first phase of the identification process, which ran from August 1994 to December 1995. More than 100,000 have been identified as potential voters, and fewer than 60,000 remain to be convoked.

Since the identification process resumed, British Government officials have made three separate visits to Laayoune in Western Sahara, where MINURSO is based. We also try to visit Tindouf, the Algerian town around which the Polisario camps lie, as often as possible. Unfortunately, the logistical difficulties are such that our last visit to Western Sahara, outside Laayoune, was in September 1997, when officials visited Tindouf, the MINURSO team site at Mehaires and Smara. They travelled from Mehaires through minefields and across the Berm to Smara, and saw for themselves the terrain and conditions that have hindered the work of the United Nations for so long. That is an indication of many of the problems and difficulties resulting from the fighting in the region.

I am pleased to be able to tell my hon. Friend that British officials are undertaking another visit to Western Sahara at this very moment. I should like to take this opportunity to reiterate our gratitude to the United Nations for its assistance with these visits. I hope that my hon. Friend will appreciate that on the ground, through our embassy and other staff, we are active in finding out what the conditions are within Western Sahara.

I also believe that practical demonstrations of support, such as visits, are vital for MINURSO. They not only provide a visible and much appreciated sign of our support, but help us to understand the conditions that it has to work under and the difficulties that it has to face. We are also keen to take every possible opportunity to improve our knowledge and understanding of developments in the territory itself. I know from the many letters we receive in the Foreign Office that there is great interest in the United Kingdom in what is going on in Western Sahara. Indeed, I am delighted to see so many of my hon. Friends in the Chamber for the debate. Yet again, there is not one Opposition Back Bencher here—but we are becoming accustomed to that.

We are told of allegations of human rights abuses, the manipulation of the press, demonstrations and disturbances. The United Nations independent jurist, Professor Rocounas, is engaged in those issues, and we support him in his work. Our regular visits offer us the ideal opportunity to find out from those on the spot what is really happening. I know that those visits are important for MINURSO morale, and they underline, in a practical way, our continuing commitment to the successful resolution of the dispute.

It has been said by some that, if the UN process stalls again, for whatever reason, Morocco would not be too bothered—it would continue to inhabit the towns west of the Berm, much as it has done since the Spanish, and latterly the Mauritanians, withdrew from the territory. I do not believe that that is what the Moroccans want. Nor is it in Morocco's interests for the sovereignty of Western Sahara to remain unresolved. My hon. Friend asked about my recent visit to Morocco. I reassure her that the issue of Western Sahara was a key element in my discussions with the king, the Prime Minister and other Ministers. Our commitment to a resolution of the issue and to the United Nations position was stressed during all those meetings.

[Mr. Derek Fatchett]

There are also some who argue that MINURSO is biased; that it is somehow pro the Polisario and anti-Moroccan. We believe otherwise. MINURSO has proved its value and its integrity, and we shall continue to hold that view unless there is any available evidence to the contrary. At the moment, there is none.

My hon. Friend asked me about the possibility of UK Government contacts with the Polisario. As she knows, I was due to meet the Secretary General of the Polisario, Mohamed Abdelaziz, this morning. I understand that Mr. Abdelaziz is in London for this week. Unfortunately, because of other diary commitments, it was not possible for me to have that meeting. I assure my hon. Friend that it is important that Britain, as a key player in Europe, in the region, at the Security Council and in the Friends of Western Sahara Group in New York, should know what is really happening at this crucial time for Western Sahara. We shall seek that information from all possible sources.

There seems to be some difficulty in arranging meetings with Mohamed Abdelaziz. I understand that my predecessor, Jeremy Hanley, arranged to meet him in north Africa early in 1997, but Mr. Abdelaziz had to pull out of that meeting. We may be fated not to meet. However, I again assure my hon. Friend that we shall seek information from all the key players in the process.

I reiterate to the House our continued determination to see the Western Sahara dispute resolved through the referendum. Britain takes no position on the outcome, and we will not alter that stance. We neither support the Moroccan claim to sovereignty over the territory, nor recognise the Polisario's self-proclaimed Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic. Indeed, my hon. Friend would not wish me to take any other position. Her argument is that the matter is one for self-determination by the people. We support the United Nations, and we want to see the dispute resolved peacefully. Morocco and the Polisario have agreed to put the matter to a free vote. We shall do all we can to make sure that there is a vote and that it is free and fair. We shall do all we can to help implement whatever decision the people make.

In February this year, I was pleased to be able to meet the United Nations Secretary-General's newly appointed special representative to Western Sahara, Mr. Charles Dunbar. Mr. Dunbar is a former US ambassador who has worked extensively in the region. I know from reports received that he has been extremely active in his efforts. He has been admirably and effectively supported by Mr. Robin Kinloch, the British UN staff member who heads the identification commission. My hon. Friend asked about the British role. Robin Kinloch is a key element in the resources that we make available.

I pointed out earlier the progress made on the identification of the non-contested applicants who wish to be assessed as to their qualification as voters in the referendum. As my hon. Friend and others will be aware, there are about 65,000 individuals whose eligibility to submit themselves to MINURSO for interview remains to be confirmed. That is a key issue, to which my hon. Friend referred. Now is not the time or the opportunity for me to go into the problem of the contested tribes in depth. However, in brief, Morocco believes that the members of those tribes should all have the opportunity to submit themselves for identification as voters. The Polisario believes that to do so would be contrary to the Houston agreement. It is clear that both parties see the issue as of paramount importance. We agree that a successful resolution in regard to Western Sahara requires the settlement of the dispute over those tribal groups. If there is any way in which we can assist in that process, we shall be happy to do so.

All applicants in Western Sahara, including those from the contested tribal groups, have been convoked to attend one of the UN identification centres. Those who attend are interviewed by MINURSO staff and representatives of the Polisario and Morocco. Their eligibility for registration is assessed under UN criteria. On the dates on which the 65,000 members of the contested tribes were invited to attend for identification, only 4,000 came forward. Only 1,500 have been interviewed. I regret that the Moroccans have refused to participate in interviewing the remaining 2,500 until they have received satisfactory assurances from the United Nations about how remaining members of those tribes will be dealt with. Charles Dunbar is working hard on that issue, which is crucial to the resolution of the problem, and we shall continue to assist in whatever way we can.

I hope that I have been able to answer the points raised by my hon. Friend, and to assure her that we are active on this matter and are looking for a peaceful solution through the referendum process. If the United Kingdom can assist the UN in any way to resolve this long-standing issue, we will be keen to do so. I congratulate my hon. Friend on raising an issue of such importance, and we look forward to the existence of a map of north Africa without this dispute.

Community Hospitals (Oxfordshire)

1.30 pm

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): I am delighted to open a timely debate on the crisis—that is not too strong a word—that affects our health service. Community hospitals are particularly under threat, and not only hospitals but community beds. Abingdon community hospital in my constituency, and the hospitals at Burford, in the constituency of the hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Woodward), at Wantage, in the constituency of the hon. Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson), and at Watlington, in the constituency of the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), are all at risk. Although none of those right hon. and hon. Members is present, I know that they feel strongly about the potential closures of those hospitals.

The closures faced by the people of Oxfordshire are caused by chronic underfunding of the health service and the acute financial crisis facing the health service this year, both of which are particular problems for Oxfordshire. It would be a false economy—bad not only for patients, but for financial reasons—to close community hospital beds in the way proposed. I plead with the Minister to intervene, even at this stage, because community hospital beds are threatened throughout the country. I ask him to ensure that extra money allocated this year is used not only to provide adequate community services for patients, but to avoid false economies and thereby to release cash for the health service.

The overall funding problem in the NHS has been well stated by the Liberal Democrats over the years. The NHS is chronically underfunded, to the tune of several billion pounds. Government leaks to the press confirm that sort of figure. *The Daily Telegraph* this morning says that the Department of Health will put in a megabid to the Treasury of around £8 billion. I do not know whether the Government will confirm that figure, but the British Medical Association and others who work in the field recognise that the NHS is chronically underfunded to around that sum.

On top of that, the health service, where the staff have to work hard just to keep it afloat, needs real-terms increases of about 3 per cent. a year to cope with NHS inflation, over and above retail price index rises. The Conservative Government wasted money on bureaucracy and the internal market, but they still managed to average 3.1 per cent. over their period in office, although it came in fits and starts. By adopting Conservative spending plans, the new Government have, sadly, managed real-terms spending increases of only 2.2 per cent. in the NHS budget for England in 1997–98 and 1998–99. That is not sufficient to keep the NHS going without cuts in services. We have seen the pressure on waiting lists. It is not so obvious in community hospitals, where there is no obvious proxy such as waiting list numbers or waiting times, but the pressure is there. It is also on mental health services.

It is fair to say that the Labour manifesto promised a real-terms increase of only 0.1 per cent. or less. However, the Government have revised that upwards, and have claimed that Labour is the only party able to revise its pledges upwards. They have done that not by allocating new money, but by using money initially allocated in other areas, such as the Department of Trade and Industry's underspend in 1997–98 for the £270 million allocated for winter pressures, and £1.2 billion from the Treasury reserve for this year. That is not new money. It is hard to believe that only a Labour Chancellor would spend that money from the reserve on the health service, while a Liberal Democrat or Conservative Chancellor would merely burn it on a bonfire.

An increase of only 2.2 per cent. is not enough to prevent pressures on waiting lists and other services. At the general election, I made it clear to the people of Oxfordshire, who were already worried about their community hospitals, that the Liberal Democrats would match existing resources, including the reserve and underspends, and, in addition, would give £550 million per year in new money raised by increasing tax revenues.

The extra money from the Government is based on old inflation figures, not the new figures that they found when they took office. In real terms, the money allocated in 1997–98 and—without including the allocation from the reserve, which all parties would have made—for 1998–99 is less than the Conservatives planned. More important, it is less than health authority finance bosses figured would come from a Government elected on the platform that there were "14 days to save the NHS" and "things can only get better". On community hospitals, and on waiting lists, things have only got worse.

It is important to nail the myth that the Government have offered more money than the Liberal Democrats promised at the election. They have offered significantly less. It is embarrassing for the Government that the money for community hospital services and other NHS services is less even than the amount that the Conservatives planned to spend in real terms.

Health authorities such as Oxfordshire face a bill for millennium compliance, for which there is no separate funding allocation. They face initiatives, on pain of sanction, to reduce waiting lists. They face those things with a level of overall increased funding—including the new £500 million announced this year, which is still less than 3 per cent. more in real terms—that is likely to increase waiting times.

Oxfordshire is particularly badly affected, as it is significantly below its target funding. It got a little more than the average allocation, but that was nowhere near the 3 per cent. minimum increase required. All trusts in Oxfordshire are in recovery plan mode, except the community hospital trust, which still faces cuts. As all the trusts face cuts, the health authority cannot be accused of picking on the community hospital trust. It is seeking even bigger cuts from the bigger budgets of the area's acute trusts.

It is hard to say what makes me and the people of Oxford, West and Abingdon more angry. Is it the raised expectations that were dashed after the Government said that "things can only get better"? Is it the stance of Conservative Members, who blame the Government for underfunding the NHS although the Government are merely adopting Conservative spending plans?

Is it premature for the health authority to agree a three-year or four-year funding cut, including closure of community hospitals and community hospital beds, at a time when the new structure of the health authority will, at least in the medium term, move such decisions to primary care groups? They are keen to be given a chance to take a view on whether those cuts should happen, or

[Dr. Evan Harris]

whether, when they get the budget in one or two years, time, another way can be found to make the savings that the Government are forcing on them.

Given that Oxfordshire's problems result from the Government's underfunding of the health service, and given that cuts must be made, there is a question of whether those are the most appropriate cuts. They will affect local services that are delivered to people near their homes. Oxfordshire has rural areas, in my constituency and in that of the hon. Member for Witney, who is now here, in which transport is difficult. The requirement for community hospital beds to be locally available to people and to their general practitioners is vital to better care. The community hospitals uniquely offer what I have called—in a separate debate on community care with the Under-Secretary of State for Health—the three Rs of NHS community care.

The first is rehabilitation, which allows, for patients who need it, enough time for active physiotherapy before they are discharged to home care. Instead, too often, they are discharged to a nursing home or residential home care because there is no time for the active rehabilitation that would enable them to return to their homes. Most patients would rather be at home and, in many cases, although not all, that provides a cheaper package of care for the local social services, particularly if the patients do not have their own funding.

The second of the three Rs is recuperation. It is vital that patients are given a chance to recuperate from operations or acute emergency admissions—perhaps for serious illnesses such as pneumonia—in their own time. If they are rushed back into the community, an extra work load is placed on community services, which are already underfunded. When patients are discharged from acute hospitals too early and a community hospital is not available to help them recover in their own time, the work load falls on social services. Alternatively—this is just as bad—the acute hospital cannot discharge the patient because of the lack of services available to pick up the care. That causes an increase in delayed discharges, which are already high in Oxfordshire. A lack of recuperation beds is not only bad for patients: it is financially bad.

Mr. Shaun Woodward (Witney): Is my hon. Friend aware that, in my constituency, we have three community hospitals? The first, at Burford, certainly faces closure under Oxfordshire health authority's plan. The second faces a 25 per cent. cut in the number of beds and the third faces further cuts. Thus, all three hospitals face either closure or dramatic cuts in beds. In the light of what my hon. Friend has been saying, does he feel that savings could be made by reducing the huge number of trusts in Oxfordshire to free up funds that would prevent dramatic cuts, not only in my constituency but in his and others in Oxfordshire?

Dr. Harris: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I remind him that I am his hon. Friend only in that I seek to preserve community services. Given the Conservative funding that undermined the health service before the current cuts, I could not describe myself as his friend.

I accept the hon. Gentleman's point that his constituency hospitals are particularly badly hit, although the scale of the underfunding in Oxfordshire is such that even radical trust mergers would not release sufficient management savings to provide the necessary funding to preserve those hospitals. That approach could be considered, however, as Oxfordshire has too many trusts. The Liberal Democrats have never opposed trust mergers. We feel that the issue of losing separate trust status is far less important than the loss of services.

The third R that community hospitals provide for local patients is respite care. If community beds are cut, patients will have less opportunity for respite care. That could mean extra admissions to acute hospitals when patients and their carers cannot cope at home for long periods. General practitioners use community hospitals as an alternative to acute hospital admission. The Government have considered it useful to fund that with their "winter pressures" money, with hospital-at-home schemes as an alternative to admission. I would argue that community hospitals are large-scale hospital-at-home schemes and are an alternative to expensive or inappropriate acute hospital admission.

Social services in Oxfordshire are badly affected by Government spending cuts. They have not benefited from a release from the reserve or from special money. I remind the Minister that the total social services standard spending assessment has, according to House of Commons Library figures, been cut by 1.4 per cent. in real terms in 1997–98 and by 1.1 per cent. in real terms in 1998–99, even before demographic pressures are taken into account.

Social services are simply unable to take up the extra work load that will be put on them as a result of hospital closures and reductions in community hospital beds. Therefore, I fear that the biggest work load will fall on acute hospitals. As has been predicted not only by me but by Lord Walton of Detchant, a local resident of Oxfordshire and an acknowledged expert on those matters, there will be a massive increase in delayed discharges and in admissions to hospital of people who could otherwise be managed at home or in a community hospital.

That makes no financial sense, because it is twice as expensive to keep people in acute hospital beds than it is to look after them in community hospital beds. It is certainly more expensive to the state to send patients without their own funding to a social services-funded nursing home than it would be, in the long term, to give them the rehabilitation that they may need in a community hospital.

As the matter is still out to consultation, I understand that the Minister will not be able to give his view, or even his likely view, on his decision on the proposal to close those community hospitals and beds. However, does he consider it reasonable for the local health authority and the NHS regional office to look carefully at whether the extra £65 million announced nationally, specifically for community and mental health services out of the extra £500 million announced for the NHS this year could be used profitably as a cash-releasing measure to avoid the false economy of increasing the number of delayed discharges? If he looks, as I suspect that he will have to in due course when the measure comes before him, at the consultation document issued by the health authority, he will notice that that question is not even addressed.

The question of whether the number of delayed discharges and admissions of patients who would otherwise be treated in community hospitals would increase was glossed over in the section on the effects on other acute trusts. Already, we read in the local newspapers today and yesterday that the Oxford Radcliffe hospital trust must close wards because it cannot provide enough staff to keep them open. Will it not result in double trouble for the Government's waiting list initiative if wards are closed to new admissions not only because of staff shortages but because of delayed discharges?

There is a good case for allocating the money given to the Oxford and Anglia region not on a weighted capitation allocation basis—that would be an unthinking way of proceeding—but as a cash-releasing measure to provide the resources that Oxfordshire needs to expand its services so that local people begin to see improvements. The Oxfordshire social services settlement suffered not only from an overall real-terms cut in the past two years, despite increased demography, but from a savage cut of 10 per cent. in its SSA for elderly residential care because of formula changes.

No reasonable explanation has been given to Oxfordshire county council why the Labour Government think that it suddenly costs 10 per cent. less to keep elderly people in residential accommodation. It is also hard to understand how local social services, which interlink crucially with community hospitals, can be rescued from such a huge cut in their resources.

Oxfordshire has suffered particularly badly under the Government's spending plans, which owe much to those that they adopted—unnecessarily, the Liberal Democrats believe—after the last election. There is therefore a strong case for providing the limited extra money that the Government allocated to Oxford and Anglia regional health authority to Oxfordshire health authority specifically to avoid cuts in community hospitals and in mental health services in Oxfordshire. Otherwise, those cuts will be bad, not only for the finances of the health authority, but for patients across Oxfordshire.

1.48 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. Alan Milburn): I congratulate the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) on securing this debate. This is an important issue, as community hospitals can be a valuable part of the local health service in many parts of the country. I know that there are real concerns not just in the hon. Gentleman's constituency but in the constituency of the hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Woodward) about the health authority's proposals.

I should say at the outset that there is no single national blueprint for the configuration of services that will suit all localities. As I am sure the hon. Gentleman recognises, all localities are different and, in some cases, community hospitals may not be the best way of delivering local services. It is the job of health authorities and NHS trusts to ensure that local services are matched to local need.

The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well the Government's position on the future of Oxfordshire's community hospitals. If a local community health council objects to the health authority's proposals, the matters will be referred to Ministers. Until then, we must remain impartial about any future decision.

The public consultation on the proposals to reshape community services in the county began on 4 April. Public meetings have now been held in all 11 towns that have community hospitals. I understand that the health authority has circulated more than 5,000 consultation documents and 10,000 summary documents. I urge all hon. Members and members of the public who are concerned about the issue to submit their views to the health authority. The whole point of having a consultation is for the health authority to ascertain the views of local people and interested parties. I can tell the hon. Members for Oxford, West and Abingdon and for Witney that, if the issue is referred to Ministers, we shall listen carefully to what they and local people have to say.

Two options are being considered by the health authority and the NHS trust. Both options would mean that the 12-bed hospital at Bicester would be replaced by a new 30-bed hospital and a new minor injuries unit would be developed for Witney. To achieve that, the first option would involve closing Burford and Watlington hospitals and reducing the number of beds at five of the other community hospitals. The second option would also involve closing Burford hospital, and the wards and day hospital at Wallingford, and reducing the number of beds at four of the other community hospitals. Under that proposal, a new day hospital would be developed at Didcot, and there would be an increase in beds at Watlington. The health authority claims that, with both options, the aim is to reduce bed numbers in areas where there is relatively generous provision and to increase bed numbers where there is a greater need.

Again, it would be inappropriate for me to comment further on the pros and cons of the options while the consultation is still going on.

Mr. Woodward: The Minister said that both options include the proposal to close Burford hospital. It may help him to know that the hospital has an average annual occupancy of over 90 per cent. If Burford were to close, the nearest available community hospital would be at Witney, which has 61 beds. It is proposed to close about 25 per cent. of the beds at Witney. When I was there a few weeks ago, there was only one empty bed, and the hospital's average occupancy was also over 90 per cent. As the acute hospital, John Radcliffe, has spent many months of this year on red alert, not only will be there be no community bed provision, but there will be no acute bed provision. That makes nonsense of the NHS White Paper's support for local provision, because there will be no provision for such patients in west Oxfordshire.

Mr. Milburn: All I can say to the hon. Gentleman is that, if the health authority's proposals come to Ministers, they will of course be judged in the context of the White Paper. However, I understand that the health authority claims that the proposals, which are fully supported by the community health trust, aim to tackle fairness of access to services. Our White Paper clearly states that there should be an end to unfairness and that high standards should be available to all patients. I expect that the hon. Members for Witney and for Oxford, West and Abingdon would support that principle. I understand that, even without any financial pressures, the health authority and the NHS trust believe that change would have to be made to ensure a fairer distribution of health care in the county.

The health authority has stated that there are considerably more community hospital beds for people aged over 65 in the south and west of the county than in the north. Clearly, those are difficult issues, which will

[Mr. Milburn]

need to be considered carefully. As I said, they will be considered within the policy context of our White Paper, "The New NHS". There is no doubt that community hospitals will be part of our vision for the NHS. As the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon rightly said, nobody benefits if people are admitted to hospital unnecessarily or are kept in acute hospitals longer than necessary. Waiting lists get longer and hospital services become stretched to the limit.

Much work is being done to provide imaginative alternatives to traditional rehabilitation and recuperation services which meet patients' needs. However, we need to ensure that access to such services is dependent not on where patients live but on meeting their needs. Again, if proposals come to Ministers, we shall judge them in the context of that principle.

We currently do not have enough evidence to stipulate whether intermediate care should be provided through community hospitals or in the patient's home. There is a need for better evaluation as models of care develop. In particular, the health authority will need to consider how community hospitals best fit in with acute hospitals and other community facilities to ensure the best balance of emergency, planned and rehabilitation care.

Dr. Peter Brand (Isle of Wight): The Minister has highlighted the national importance of having a policy for community hospitals. Would it not would be a great shame if the hospitals that he has mentioned—which I visited recently—were to close and the opportunity to use the set-up in Oxfordshire as a national pilot for a more integrated health service were lost?

Mr. Milburn: As I said, first, there is no uniform community hospital and, secondly, local needs vary according to local circumstances. That is why the health authority and the NHS trusts concerned must be clear about the relationship between community hospitals, acute care, primary care and other NHS services. That is for the health authority to determine following consultation. There is no single national blueprint. If we tried to impose one, the national health service would not best meet local patients' needs, and we want to avoid that result at all costs.

No part of the national health service stands alone. Clinicians, other members of staff and, increasingly, patients have reached that understanding over the past few years. The NHS is an interconnected system. The hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Dr. Brand) is right, and we want more integrated forms of care in future so that patients who need access to hospital services, and, equally, to primary care, rehabilitation and social services, have a greater continuum of care than in the past. In some parts of the country, community hospitals will provide a vital role in providing that form of integrated care, but that is a matter for local determination.

That brings me—sadly, because the debate had been going well—to money. I say to the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon that the Liberal Democrats are playing a tired old record. Time and again, we hear fantasy figures conjured out of thin air. The facts are straightforward: the Government have allocated an extra £2,000 million to the national health service on top of the allocations planned by the previous Government. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I am grateful for the support for that proposition from the Liberal Democrat Benches, where there is at last a glimmer of reality.

I remind the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon that it is important that all hon. Members remember what we promised the electorate at the general election. We promised real-terms increases in funding for the national health service, and we are delivering them. The Liberal Democrats promised increased investment of £540 million per annum. That was generous, but we have doubled that. Now the hon. Gentleman is crying crocodile tears and trying to leapfrog the Government's additional investment in the NHS.

I make it clear to the hon. Gentleman that we recognise that Oxfordshire has particular problems. That is why we have allocated an extra £2.8 million to help with the strategic changes taking place in the county. That is why more money was given to Oxfordshire to help with winter pressures than to any other county in the region. That is why, since we came to power on 1 May last year, we have allocated to the health service in the county £20 million more than the previous Government were planning. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will welcome that.

Dr. Harris: It is necessary to point out, for the record, that the cheers for the Minister's statement came from Labour Members—including the Chairman of the Select Committee on Health, the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe)—sitting in Liberal Democrat seats, who are queueing for Gallery tickets. Clearly, the Liberal Democrats would spend more in real terms than the Government, and for the Government to ignore inflation is to ignore reality for patients in Oxfordshire.

Finally, does the Minister agree that it would not be unreasonable for the local NHS executive to make specific cash releasing allocations of extra money to prevent false economies?

Mr. Milburn: That is an extremely good point. As the hon. Gentleman is aware, £65 million was made available for the waiting list initiative and to improve primary, community, mental health and social services. I expect that the region will take account of local circumstances in determining how best to allocate that money for the maximum benefit of patients.

We all want a modern national health service. There is no doubt that community hospitals will have a role to play in some areas. If the matter comes before Ministers, I can assure the hon. Gentleman—

It being Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Sitting suspended, pursuant to Standing Order No. 10 (Wednesday sittings), till half-past Two o'clock.

Oral Answers to Questions

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Multinational Companies (Business Practices)

2. **Mr. Michael Clapham** (Barnsley, West and Penistone): What discussions she has had with United Kingdom-based multinationals about their business practices in relation to overseas projects. [42497]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): I have had many discussions with multinational companies about their investment and trading practices. We have discussed the growing ethical consumer movements, and their focus on core labour and environmental standards.

I have also discussed the welcome support of the major pharmaceutical companies for the roll back malaria initiative. I have had many discussions on the interest of developing countries in attracting beneficial investments, and the interest of companies in supporting development. My Department is consulting widely with the private sector on how we can be best work together to promote those objectives.

Mr. Clapham: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer, but may I tell her that on 13 May, the day on which Rio Tinto, the largest mining company in the world, held its annual general meeting, the International Union of Chemical, Energy and General Workers published a booklet entitled "Rio Tinto: Tainted Titan", and held a stakeholders' meeting to draw attention to the fact that the company had shown disregard for human rights and for the environment? I agree that it is now addressing those issues, but will my right hon. Friend continue to press to ensure that multinational companies exercise the best practices and have regard for human rights and for the environment?

Clare Short: I can certainly give my hon. Friend that undertaking, but there is definitely a new mood among multinational companies. They are seeking meetings with my Department and, one by one, they are making commitments to human rights and to monitoring their performance overseas. There is a real sea change, and if we encourage that, we could improve standards of protection of the environment and core labour standards across the world. It is an important opportunity.

Rio Tinto had a bad reputation, but it seems to be working to change. I recently gave out the World Aware awards, and the company won one. I was visited by missionaries who had been working in the Philippines and who were critical of the company's record. I arranged that they should meet, but, apparently, Rio Tinto is not in the Philippines any more. All of us, including my hon. Friend, should meet Rio Tinto and get behind those improvements in performance, because they are beneficial to everyone.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Faversham and Mid-Kent): Can the Secretary of State confirm that her conversations also cover behaviour such as marketing vigorously in overseas countries goods that have been banned or found to be dangerous in this country? Will she look at the record of the tobacco companies that flog cigarettes vigorously overseas as they are unable to flog them here, because we understand the dangers? Will she also consider countries that still promote tinned and powdered milk, when everyone believes that maternal milk is infinitely better for children?

Clare Short: I am happy to give the hon. Gentleman an undertaking to look at any issue, but I do not pretend to have invincible power to cause multinational capital suddenly to take on the standards that he advocates. We have all been campaigning to get rid of irresponsible baby milk advertising, which is so destructive. I confess that I have never looked into the tobacco issue in detail, but I am aware of it from press coverage. I will take a look at it.

Mr. Hugh Bayley (City of York): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the remarks of Adair Turner, from the Confederation of British Industry, in favour of international action to combat bribery in international trade? That is a change of position for the CBI. Given my right hon. Friend's support in the White Paper for action to implement the convention of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development on combating international bribery, will she or her Government colleagues be introducing legislation to tackle the problem?

Clare Short: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for his work in this area. We have a great opportunity, because the OECD has called for companies from industrialised countries to clean up their act, for Governments to cease the practice of allowing bribes in overseas countries to be tax-deductible—it is disgraceful that they ever were tax-deductible—and for it to be made a crime to offer a bribe to a public official overseas. I am keen for Britain and other countries to embrace this opportunity, especially when Governments of developing countries, particularly in Africa, are giving a lead and are taking steps at home. There is no doubt that corruption hurts the poor. We are considering legislation, and I am hopeful that Britain will take a lead.

Sudan

3. **Mr. Archy Kirkwood** (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): If she will make a statement on the current provision of aid to Sudan. [42499]

4. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton** (Macclesfield): If she will make a statement on her Department's aid programmes to the people of southern Sudan. [42500]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): I am happy to say that, since my statement to the House on 28 April, the Government of Sudan, partly due to the pressure of international public opinion, have gradually improved access to the worst-affected areas, particularly in Bahr El Ghazal. I approved further British contributions during May totalling £6.23 million, which brings our overall assistance to Sudan since February to £10.23 million. The European Union General Affairs Council on 25 May

again called for a ceasefire for humanitarian purposes, which remains the most urgent requirement. Unfortunately, the Sudan People's Liberation Army has refused to consider that request. A recent mission by an official of my Department reported that access remained a problem, despite the fact that we had been given assurances that it was now adequate, and that feeding standards for children were too low and were below international standards.

Mr. Kirkwood: It is self-evident that the problems of delivering aid to southern Sudan are politically complex. The Secretary of State has been bedevilled by the problem of access. In today's edition of *The Times*, she rehearses some of her worries about fundraising by aid agencies, particularly the Red Cross. Will she confirm that her reported remarks should not be interpreted as the Government saying that fundraising is not necessary to deliver help to the needy of southern Sudan?

Clare Short: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that no one should believe what they read in *The Times*. The little man involved wanted to put an aggressive slant on an important issue of public discussion. The truth is that Sudan does not need public appeals. I have guaranteed that funds would be provided, and so did other Governments. The problem is complex. We must be able to provide the money rapidly and get the food delivered when we have the opportunity. There is no shortage of resources for food, but the international community must continue to put pressure on the Government of Sudan—it has already had some effect—and on the southern factions. Ideally, there should be a ceasefire so that a trainload of food can get to everyone who needs it in that large area.

Many of the non-governmental organisations are doing wonderful work on the ground delivering food to the people. I regret the public appeal. The NGOs were divided in their view, because such appeals confuse the message about the nature of the problem. Good people in our country think that there is a shortage of money. That is not the problem: it is the politicians on both sides of the conflict who deliberately prevent access and cause people to starve.

Mr. Winterton: Although I accept that more food is needed for the very deprived people of Sudan, especially southern Sudan, and that access is one of the main causes of the delay in getting the food to them, I am sure that the Secretary of State will agree that it is the continuing civil war between the Government of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Army that has created the major elements of the problem. What fresh initiatives will be taken to bring both parties in the civil war to the table and to negotiate the establishment of a forum or agency that can bring the suffering of these extraordinary people to an end? We are all impressed by the passive way in which they are prepared to accept their lot.

Clare Short: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right; it is a humanitarian disaster. Many such disasters have already occurred, and more will come.

This disaster is a direct result of the war. The area where the famine is has been fought over by a faction that changed sides; consequently, people have been displaced and crops uprooted. The famine has been compounded by the fact that the Sudan Government would not allow us access, and by the fact that, now that they have, the southern factions will not allow a ceasefire. It is our duty to provide humanitarian relief, but we shall not solve the problem in that way.

We have done our best to send a message during the crisis—a message from all the people of the world who are concerned. The Sudan Government changed their position: they allowed more access and offered a ceasefire. The southern factions, however, have not responded. Following my statement in the House, we put pressure on both sides in our European Union presidency role. The Governments of the surrounding countries—comprising the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, or IGAD—are trying to broker peace talks; the last round did not lead far, but further talks will take place in July or August, hosted by Johannes Pronk, the Netherlands Minister for Development Co-operation.

The whole international community must put pressure on both sides. No side can win the war by fighting: if the fighting continues, the people of Sudan will continue to suffer. We must do all we can to call for a ceasefire and a reasonable settlement.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): There seems to be a difference of opinion about whether money is needed. The United Nations said today that it needed US$109 million to deal immediately with the humanitarian crisis. As Governments have committed only 20 per cent. of that so far, and as only 7.2 per cent. has been paid, there is clearly a shortage of money. Can we do anything to help?

Clare Short: I assure my hon. Friend that there is no problem of money or food. The trouble is that, in the humanitarian aid business, there is competition over who is in the headlines and who is raising the money, and that gets in the way of the true message. Operation Lifeline Sudan—which, as my hon. Friend knows, is headed by the United Nations—tells us that the Sudan Government have improved access, and that there is enough food. As I have said, an official from my Department has come back and told us that that view is too optimistic, but, as I have also said, we will continue to provide the necessary funds. The EU is about to disburse a considerable amount.

I insist on this point first because it is true, but also because we must not muddle the message to the public. I ask the public to use all their influence to put pressure for a ceasefire on both sides. We will deliver the money: there is no shortage of money, and anyone who suggests that there is misleads the public.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): We understand that there is no shortage of money in some places. However, although I agree that the Sudan People's Liberation Army ought to call a ceasefire, does the Secretary of State not accept that, at a time when the National Islamic Front, with its cohorts, invades four counties containing about 2 million people—scattering and butchering them in an attempt to maintain control of an area that may produce oil—there is something wrong with the balance, given that it claims that it is giving humanitarian aid on the airstrips?

Clare Short: The hon. Gentleman is right to say that the Sudan Government have done many undesirable

things, but deep, dreadful and monstrous wrongs have been done by all sides in the civil war. I do not think that anyone should line up with one side or the other. The people of Sudan desperately need a ceasefire and a peace settlement, securing the rights of people in all parts of the country. No one will win through the war; the suffering will go on, and those with any feeling for any of the people of Sudan must use all their influence to secure peace.

Mr. Gary Streeter (South-West Devon): Will the Secretary of State join me in paying tribute to *The Guardian* for its recent campaign relating to the crippling problems of the poorest countries on the planet—including Sudan—under the slogan "the new slavery"? Does she agree that finding new and better ways in which to bring effective help to the 1.3 billion people throughout the world, including Sudan, who live in abject poverty—including the redemption of debt, albeit linked to good governance—is one of the biggest issues facing politicians in the developed world? Have we not a Christian duty to do all we can?

Clare Short: I am happy to agree with the hon. Gentleman, and I welcome his promotion to this important portfolio. I hope that he will forgive me for paying tribute to his predecessor, the right hon. Member for Eddisbury (Sir A. Goodlad), whose commitment to the cause of international development was sincere and deep. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will not misunderstand me when I say that, however big his commitment, it could not be any greater than the right hon. Gentleman's. I agree that there is a moral duty on people of all moralities and religions to give the poor of the world a chance to climb out of their poverty. Our people have an interest in reducing inequality, division and instability because they are dangerous for everyone. As I have said before, this is the most noble cause in politics, and I welcome the hon. Gentleman to it.

Mr. Streeter: In view of the critical reaction of several leading agencies to the Secretary of State's remarks on Thursday about the use of shocking images to attract public interest to events in Sudan and to other tragedies, in the light of recent figures which show that the British public are certainly not suffering from compassion fatigue, and in the light of the confusion that has been caused by her remarks, would she take this opportunity to reconsider them?

Clare Short: No, I would not. The hon. Gentleman should not believe misleading accounts in *The Times* or in other newspapers. The issue is enormously important, and there was no need for a public appeal for funds for Sudan. There was a big division among NGOs about whether there should be one, and most of them joined together in a group appeal. First, many of them took the view that a public appeal would confuse the message to the public about the cause of the suffering in Sudan and about how public opinion could be used to try to get some relief for the people of Sudan.

Secondly, I have referred to a book by Richard Jolly, who is a great development academic. He used to be with the United Nations Children's Fund, and now edits the United Nations Development Programme report. There is compassion fatigue in the industrialised countries at a time when it is apparent that more development has been achieved over the past 50 years than ever before. It is undermining the commitment of Governments to development and confusing the public.

Appeals that use constant images of famine and failure are helping to feed a compassion fatigue that is reflected in reduced commitment and spend by Governments. It is a real issue, and I am making a speech to the media this afternoon about how we might do better. I shall send the hon. Gentleman a copy of that. Many NGOs agree that we must try to do better.

Sierra Leone

5. **Mrs. Eleanor Laing** (Epping Forest): What aid has been given to Sierra Leone during 1998. [42501]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): Since the return of President Kabbah's democratically elected Government, we have provided £1 million to re-establish core functions and services to enable the Government to be up and running; £1 million for non-governmental organisations delivering humanitarian and development assistance and £1 million to the International Committee of the Red Cross to enable it to continue its humanitarian aid and protection work. The European Union is providing 2 million ecu for seeds and tools, and 200,000 ecu to help refugees in Guinea to return home. We are looking at what more we can do to strengthen governance and bring immediate relief to the people. We hope in future to be able to assist in demobilising and reintegrating ex-combatants.

Mrs. Laing: I thank the Secretary of State for that full and helpful answer. All hon. Members welcome the giving of humanitarian aid where it is greatly needed. Can the Secretary of State assure the House that none of her officials knew of or supported the activities of Sandline International in breaking the Government's embargo on Sierra Leone?

Clare Short: I can give the hon. Lady that absolute assurance. Beyond that, as she knows, an inquiry is taking place into the matter. The proper, democratically elected Government have been restored. The coup in Sierra Leone was vicious and brutal; a set of people went around chopping off the arms and legs of children. It is good for humanity that that is over. The paradox of the return is that it was led by the Nigerians, which means that an undemocratic Government helped to restore a democratic one. That is the biggest irony. The details of the Sandline operations will be resolved by the current inquiry, but my Department has no engagement whatever.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): Now that there is a legitimate regime in Sierra Leone, does my right hon. Friend agree that, rather than waiting for the millennium and the Jubilee 2000 appeal to apply to every poor country, a group of nations, perhaps under EU leadership, could use debt relief in some poor test countries to determine the effectiveness of offering the remission of debts? It would be on the basis that those countries passed the money to the poor and not into some rich, elite pockets.

Clare Short: That is exactly what we are doing. Forty-one countries are on the list of highly indebted

countries, with unsustainable debt affecting their capacity to deliver services to their people. A formula has been agreed by the International Monetary Fund and the World bank. I refer to debt to multinationals, not commercial debt; that is a confusion in some of the debate.

About 20 of those countries will qualify, if we can do better on post-conflict countries, which include Sierra Leone, Rwanda and Liberia, but debt relief is only part of the answer. The problem is poverty. Some countries have poverty without debt: some countries with debt are not interested in the poor. Giving debt relief within the context of supporting Governments who want to eradicate poverty and to provide for human development is what we are doing and will continue to do.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): Does the Secretary of State agree that, in Sierra Leone last year, aid was reduced as part of the political pressure to oust the junta, yet, as in the case of Sudan, arms continued to flow into the country? Does she agree that, although humanitarian aid must never be reduced to the poorest people in the world, because poverty leads to conflict, which leads to poverty, we must also look at the supply of arms to those countries? It is only by the prevention of conflict that we shall ultimately solve the problem of the poor.

Clare Short: I agree with the hon. Lady's second point, but we did not reduce humanitarian aid to Sierra Leone to put pressure on the coup leaders. I personally met my officials and supervised everything we did on that. That allegation has been made by one NGO, and it just is not so; some of my officials have written to it on the matter. There was real trouble getting resources in without feeding the fighters. That is always a serious problem, but, through NGOs and the Red Cross, we put in as much relief as we could get through to people. We also funded a radio station so that people could gain access to the truth. We funded many refugees and prepared the Government to return. We did not cut resources to hurt people.

On the wider question of the feeding of conflict by access to arms, the hon. Lady is right. Oxfam and others have launched an important campaign on small arms. Africa is littered with them. They feed fighting in very poor countries, where having a weapon makes people strong and means that they can get resources that others cannot. Sadly, much of the ammunition is manufactured in Africa, so it is not a question just of imports, but we must do better. Conflict is breaking out in the poorest countries and impoverishing them further.

Drought and Famine

6. **Mr. Barry Jones** (Alyn and Deeside): What extra moneys she has earmarked to combat drought and famine since 1 May; and if she will make a statement. [42502]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Mr. George Foulkes): We have a contingency reserve that is set aside for emergencies and funds can also be allocated from country programme budgets. I assure my hon. Friend that we give the highest priority to ensuring that adequate resources are made available very quickly for humanitarian emergencies. Since 1 May this year, we have pledged £6.23 million for the emergency in the Sudan.

Mr. Jones: I thank my hon. Friend for that information and for his efforts as a Minister. Is it his view that, in the Sudan, there is a shortage of food for people who are hungry, or that the hungry cannot get access to the food that is there? Has he any further advice to the Red Cross as to how it conducts its campaigns for money for people who are hungry and poor?

Mr. Foulkes: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has said, we have already agreed more than £10 million to the Sudan. The problem is not money. Even the Disasters Emergency Committee was divided when it considered whether to have an appeal for the Sudan. My right hon. Friend has done the country and this issue a service by opening up the debate. The media sometimes seem obsessed with disasters. If it bleeds, it leads, in some media. That means that we do not get the positive message over of some of the success of the development work that we and other countries have been doing.

Mr. Shaun Woodward (Witney): Given the Minister's undoubted commitment to the principle of humanitarian aid, will he tell the House whether his Department was consulted about clause 63 of the Finance Bill, and what effects he and his Department believe clause 63 will have on the provision of overseas aid by British charities?

Mr. Foulkes: Departments are consulted regularly about matters that affect them. I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would congratulate the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the arrangements he has made for tax relief for people who are willing to give money to charities, which has been a great boost for them. That is the kind of issue he should be raising, rather than quibbling about that particular clause.

Debt Reduction

7. **Mrs. Sylvia Heal** (Halesowen and Rowley Regis): What action her Department intends to take to assist in the reduction of the debt burden of countries that do not qualify under the terms of the heavily indebted poor countries initiative because of recent conflict. [42503]

10. **Fiona Mactaggart** (Slough): What progress has been made in reducing the indebtedness of countries that do not qualify for the heavily indebted poor countries initiative because they have recently come out of conflict; and if she will make a statement. [42507]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): Following a British initiative, the G8 summit agreed on the need to look at ways in which to provide more and earlier debt relief to help heavily indebted post-conflict countries, such as Rwanda and Liberia. Special arrangements are needed because, by definition, they lack a track record of good economic management, having come out of war and crisis. We are working to implement this and, in the case of Rwanda, the UK has made a substantial pledge to the debt trust fund for Rwanda at the donors meeting which is taking place in Stockholm.

Mrs. Heal: Will my right hon. Friend—who is aware of the particular problems of those countries—do all she can to urge the international community to respond to their exceptional needs as they try to rebuild their

political, economic and social systems? She will know of the many organisations linked with Jubilee 2000, and of the concerns of the British Medical Association about the impact that debt has on the health of those countries.

Clare Short: My hon. Friend is right. In Birmingham, I met lots of people who came—with enormous dignity and good spirits—to call for help with debt relief. Rwanda is coming out of bitterness and pain after surviving genocide, when the world let it down and failed to intervene, and it has a Government who are trying to do the right things. If we do not assist the Government in bringing relief to the country—Rwanda is one of the poorest countries in the world—the chance of it returning to conflict is great. It is in everyone's interests that we make greater progress and are not rigid about the formula, thus excluding post-conflict countries.

Fiona Mactaggart: I was pleased to hear that part of the Secretary of State's response which suggested that we would be able to make a contribution to Rwanda's being able to meet its current debt. Does she accept that many of the countries of the poorer world find it unfair that the international mechanism seems to be a one-way street? The UN did not deliver protection from genocide in Rwanda, yet countries are expected to fit in with incredibly stiff recommendations in terms of meeting debt relief proposals. Will she work to try to make sure that, within debt relief programmes, the future prospects and accountability of a country are taken into account, as well as its history?

Clare Short: I agree with my hon. Friend, as did Kofi Annan and all serious observers, that the international community badly let down Rwanda. We are committed by convention. following the holocaust in Europe, always to intervene to prevent genocide. We failed to do so, and we pulled out UN troops. There was systematic, organised slaughter, and we should never forgive ourselves for that. I do not fully agree that, in all cases, the debt owed to the IMF, to the World bank and for export credits is unfairly imposed. In some cases, bad Governments have been replaced by good Governments, and they need help. Borrowing is not always bad. If it is borrowing for good investment, it is desirable. We need good Governments to get out from the overhang of bad debt so that they can build their economies for the future.

Mr. Gary Streeter (South-West Devon): No one doubts the personal commitment of the Secretary of State to debt redemption. However, she will be aware of the widespread disappointment and anger at the abject failure of the recent G8 summit to take the matter forward. Can she confirm that the Government remain committed to giving a lead in relation to debt redemption, albeit linked to good governance? Will she continue to seek to persuade leaders of other creditor nations to do exactly the same?

Clare Short: The hon. Gentleman must not believe everything he reads in the newspapers—he should have read the communiqué produced at the summit. The truth is that, shortly after forming our Government, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor made a speech calling for speeding up of the implementation of the HIPC initiative, and for three quarters of eligible countries to be untrapped by 2000. Immediately after the general election, in a meeting with the World bank and the IMF, we could not reach agreement on the initiative. We now have the support of all the major countries. Partly because of pressure by those good people demonstrating on the streets of Birmingham, implementation of the initiative is being speeded up. We need now to make more progress in dealing with the debt problems of post-conflict countries, which will be a complex matter. However, for some of the poorest countries, the problem is not debt. We have to act on poverty and on good governance—which includes dealing with debt, but not only with that.

Mr. John Townend (East Yorkshire): Will the right hon. Lady reassure the House that, if the United Kingdom writes off a country's debts, we shall not make further loans out of taxpayers' money to that country? Otherwise, in 10 years' time, we might be faced with the same problem. When help is needed, is it not better to provide it as aid rather than as loans that will not be repaid?

Clare Short: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman knows that the initiative is not only British, but international; that the issue encompasses export credits to many countries, IMF debt and World bank debt; and that the initiative provides relief only to countries that adopt good economic management to improve their economy and benefit poor people in their country. Countries must have a track record of such economic management both before and after they sign on for debt relief. I assure the hon. Gentleman that no country will receive debt relief unless it is being very responsible in its economic management. I give him that complete assurance.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1.[42525] **Mr. Andrew Mackinlay** (Thurrock): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 3 June.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I will have further such meetings later today. I have also sent a message of condolence to the people and Government of Germany about the appalling rail tragedy earlier today.

Mr. Mackinlay: Does the Prime Minister recall that, when we were in opposition, we used to groan at the fawning, obsequious, softball, well-rehearsed and planted questions asked by Conservative Members of the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major)? Will my right hon. Friend distinguish his period in office by discouraging such practices—which diminish Prime Minister's Question Time—during this Parliament? Furthermore, in view of the rather depleted official Opposition, will he encourage rather than discourage—

without fear or favour, and without showing partiality or affection—loyal Labour Back Benchers who wish to seek and provide scrutiny and accountability in this place?

The Prime Minister: I fully respect my hon. Friend's independence of mind, and shall do my very best to ensure that he retains it.

Mr. William Hague (Richmond, Yorks): On behalf of the Opposition, may I say that we wish to associate ourselves entirely with the Prime Minister's remarks on the tragedy in Germany?

In the new and highly welcome atmosphere of reconciliation in Northern Ireland, would it not now be appropriate for the Government to review as a matter of urgency the prison sentences of Guardsmen Fisher and Wright?

The Prime Minister: That review is being conducted. I should not say anything about it, as it is being conducted in a quasi-judicial capacity by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. However, I understand the concern that has been raised by the right hon. Gentleman and many others. I am sure that it is shared on both sides of the House.

Mr. Hague: We all understand that the cases are difficult, and I know that the Prime Minister understands the immense difficulties faced by our armed forces in Northern Ireland and the terrible pressures on soldiers, which can sometimes result in tragic incidents. I hope that he will ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to re-examine the matter, and to bring forward the review of the cases, which are causing growing public concern.

The Prime Minister: First, I give my warmest congratulations on the work that they do to our armed forces in Northern Ireland and to the Royal Ulster Constabulary. In respect of the particular case, there was a court case which concluded on Friday 22 May; before that court case was concluded, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland was not able to conduct her own review. Now that it is out of the way, she will do that, and do so as quickly as possible.

Q2.[42526] **Mr. John Hutton** (Barrow and Furness): Can my right hon. Friend confirm that, in the past 12 months, the Government have given the go-ahead for the construction of 30 new hospitals—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Hutton: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Those hospitals amount to the biggest programme of modernisation and renewal in the history of the national health service. Will my right hon. Friend also confirm that the construction of those new hospitals is not only an excellent way to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the national health service, but provides further evidence that Labour Governments are always good news—*[Interruption.]*—for the national health service?

The Prime Minister: I fully concur with that. It is no surprise that Conservative Members do not like it, because they promised those new hospitals, but never built a single one. It is this Government who are building 30 new hospitals, six of them already under way, and spending a further £2 billion in the health service.

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): Does the Prime Minister agree that, one, the efforts of the international community so far to persuade President Milosevic to exercise some restraint in Kosovo have had no visible effect; two, that the situation in the province is now speedily deteriorating; and, three, that in these matters it is far, far better to take strong, preventive action early than to wait until one is left with doing too little, too late?

The Prime Minister: I agree with that. The first meeting of the working group, which was convened in part by Britain, took place a few weeks ago; and, subsequent to that, a series of further meetings have taken place. In addition, Mr. Rugova is now in Washington and has met President Clinton; there will be an attempt to have further dialogue between him and Mr. Milosevic. I want to make it very clear that we are watching the situation in Kosovo extremely carefully. We believe that we cannot afford to have an extension of violence and disorder there—*[Interruption.]* Before, in a similar situation nearby, the international community acted with great firmness, and we must make sure that we do the same again. In answer to the question from the Opposition Benches, "Why bother?" we bother because disorder in that part of the world would have a huge impact on all of us, including this country.

Mr. Ashdown: The Prime Minister draws a parallel with Bosnia and is right to do so, but may I remind him that it was during the previous United Kingdom presidency in 1992 that we missed the decisive opportunity to act early in Bosnia? As the current President of the EU, will he consider these three actions: one, to reinforce the United Nations troops on the Macedonian border; two, to deploy a screening force from NATO on the Albanian border; and, three, to make it absolutely clear to President Milosevic that if he should act in gross contravention of international human rights and with the effect of destabilising the nations in the area, the international community will regard that as an act in violation of international law?

The Prime Minister: In respect of the specific action that we will take, I have already said, and will repeat, that we do not believe that we could afford to have disorder spreading in that part of the world. I hope that that is a sufficiently clear message to Mr. Milosevic.

In respect of the measures for which the right hon. Gentleman asked, he may like to know that Ministers have already commissioned military advice on support for United Nations and Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe monitoring activity, as well as NATO preventive deployments in that region; we are looking very carefully at what we need to do. There are certain discussions currently going on between Mr. Milosevic and Mr. Rugova, and we are watching very carefully. Again, I make it clear that we do not believe that it could be in the interests of our country or of the world community to allow a similar situation to develop there as developed in Bosnia.

Q3.[42527] **Mr. Lindsay Hoyle** (Chorley): Does the Prime Minister agree with me that the profits announced

by Camelot, which amount to more than £1.5 million a week, are excessive, and that we ought to ensure that the next company chosen does not profit out of good causes? At the end of the day, the people who have lost by more than £1.5 million a week are the beneficiaries throughout the regions. Would not a fairer spread of lottery money throughout the regions be better?

The Prime Minister: We are committed to seeking an efficient, not-for-profit operator, and we want to maximise the money available for good causes. The National Lottery Bill will create the new opportunities fund, which will fund school clubs, information technology training for teachers and librarians, and healthy living centres, as well as the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts. I hope that, as a result of the Bill, we will be able to get more money for good causes that would otherwise not be funded from public spending. As I say, we are committed to seeking an efficient, not-for-profit operator.

Q4.[42528] **Mr. James Gray** (North Wiltshire): The number of people on hospital waiting lists in Wiltshire has increased by 1,911 since Labour came to power this time last year. Does the Prime Minister therefore agree that now is a particularly unfortunate time for ward closures, such as that planned for the Cameron ward for the mentally ill in Chippenham and other similar wards in Trowbridge and Warminster? Will he join me in supporting the group that is opposing those ward closures? If he will not, will he accept that those closures are symptomatic of new Labour's approach to the health service?

The Prime Minister: No, I do not accept that at all. We are spending some £2 billion more than the previous Government, whom the hon. Gentleman supported, spent on the national health service. What is more, the waiting list pledge that we made, we will meet—as we said that we would. When we meet it, it will be the first time in years that waiting lists have come down. They will come down under a Labour Government, having risen year on year on year under the Tories.

Mr. Roger Stott (Wigan): It is normal to preface a question, "Is my right hon. Friend aware". May I turn that round to say that my right hon. Friend is probably not aware that I spent the week leading up to the referendum in Northern Ireland in Derry, knocking on doors and persuading people to vote yes to the agreement? That agreement has been solidified by the votes of the people in both the north and the south of Ireland. As this is the first Prime Minister's Question Time since the result of the referendum, may I congratulate my right hon. Friend for putting in so much work to achieve that decision?

The Prime Minister: I should like to thank all the political leaders who did a lot to secure a yes vote in that referendum. That vote was a vote for the future in Northern Ireland; it was a vote to give the children of Northern Ireland a better future than that of their parents. I hope very much that the efforts of everyone will go to make the agreement work. We now have a set of structures and principles that can give Northern Ireland the future it needs. I hope that everyone there accepts the democratic will of the majority of people in Northern Ireland and makes this work for the future.

Q5.[42530] **Mr. Damian Green** (Ashford): The Prime Minister will know that, last week, the Socialist group in the European Parliament tabled a motion congratulating him on his conduct of the British presidency. He will also be aware that, quite rightly, the motion was heavily defeated. Who does he blame for the failure of the British presidency—the Foreign Secretary or himself?

The Prime Minister: I do not accept the premise of the hon. Member's question. The one issue that I would have thought it very unwise—even for a new member of the Opposition Front-Bench team—to raise is the subject of Europe, when the Conservative party is split from head to toe on the issue, there has been an interesting reshuffle that seems to me to have something of the right about it, and, even today, we are reading that Norman Lamont and the leader of his group in the European Parliament are falling out with one another.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): The Prime Minister will be aware that, last week, the people of Hong Kong held their first election since the handover to China. Despite the many deficiencies of the electoral system, two of the positive things about the election were the huge turnout—much bigger than expected—and the fact that the pro-democracy candidates, such as Martin Lee and Emily Lau, had an enormous electoral mandate. Will my right hon. Friend take the opportunity to assure the ordinary people of Hong Kong of the continuing concern of the House of Commons, and of the fact that we will never allow trade or other strategic considerations to divert us from giving the maximum support and encouragement for the people of Hong Kong to move forward to full universal suffrage?

The Prime Minister: Obviously, I strongly support the agreement concluded in respect of the future of Hong Kong, and I am also delighted at the strong trade and investment links between this country and Hong Kong. One of the interesting things about the period since the handover is the fact that, despite some people's expectations, Hong Kong has been highly successful in very difficult economic circumstances, and its political circumstances have done nothing but improve.

Mr. William Hague (Richmond, Yorks): On the subject of reshuffles, as the Prime Minister has a Secretary of State for Health who does not know how many hospitals he is closing, and a Foreign Secretary who does not know how many coups he is supporting, may I suggest to him that a reshuffle in the Government might be in order?

We have heard today more revelations about Labour councils in Scotland, and about their spectacular mismanagement and gross incompetence in particular. Is the Prime Minister prepared to take some responsibility for the scandalous behaviour of so many of his party's elected representatives?

The Prime Minister: When the particular irregularities were brought to light, we acted. That is the difference.

We are still waiting for action from the Conservative party over Westminster council. Perhaps when the right hon. Gentleman gets to his feet he will tell us what action he intends to take. We have taken action.

Mr. Hague *rose—*

Hon. Members: Answer.

Mr. Hague: I will answer. Westminster was in 1988—

Hon. Members: Answer.

Madam Speaker: Order. The House must come to order.

Mr. Hague *rose—[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Mr. McNulty, just be careful.

Mr. Hague: Westminster was in 1988, when the Prime Minister was wearing a CND badge; we are talking about 1998, for which he is responsible. He says that the Government act, but the record of the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Scottish Labour party is to have an inquiry and do nothing about it. They suspended the Monklands councillors, and they let them back in; they had an inquiry into East Ayrshire, and now they will not reveal the results; they have had inquiries into Paisley that never end and never report.

Is the Prime Minister aware that police chiefs have now said that they have had to send police officers into Renfrewshire council so often that, if it had been a pub, they would have closed it down? That is the position now; is it not time that we had an independent inquiry into the crisis in local government in Scotland so that we can see what the Prime Minister's party is doing to local government in Scotland?

The Prime Minister: First, every time that there has been an inquiry we have abided by the result. Secondly, the inquiry into the matter that the right hon. Gentleman is raising is independent. Thirdly, people in Westminster still live with the consequences of what Westminster council did.

Mr. Hague: The Prime Minister has still not given us an independent public inquiry into what is happening in Scotland. It is all talk and no action, as it always is with the Government now—talk about national health service waiting lists while waiting lists go up, talk about class sizes while class sizes go up, and talk about cleaning up local government in Scotland while the dirt grows every day. It is talk, talk, talk, and nothing to show for it. When will the Prime Minister stop talking about all those problems and start acting on them?

The Prime Minister: We have acted. We have acted by appointing the very independent people that the right hon. Gentleman has called for—and we did so before he called for them. That stands in the sharpest contrast to the way in which he has behaved in relation to Conservative councils. As for the national health service and class sizes, waiting lists rose year on year under the Conservatives, and class sizes went up for 10 years. We are going to get them down. If the right hon. Gentleman wants to make it a test at the next election whether we have met those pledges on NHS waiting lists and class sizes, let him do so—when he does, we will pass those tests and no one will ever believe that the Tories will do a good job on schools and hospitals.

Mr. David Watts (St. Helens, North): Given that crime has doubled since the election of the last Government, will my right hon. Friend say what action this Government will take to cut crime in communities such as St. Helens?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right—under the Tory Government, not only did class sizes and waiting lists increase, but crime doubled. We are taking action in the Crime and Disorder Bill by introducing new parental supervision orders and measures on youth justice, and we are ensuring speedier justice in the young offenders courts. As a result of action that this Government are taking, we are already, in those areas where we have put in place the new proposals, halving the time it takes to get young offenders to court. That is the action that we promised; that is the action that we are delivering.

Q7.[42532] **Mrs. Cheryl Gillan** (Chesham and Amersham): When the Prime Minister is next chauffeur-driven through Chesham and Amersham to visit his second home—or is it his third?—at Chequers, will he stop to tell those 4,500 of my constituents, his neighbours, who are currently on the South Buckinghamshire waiting list for operations when they will finally have their operations—this year, next year, some time or never?

The Prime Minister: I was telling the House a moment ago how much extra money we have put in, so let me tell the hon. Lady that, as a result of the extra money this year—£1.7 billion—we will see this year, for the first time in years, waiting lists coming back down. We were never going to turn round 20 years of Tory government on the NHS in one year, but turn it round we will. When we do, it will be because we have a Labour government who believe in the NHS, not a Tory Government who spent 20 years undermining it.

Mr. Anthony D. Wright (Great Yarmouth): Is the Prime Minister aware that, after 18 long Tory years of complete mismanagement of the economy, the average household income in Great Yarmouth is only 50 per cent. of that in the rest of East Anglia? I am sure that my constituents warmly welcome the Government's initiative in implementing a minimum wage, but will he assure us that, before he brings the Low Pay Commission's report back to the House, he will also accept reports from other organisations on 16 to 18-year-olds and 18 to 21-year-olds?

The Prime Minister: We will listen to all the representations that we have had. It is important that we introduce a national minimum wage not only for reasons of justice, but because it is not right that, at the moment, we are spending £3 billion to subsidise low pay. However, we have always said, as we did in our manifesto, that we would introduce it sensibly—we must introduce it in a manner that is consistent with the overall and prudent running of the economy. We will do that to make sure that we meet our requirements for both justice and enterprise.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Does the Prime Minister recall telling the House six weeks ago that

enriched uranium had to come from Georgia to Dounreay because the Georgians could not guarantee its safety? In the intervening period, the head of security at Dounreay has resigned because he could not guarantee the plant's integrity; there has been a serious nuclear incident, which has shut down the processing unit—the reprocessing was already shut; there could be criminal prosecutions; emissions have been underestimated by a factor of 10; and 170 kg of enriched uranium, which is enough to build 10 nuclear devices, have been lost or mislaid or cannot be accounted for. Will the Prime Minister tell the House where the lost enriched uranium from Dounreay is? Will he guarantee that no more nuclear materials will be taken into the plant in its current condition?

The Prime Minister: I really think that the Scottish National party has behaved with utter irresponsibility right from the start. First, the hon. Gentleman has just alleged that a nuclear accident caused the review by the Health and Safety Executive. It was not; it was the loss of electrical supplies to the fuel cycle area.

The allegations about the supposedly missing highly enriched uranium were based on a misinterpretation of 30-year-old records which are far from complete by any modern standards. The Atomic Energy Authority has explained already, in line with the results of its 1963 and 1973 investigations, that the discrepancies in the amounts of material arose because of accounting and measurement uncertainties. There is absolutely no evidence to back up the suggestion that the hon. Gentleman keeps making, for wholly irresponsible reasons, that any material has been stolen or has fallen into the hands of terrorists or foreign Governments.

I can confirm that no such material has ever been sent from Dounreay for use for United Kingdom weapons purposes, and I suggest that the hon. Gentleman reads carefully what has already been said by the chief executive and others on the issue. For the hon. Gentleman to alarm the public in this way is irresponsible in the extreme, but entirely typical of him.

Q10.[42535] **Dan Norris** (Wansdyke): Following the tragic death and injury of 33 babies at Bristol Royal infirmary, the General Medical Council's inquiry heard that even my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health could not intervene in the internal running of the trust. What steps does my right hon. Friend intend to take to ensure that the medical profession is accountable and controlled so that the tragedy in Bristol can never happen again? Will he join me in praising Dr. Stephen Bolsin, the anaesthetist who tried to speak out at the time of the tragedy and sadly was unsuccessful?

The Prime Minister: I can say to my hon. Friend that the appalling tragedy at Bristol must never be repeated. We have given a commitment to the parents that there will be an inquiry into what went wrong. We believe that procedures have changed already. However, as we announced in our recent White Paper, we are committed to an independent commission for health improvement. Its job will be to ensure that quality controls are in place in every hospital in the country.

Every national health service trust will be visited every three to four years. The commission will have special powers to investigate whether there are particular problems in any hospital. Its findings will be made public and acted on, and patients themselves will have a voice on the commission. We believe that the combination of existing procedures—which have improved since these deplorable incidents—and the improvements that we shall put in will provide the best possible chance of avoiding any such tragedy happening again.

Mr. Robert McCartney (North Down): I assure the Prime Minister that this is not a planted question. He will be aware from his security advisers that Mr. Gerry Adams and Mr. Martin McGuinness are believed to be members of the seven-man IRA Army Council. Will the Prime Minister give an unequivocal assurance to the law-abiding people of Northern Ireland that the representatives of terrorist groups that still retain their weaponry will not be placed in government over them until such groups agree to decommission and to commence decommissioning? Will he give a further assurance that, before the assembly elections, his Government will publish the draft legislation giving substance to the pledges that he made to the people of Northern Ireland during the referendum campaign?

The Prime Minister: Certainly we will give effect to the pledges that have been made prior to the assembly elections. That is absolutely right. As I have made clear throughout and do so again now, the provisions in relation to decommissioning and what I said about it before the referendum campaign stand and must properly be put in the legislation. I have also always made it clear that we regard Sinn Fein and the IRA as inextricably linked. Indeed, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland said that in the House on Monday. I hope that the hon. and learned Gentleman, having been on the wrong side of the referendum campaign—perfectly honourably, as he is entitled to be—accepts the verdict of the overwhelming majority and, if he is elected to the assembly, goes in with the right spirit of mind to make it work for the people of Northern Ireland.

Mr. David Hanson (Delyn): When my right hon. Friend attends the Cardiff summit in a couple of weeks, will he take the opportunity to ask his fellow leaders to check, when they return home, whether they have hereditary peers or hereditary members in their national assemblies? I think that he will find that they do not.

Will my right hon. Friend confirm that we want a modern democracy in Europe and a modern democracy at home? In abolishing hereditary peers, my right hon. Friend may well wipe out a large number of the Conservative's shadow Cabinet in the House of Lords.

The Prime Minister: It is an interesting reshuffle that puts 14 hereditary peers on the Conservative Front Bench.

We are committed to the reform of the hereditary element of the House of Lords, for two reasons. First, it cannot possibly be right that people sit as legislators in the Houses of Parliament on the basis that their birth makes them hereditary peers. Secondly, it is an absolute democratic scandal that hereditary Conservative peers outnumber the peers of the elected Government of the day by three to one. In other words, there is an in-built Tory majority in the House of Lords in perpetuity. That may be justified by the Conservative party because it believes in that sort of thing—but it is our job, as a new Labour Government, to remove that and make our Houses of Parliament democratic.

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

SIXTH SERIES—VOLUME 313

HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SECOND PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FORTY-SEVENTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 1997–98

COMPRISING PERIOD
1 June—11 June 1998

£70

HER MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT

MEMBERS OF THE CABINET

(Formed by the Rt. Hon. Tony Blair, MP, May 1997)

Prime Minister, First Lord of the Treasury and Minister for the Civil Service—The Rt. Hon. Tony Blair, MP
Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions—The Rt. Hon. John Prescott, MP
Chancellor of the Exchequer—The Rt. Hon. Gordon Brown, MP
Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs—The Rt. Hon. Robin Cook, MP
Lord Chancellor—The Rt. Hon. The Lord Irvine of Lairg
Secretary of State for the Home Department—The Rt. Hon. Jack Straw, MP
Secretary of State for Education and Employment—The Rt. Hon. David Blunkett, MP
President of the Board of Trade (Secretary of State for Trade and Industry)—The Rt. Hon. Margaret Beckett, MP
Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food—The Rt. Hon. Dr. John Cunningham, MP
Secretary of State for Scotland—The Rt. Hon. Donald Dewar, MP
Secretary of State for Defence—The Rt. Hon. George Robertson, MP
Secretary of State for Health—The Rt. Hon. Frank Dobson, MP
President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons—The Rt. Hon. Ann Taylor, MP
Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport—The Rt. Hon. Chris Smith, MP
Secretary of State for Social Security—The Rt. Hon. Harriet Harman, MP
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland—The Rt. Hon. Marjorie Mowlam, MP
Secretary of State for Wales—The Rt. Hon. Ron Davies, MP
Secretary of State for International Development—The Rt. Hon. Clare Short, MP
Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Lords—The Rt. Hon. The Lord Richard, QC
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster—The Rt. Hon. Dr. David Clark, MP
Minister of Transport—The Rt. Hon. Gavin Strang, MP
Chief Secretary to the Treasury—The Rt. Hon. Alistair Darling, MP

DEPARTMENTS OF STATE AND MINISTERS

Agriculture, Fisheries and Food—
Minister—The Rt. Hon. Dr. John Cunningham, MP
Minister of State—Jeff Rooker, Esq, MP
Parliamentary Secretaries—
Elliot Morley, Esq, MP
The Lord Donoughue

Cabinet Office—
Minister Without Portfolio—Peter Mandelson, Esq, MP

Culture, Media and Sport—
Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport—The Rt. Hon. Chris Smith, MP
Minister of State—
Minister for Film and Tourism—The Rt. Hon. Tom Clarke, CBE, MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretaries of State—
Mark Fisher, Esq, MP (Minister for Arts)
Tony Banks, Esq, MP (Minister for Sport)

Defence—
Secretary of State—The Rt. Hon. George Robertson, MP
Ministers of State—
Minister for Defence Procurement—The Rt. Hon. The Lord Gilbert
Minister for the Armed Forces—Dr. John Reid, MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State—John Spellar, Esq, MP

Education and Employment—
Secretary of State—The Rt. Hon. David Blunkett, MP
Ministers of State—
Minister for Employment, Welfare to Work and Equal Opportunities—The Rt. Hon. Andrew Smith, Esq, MP
Minister for School Standards—Stephen Byers, Esq, MP
The Baroness Blackstone
Parliamentary Under-Secretaries of State—
Ms Estelle Morris, MP
Dr. Kim Howells, MP
Alan Howarth, Esq, CBE, MP

Environment, Transport and the Regions—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt. Hon. John Prescott, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE—

Minister of Transport—The Rt. Hon. Gavin Strang, MP

Minister for the Environment—The Rt. Hon. Michael Meacher, MP

Minister for Local Government and Housing—Ms Hilary Armstrong, MP

Minister for the Regions, Regeneration and Planning—Richard Caborn, Esq, MP

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

Nick Raynsford, Esq, MP (Minister for London and Construction)

Ms Glenda Jackson, MP (Minister for Transport in London)

The Baroness Hayman (Minister for Roads)

Ms Angela Eagle, MP

Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt. Hon. Robin Cook, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE—

Derek Fatchett, Esq, MP

Tony Lloyd, Esq, MP

Doug Henderson, Esq, MP

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE—The Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean

Health—

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR HEALTH—The Rt. Hon. Frank Dobson, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE—

Alan Milburn, Esq, MP

Minister for Public Health—Ms Tessa Jowell, MP

The Baroness Jay of Paddington

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE—Paul Boateng, Esq, MP

Home Office—

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE HOME DEPARTMENT—The Rt. Hon. Jack Straw, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE—

Alun Michael, Esq, MP

Ms Joyce Quin, MP

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

George Howarth, Esq, MP

Mike O'Brien, Esq, MP

The Lord Williams of Mostyn

International Development—

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT—The Rt. Hon. Clare Short, MP

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE—George Foulkes, Esq, MP

Law Officers' Department—

ATTORNEY-GENERAL—The Rt. Hon. John Morris, QC, MP

SOLICITOR-GENERAL—The Lord Falconer of Thoroton, QC

Lord Advocate's Department—

LORD ADVOCATE—The Rt. Hon. The Lord Hardie, QC

SOLICITOR-GENERAL FOR SCOTLAND—Colin Boyd, Esq, QC

Lord Chancellor's Department—

LORD CHANCELLOR—The Rt. Hon. The Lord Irvine of Lairg

PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY—Geoffrey Hoon, Esq, MP

Northern Ireland Office—

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND—The Rt. Hon. Marjorie Mowlam, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE—

Paul Murphy, Esq, MP

Adam Ingram, Esq, MP

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

The Lord Dubs

Tony Worthington, Esq, MP

Paymaster General's Office—

PAYMASTER GENERAL—Geoffrey Robinson, Esq, MP

Privy Council Office—

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL AND LEADER OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS—The Rt. Hon. Ann Taylor, MP

LORD PRIVY SEAL AND LEADER OF THE HOUSE OF LORDS—The Rt. Hon. The Lord Richard, QC

Public Service, Office of—

CHANCELLOR OF THE DUCHY OF LANCASTER—The Rt. Hon. Dr. David Clark, MP

PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY—Peter Kilfoyle, Esq, MP

Scottish Office—

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR SCOTLAND—The Rt. Hon. Donald Dewar, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE—

Minister for Home Affairs and Devolution—Henry McLeish, Esq, MP

Minister for Education and Industry—Brian Wilson, Esq, MP

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

The Lord Sewel, CBE

Sam Galbraith, Esq, MP

Calum Macdonald, Esq, MP

Social Security—

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR SOCIAL SECURITY AND MINISTER FOR WOMEN—The Rt. Hon. Harriet Harman, MP

MINISTER OF STATE—

Minister for Welfare Reform—The Rt. Hon. Frank Field, MP

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

John Denham, Esq, MP

Keith Bradley, Esq, MP

The Baroness Hollis of Heigham

Ms Joan Ruddock, MP

Trade and Industry—

PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD OF TRADE (SECRETARY OF STATE FOR TRADE AND INDUSTRY)—The Rt. Hon. Margaret Beckett, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE—

Minister for Trade—The Lord Clinton-Davis

Minister for Trade and Competitiveness in Europe—The Lord Simon of Highbury, CBE

Ian McCartney, Esq, MP

Minister for Science, Energy and Industry—John Battle, Esq, MP

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

Nigel Griffiths, Esq, MP (Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs)

Mrs. Barbara Roche, MP (Minister for Small Firms, Trade and Industry)

Treasury—

PRIME MINISTER, FIRST LORD OF THE TREASURY AND MINISTER FOR THE CIVIL SERVICE—The Rt. Hon. Tony Blair, MP

CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER—The Rt. Hon. Gordon Brown, MP

CHIEF SECRETARY—The Rt. Hon. Alistair Darling, MP

PAYMASTER GENERAL—Geoffrey Robinson, Esq, MP

FINANCIAL SECRETARY—Ms Dawn Primarolo, MP

ECONOMIC SECRETARY—Mrs. Helen Liddell, MP

MINISTER FOR TRADE AND COMPETITIVENESS IN EUROPE—The Lord Simon of Highbury, CBE

PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY—The Rt. Hon. Nicholas Brown, MP

LORDS COMMISSIONERS—

Robert Ainsworth, Esq, MP

Graham Allen, Esq, MP

Jim Dowd, Esq, MP

John McFall, Esq, MP

Jon Owen Jones, Esq, MP

ASSISTANT WHIPS—

Clive Betts, Esq, MP

David Clelland, Esq, MP

Kevin Hughes, Esq, MP

David Jamieson, Esq, MP

Jane Kennedy, MP

Greg Pope, Esq, MP

Ms Bridget Prentice, MP

Welsh Office—

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR WALES—The Rt. Hon. Ron Davies, MP

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

Peter Hain, Esq, MP

Win Griffiths, Esq, MP

Her Majesty's Household—

LORD CHAMBERLAIN—The Rt. Hon. The Lord Camoys, GCVO

LORD STEWARD—The Viscount Ridley, KG, GCVO, TD

MASTER OF THE HORSE—The Lord Somerleyton, KCVO

TREASURER—George Mudie, Esq, MP

COMPTROLLER—Thomas McAvoy, Esq, MP

VICE-CHAMBERLAIN—Janet Anderson, MP

CAPTAIN OF THE HONOURABLE CORPS OF GENTLEMEN-AT-ARMS—The Lord Carter

CAPTAIN OF THE QUEEN'S BODYGUARD OF THE YEOMAN OF THE GUARD—The Lord McIntosh of Haringey

LORDS IN WAITING—The Lord Haskel, The Lord Whitty, The Lord Hoyle

BARONESSES IN WAITING—The Baroness Farrington of Ribbleton, The Baroness Ramsay of Cartvale

---

SECOND CHURCH ESTATES COMMISSIONER, REPRESENTING CHURCH COMMISSIONERS—Stuart Bell, Esq, MP

HOUSE OF COMMONS

PRINCIPAL OFFICERS

THE SPEAKER—The Rt. Hon. Betty Boothroyd, MP

CHAIRMAN OF WAYS AND MEANS—Sir Alan Haselhurst, MP

FIRST DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF WAYS AND MEANS—Michael J. Martin, Esq, MP

SECOND DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF WAYS AND MEANS—Michael Lord, Esq, MP

CHAIRMEN'S PANEL—

Mrs. Irene Adams, MP, Donald Anderson, Esq, MP, Peter Atkinson, Esq, MP, Joe Benton, Esq, MP, John Butterfill, Esq, MP, Dr. Michael Clark, MP, Frank Cook, Esq, MP, Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, MP, Roger Gale, Esq, MP, Jimmy Hood, Esq, MP, Barry Jones, Esq, MP, John McWilliam, Esq, MP, John Maxton, Esq, MP, Mrs. Ray Michie, MP, Edward O'Hara, Esq, MP, Mrs. Marion Roe, MP, George Stevenson, Esq, MP, Bowen Wells, Esq, MP, Andrew Welsh, Esq, MP, The Rt. Hon. Miss Ann Widdecombe, MP, Mrs. Ann Winterton, MP, Nicholas Winterton, Esq, MP

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION—

The Rt. Hon. The Speaker (Chairman), Archy Kirkwood, Esq, MP, The Rt. Hon. Sir Peter Lloyd, MP, Dr. Lewis Moonie, Esq, MP, The Rt. Hon. Gillian Shephard, MP, The Rt. Hon. Ann Taylor, MP

SECRETARY OF THE COMMISSION—M. R. Jack, PhD

BOARD OF MANAGEMENT—

W. R. McKay, CB, (Chairman) (Clerk of the House of Commons), P. N. W. Jennings (Serjeant at Arms), Miss J. B. Tanfield (Librarian), A. J. Walker (Director of Finance and Administration), I. D. Church (Editor of the Official Report), Mrs. S. J. Harrison (Director of Catering Services)

SECRETARY OF THE BOARD OF MANAGEMENT—B. A. Wilson (Head of the Establishments Office)

SPEAKER'S SECRETARY—N. Bevan, CB

SPEAKER'S COUNSEL—J. S. Mason, CB, J. E. G. Vaux

SPEAKER'S CHAPLAIN—Rev. Canon D. C. Gray, TD, PhD

PARLIAMENTARY COMMISSIONER FOR STANDARDS—Sir Gordon Downey, KCB

1 June 1998

THE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SECOND PARLIAMENT OF THE
UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 7 MAY 1997]

FORTY-SEVENTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 313**

TWENTIETH VOLUME OF SESSION 1997–98

House of Commons

Monday 1 June 1998

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Regional Theatre

1. **Mr. Bill Rammell** (Harlow): If he will make a statement on his plans to support regional theatre. [41984]

The Minister for Arts (Mr. Mark Fisher): The network of British regional theatres and touring companies is one of this country's great artistic achievements. We are determined to strengthen and develop that network.

Mr. Rammell: Under the system of theatre funding by the regional arts council, two theatres in my region are funded at the expense and to the exclusion of all the others, including the successful Playhouse in my constituency. Does my hon. Friend agree that such an unfair system of funding should cause concern? Does he further agree that regional arts councils should be charged with distributing their funds more equitably?

Mr. Fisher: My hon. Friend and the new management of the Harlow Playhouse have been having discussions with the chief executive of the Eastern arts board. I wish them well in those discussions. My hon. Friend is right to say that the record of the Arts Council and regional arts boards in backing new companies and developments is less than inspiring—their priority has tended to be the defence and preservation of existing companies. I am confident that the new Arts Council and its chairman, Mr. Gerry Robinson, will want to take an early and positive look at that.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross): The new structure of the Arts Council has led to the resignation of the entire theatre panel. How will the perceived needs of theatre in the regions be communicated to the Arts Council?

Mr. Fisher: The new chairman of the Arts Council and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State have made it clear, in letters to the papers and in press statements, that they recognise that one of the Arts Council's great strengths lies in its professional, independent, detailed advice from specialist panels. That will continue, and my right hon. Friend's letters and statements have made it clear that that advice is valued and that the council will have access to it.

Mr. Richard Spring (West Suffolk): What does the Minister think about the resignation of the entire drama panel of the Arts Council and the unprecedented refusal by 58 theatre directors to fill the gap—coming on top of the closure of regional theatres such as the one in Farnham, the Liverpool Playhouse and Greenwich theatre? Does he agree that that is a shocking indictment of the Government's policies, as opposed to the false impression of support that was conjured up in the Secretary of State's book?

Mr. Fisher: No, I do not. All those on the advisory group were eminent people who gave good advice, but, as I said to the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan), professional, expert advice of that quality is at the heart

of all the Arts Council's decisions. I assure Opposition Members that that specialist advice, not just in drama but in other art forms, will continue.

Art Market

2. **Mr. Andrew Robathan** (Blaby): If he will make a statement on the future of the major art houses in the United Kingdom. [41986]

The Minister for Arts (Mr. Mark Fisher): The Government recognise the great contribution that the United Kingdom art market makes to the national economy. It employs some 40,000 people and has a turnover of £2.2 billion a year. The Government are determined to play their part in ensuring that the market continues to be competitive and to thrive.

Mr. Robathan: I whole-heartedly support the Minister's response. Will he undertake to defend the art market against the threat of harmonisation of VAT across the European Union? He will know that the introduction of 2.5 per cent. VAT on the sale of works of art has already seriously affected the art market in London and in the rest of Britain. If VAT is harmonised, the art market may be driven not just from Britain but from the European Union, and may go to the United States and Switzerland. Will he take action to prevent that?

Mr. Fisher: VAT is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that it has caused problems for our art market, as has the possible threat of harmonising droit de suite. We have undoubtedly played a major part in trying to get a more rational debate on droit de suite in Europe. Other countries do not have such legislation and support us in being sceptical and critical of droit de suite. We continue vigorously to argue that case in the European Union.

Elgin Marbles

3. **Mr. Gordon Prentice** (Pendle): Under what circumstances the Elgin marbles might be returned to Athens to mark the millennium. [41988]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr. Chris Smith): The Government have no plans to return the Parthenon sculptures to Athens.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Prentice: I suspect that I may not have the House with me on this matter, Madam Speaker.

Thirteen years ago, the then leader of the Labour party, Neil Kinnock, said that the Parthenon without the marbles was like a smile missing a tooth, and pledged to return the frieze to Greece. If the case was so compelling 13 years ago, why is it not equally compelling now?

Mr. Smith: Although I sympathise with my hon. Friend's view, we have had time over the intervening 13 years to reflect on the matter, and it is clear that the Parthenon sculptures were legally and properly acquired. They have been kept in very good condition—very great care has been taken of them ever since—and they are seen, for free, by 6 million people a year from all over the world. We believe that the British museum is the best place to keep them.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Without pursuing the matter of Commissioner Kinnock's marbles, which might be indiscreet at this stage, may I welcome what the Secretary of State has said? The right hon. Gentleman will recognise that it would lead to absolute chaos if we started down the path of relocating works of art, wherever they are in the world. The best, safest and most proper position is the one that he is adopting.

Mr. Smith: It is rare for me to agree whole-heartedly with every word that the right hon. Gentleman says, but on this occasion I do, because he is right: if we were to open this question, a host of other questions about the location of works of art throughout the world would arise. I do not believe that anyone wants such questions to be reopened.

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): Is my right hon. Friend aware that 13 years ago I took this matter up with Mr. Neil Kinnock and that, with me at any rate, he did not seek to defend the position? Is he further aware that it would be one thing if the marbles could be placed on the Acropolis itself, but that it would be nonsense to take them from one museum and put them in another museum that is not as well looked after as ours?

Mr. Smith: My right hon. Friend is right to point out that the proposal is not that the marbles should be replaced on the Acropolis but that they should be housed on the Acropolis hill in a museum specially built for the purpose whose architecture has been widely criticised. The marbles were legally acquired; they have been where they are for a long period; and they are seen by many millions of people, not just from Britain but from around the world. We do not believe that the case for their return is in any way compelling.

Media Ownership

4. **Miss Julie Kirkbride** (Bromsgrove): If he will make a statement on the regulations governing media ownership. [41989]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr. Chris Smith): New rules on media ownership were established in the Broadcasting Act 1996. The Government have no plans to change them.

Miss Kirkbride: I thank the Minister for that response, but I should like to ask him about the proposals for the privatisation of Channel 4. We understand that the Chancellor of the Exchequer is trying to squeeze any amount of money out of any pocket that he can find, and I am sure that £1 billion-worth of proceeds from the privatisation of Channel 4 would make him very popular among his Treasury colleagues. What does the Secretary of State think of that proposed privatisation, especially

given that, when it was proposed by the Conservative Administration, it was widely scorned by Labour Members?

Mr. Smith: The hon. Lady will probably know that, during the election campaign, we made it clear that we had no plans to privatise Channel 4. That remains the case.

Mr. Derek Wyatt (Sittingbourne and Sheppey): What conversations on European media ownership has the Secretary of State had during our presidency of the European Union? Does he agree that the solution to the problem of United Kingdom media ownership is to be found in a broader European regulation?

Mr. Smith: Although we accept, and are seeking to implement, the television without frontiers directive, we do not believe that it is necessary to extend to Europe the purview of the entirety of media regulation. We believe that Europe has a role to play, and that is properly reflected in the television without frontiers directive, but we do not want to go further than that at this stage.

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford): The Secretary of State should perhaps consider straight away a detailed piece of media regulation: the switch-off of analogue television services. Is he aware that his decision not to take a decision for two or three years will put in danger the development of digital television in this country, and will possibly damage the interests of an industry that is culturally and economically vital to our future?

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman should have been present at the meeting of the digital television group to which I spoke last week. I said that we intended to make a decision on the switch-off of analogue as soon as possible. We are consulting on this matter: we issued a consultation paper a couple of months ago and the deadline for replies is within the next couple of months. We shall consider carefully the results of the consultation process, and shall then come to a view.

Performing Arts (Kettering)

5. **Mr. Phil Sawford** (Kettering): What plans he has to support the performing arts in Kettering. [41990]

The Minister for Arts (Mr. Mark Fisher): Kettering has benefited from several national lottery awards totalling £1.7 million, including a £1.2 million award for a new performing arts centre at the Latimer school in Kettering.

Mr. Sawford: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. We welcome the funding for the arts centre at Latimer school in my constituency, which will provide a much-needed facility for young people at the school and for the wider community. How will the latest lottery reforms help budding young artists and performers in my constituency and in the rest of the country?

Mr. Francis Maude (Horsham): They will make things worse.

Mr. Fisher: They will not, as the right hon. Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude) suggests, make things worse: on the contrary, the reforms will help by getting more money out to the regions so that decisions can be made more strategically and money can be spent more coherently, especially on projects, such as the one in my hon. Friend's constituency, which link community arts work to education. The strategy will develop a new generation of audiences in towns such as Kettering, and will bring out the creative talent of young people who may be the artists of the future.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): The Minister will appreciate that probably the best and most well-known theatre in the Kettering area is that in Market Harborough.

Madam Speaker: The question is about the Kettering area. I know the hon. and learned Gentleman's constituency very well, and the distance between the two areas. We are talking about Kettering.

Mr. Garnier: You are quite right, Madam Speaker, although the distance between Market Harborough and Kettering is nought, because that is the boundary; besides, as you will know from your local knowledge, many people from the Kettering constituency come to the Market Harborough theatre.

Madam Speaker: But how many people from Market Harborough go to the theatre in Kettering? The hon. and learned Gentleman's question is not in order and we shall go no further with it.

Sport (Social Exclusion)

6. **Mr. Harold Best** (Leeds, North-West): If he will make a statement on the role of sport in combating social exclusion. [41991]

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Tony Banks): We will never know the answer to your question now, will we, Madam Speaker?

I am convinced that sport can help to tackle the problems of social exclusion. I am encouraging the English Sports Council to direct more of its resources at that problem and to work closely with other agencies. My Department is working closely with the social exclusion unit in this area.

Mr. Best: Will the Minister confirm that the Government's national lottery policy will ensure that the Sports Council's money provides for disadvantaged areas such as the inner-city area of North-West Leeds? Will he also ensure that, when such funding goes to professional clubs—if it does—there is a guarantee that facilities will be made available to local schools and local community sport?

Mr. Banks: The priority areas initiative of the Sports Council for England allows up to 90 per cent. lottery funding—the usual being 65 per cent.—for sports projects designed to give special help to deprived areas. So far, it has supported more than 350 projects with awards totalling £186 million. The National Lottery Bill, once enacted, will enable the Sports Council to adopt a strategy that directs lottery funding to areas where there is an obvious lack of resources and where there is a great need for such projects.

Sport is one of the greatest ways of reaching young unemployed people who might otherwise be hanging around on street corners, expending their energy in non-constructive ways. Sport is a wonderful and imaginative way of organising young people and teaching them a great many things, including respect for themselves. I suspect that the new strategy of the English Sports Council will fully accord with the sort of views that my hon. Friend has just expressed.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): Will the Minister for Sport comment on the impact on the English football team of excluding Gazza from the squad?

Mr. Banks: That is a very ingenious interpretation of social exclusion, and I congratulate the hon. Lady on being the first to raise the matter in the House this afternoon. It is a subject of great national concern. I think that the national coach, Glenn Hoddle, is to be congratulated on his brave decision. Sport is even crueller than politics: if someone gets it wrong, retribution follows quickly. We must all keep our fingers crossed in the hope that the decision was the right one—my own feeling is that it was. I expect the English team to do even better now, despite the personal tragedy surrounding the footballing exclusion of that great character Gazza.

Mr. Bruce Grocott (Telford): I know that my hon. Friend, like me, supports the widest possible dissemination of the benefits of sport, but does he agree that, when sport acquires large additional funds through sponsorship, television income or other commercial activity, it is desirable that the benefits of that additional income—I am thinking of football particularly—should be spread through the whole game? They should not result in an ever-widening divide between the haves and the have-nots.

Mr. Banks: My hon. Friend raises a point about which I know large numbers of ordinary football supporters feel strongly. I addressed a meeting of the Football Supporters Association in Wolverhampton on Saturday—the first sports Minister to do so, incidentally—where its members made the same point. Football must recognise that there may come an end to the enormous flow of money currently pouring into it. The game is fashionable at the moment; an awful lot of people who support football today may not do so in a few years' time. It is essential that resources are more evenly distributed throughout the game. Unless the grass roots are nourished there will ultimately be problems for the premier league. I hope that that message is taken seriously by the football authorities—I am always reminding them of it.

Museum Funding

7. **Mr. John Bercow** (Buckingham): If he will make a statement on funding for museums. [41993]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr. Chris Smith): Funding for the national museums and galleries was protected for the current year. Additional funding has been made available to five museums and galleries to enable free admission to be maintained.

The Heritage Lottery Fund's £7 million access fund will support initiatives to widen access to museums and galleries throughout the UK. I will make a further announcement in the summer, when the departmental spending review is concluded.

Mr. Bercow: I thank the Secretary of State for that answer. The right hon. Gentleman pledged to provide free universal access to the national collections at an estimated cost of £40 million, yet he has succeeded in finding only £2 million, plus a further £7 million which he has raided from the lottery. Does not this latest betrayal prove that what needs to be preserved as a museum piece is Labour's list of broken promises?

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman conveniently forgets that no such promise or pledge was ever given. Indeed, I am surprised that he is not more enthusiastic about the fact that we have managed to preserve the important principle of free admission to the national gallery, the Tate gallery, the national portrait gallery, the British museum and the Wallace collection.

That contrasts savagely with the actions of Buckinghamshire county council which, despite an increase in its standard spending assessment for education for the current year, is putting two museums under threat. As I recollect, Buckinghamshire has been under continuous Tory control since 1889.

Ms Beverley Hughes (Stretford and Urmston): I thank my right hon. Friend for the support that he has given so far to efforts to secure funding for the proposed imperial war museum of the north. However, is he aware that, although the project has already secured funding of £19 million from Europe and the private sector, the Heritage Lottery Fund is still refusing to consider the application? Is my right hon. Friend satisfied with the way in which the heritage lottery fund has responded to this application and, more generally, with the way in which it is allocating funds as between London and other parts of the country?

Mr. Smith: I know that this is a matter of great importance to my hon. Friend, who has discussed it in some detail with me. Both she and I have also discussed the matter with the Heritage Lottery Fund. I would urge her to continue such discussions in the hope of eventually obtaining a satisfactory outcome.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): One way of assisting museums is to ensure that, when artefacts are made available by Government Departments such as the Ministry of Defence, appropriate museums are given advance notice and an opportunity to buy those artefacts at a reasonable price. Will the Secretary of State support a campaign to ensure that that is done?

Mr. Smith: I certainly view that as being entirely sensible. I think that it happens in the vast majority of cases anyway, but if the hon. Gentleman has a particular case in mind, I should be delighted to take it up personally.

Performing Arts (National Lottery Reforms)

8. **Mr. Martin Linton** (Battersea): How the lottery reforms will benefit the performing arts. [41994].

The Minister for the Arts (Mr. Mark Fisher): The National Lottery Bill will radically reform the lottery, making the process easier for applicants, distributing grants faster and therefore more effectively, and ensuring that in future more is spent on supporting artists and activities, rather than just on bricks and mortar.

Mr. Linton: Is the Minister aware of pioneering schemes such as the ladder of development which has attracted a grant of £275,000 from the lottery's arts-for-everyone programme to the Battersea arts centre, an organisation which specialises in enabling young performing artists to get their feet on the first rung of the ladder? I should add that I am the chairman of that organisation. Has the Minister seen a letter from the director of Battersea arts centre to the Prime Minister congratulating him on the impact of the new deal on young performing artists, many of whom have in the past used the dole while getting on to that all important first rung of the ladder?

Mr. Fisher: My hon. Friend is quite right to state that Battersea arts centre is enormously resourceful in accessing lottery money. It has received £810 million for refurbishment and—

Mr. Linton: Thousand.

Mr. Fisher: Yes, £810,000—there is a slight difference. It has now also received a further grant for development. My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the potential of the new deal for young artists at a crucial stage in their career. Young artists want a chance to work and to get their work in front of audiences. The Government are determined, through initiatives such as the new deal, to help them to do that.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): As I am not persuaded by the argument that the introduction of a sixth good cause will not adversely affect the money going to the five existing good causes, including the performing arts, may I ask the Minister at least to monitor what happens? Does the hon. Gentleman accept that there is a need to help the performing arts institutions which, although not national institutions, are not regarded as regional institutions either—especially if they are in the outer London boroughs? The Old Bull arts centre in Barnet is a very good example of such an institution. It puts on some very good work, some of which, I understand, has recently fallen out of favour with new Labour.

Mr. Fisher: It is absolutely essential that the benefits of the lottery grants, and especially those for the arts, get to every part of the country, feed grass roots and community developments and bring on a new generation of artists and audiences. I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman that that is a priority, and it is something which is very close to the Government's heart.

New Opportunities Fund

9. **Mr. Ben Chapman** (Wirral, South): When the national lottery New Opportunities Fund will start to finance out-of-school-hours clubs. [41995]

The Minister for Film and Tourism (Mr. Tom Clarke): Subject to parliamentary approval of the National Lottery Bill, the New Opportunities Fund is likely to invite applications for the £400 million of funding for out-of-school-hours activities early in 1999.

Mr. Chapman: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that response. I greatly welcome the National Lottery Bill and the New Opportunities Fund, which provide for a fairer geographical distribution of lottery moneys—Wirral, South has fared particularly badly in that respect—but this is an important programme, and early next year seems a long way off. Will my hon. Friend consider what steps he can take to bring forward the programme—pilot applications, for example?

Mr. Clarke: It is perfectly possible that pilot applications will be considered. I well understand my hon. Friend's arguments, which he put to the House very forcefully on 7 April and which we have taken into account. The policy directions that my right hon. Friend is issuing to all distributors will emphasise the importance of funding reaching all parts of the country. I hope that my hon. Friend will feel that he has made his point.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): Does the Minister not recognise that the £400 million of lottery money that will now be spent on out-of-school-hours clubs should come out of Government taxation and that, if the trend continues, the original five causes, which include charities and the arts, are bound to have their money reduced. How much further will the process go?

Mr. Clarke: The hon. Gentleman must know that those hoary old arguments were totally exposed on Second Reading and in Committee. The Prime Minister said before the election that we do not believe it would be right to use lottery money to pay for things which are the Government's responsibility. The policy that we are pursuing, with the overwhelming support of those who were consulted, is in addition and means that we can embrace social problems and social inclusion—issues which might be of interest to the hon. Gentleman.

Tourism

10. **Mr. Peter L. Pike** (Burnley): What the Government are doing to support local authority initiatives in tourism. [41996]

The Minister for Film and Tourism (Mr. Tom Clarke): The Government fully recognise the major role that local authorities play in relation to tourism. Local authorities are closely involved in the Department's work on developing a comprehensive strategy for tourism which will identify how best to work together in future.

Councillor John Price is chairing the domestic tourism working group which is reporting to the main tourism forum.

Mr. Pike: My right hon. Friend will know that many local authorities, including Burnley, are becoming

increasingly involved in tourism. Regional development agencies will be key players in the development of tourism in the years ahead. Will local authorities be given a full role, working in co-operation with regional development agencies?

Mr. Clarke: Yes, unreservedly. My hon. Friend has raised an extremely important point. He will be pleased to know that almost all local authorities are members of their regional tourist boards, which, in turn, have taken the positive step of bidding to become partnership organisations of their regional development agencies, and we warmly welcome that.

Mr. Peter Brooke (Cities of London and Westminster): Will the lottery be funding English tourism in future?

Mr. Clarke: The right hon. Gentleman, as a former Secretary of State, will know that—particularly because of the comprehensive spending round—all those matters are currently being discussed. I cannot respond to his specific point about the lottery, as the matter is still under discussion. He will understand that, because of the comprehensive spending round, he will have to wait just a little longer.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas (Harrow, West): Is my right hon. Friend aware that local authority initiatives to encourage tourism in my area may be undermined by the need to divert resources to fund trauma counselling for the younger members of the constituency after the departure of Geri Halliwell from the Spice Girls? Will he join me in encouraging Ginger Spice to think again?

Mr. Clarke: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that question. I had the opportunity to meet the Spice Girls on location; I was also delighted to be at the premiere of their film. I am sure that what has taken place is simply a little local difficulty, which they are perfectly capable of sorting out. I wish them well.

Mr. Francis Maude (Horsham): It is good to hear that the Minister has a policy on the Spice Girls, as well as on Gazza's exclusion from the England team. Does he accept that local authority initiatives on tourism depend heavily on the work of the English tourist board? Will he confirm the report in *The Times* on Saturday that his Department has agreed to the board's disbandment as part of the comprehensive spending review? Does he accept that his Department spends only a twentieth on English tourism of what is spent per capita in Scotland? Does he understand how angry the English tourism industry and English local authorities will be about this apparent concession by a Minister who sits for a Scottish constituency, made at the behest of a Chief Secretary and a Chancellor who also represent Scottish seats? Does that not confirm that the tourism industry is simply an optional extra for him and his team?

Mr. Clarke: That was a good try, but, as a former Treasury Minister, the right hon. Gentleman knows better. He should not indulge in what he clearly knows is speculation. He knows that the Government are committed to tourism, which is the fifth biggest industry in Britain and is worth £40 billion. He will recall that comprehensive spending reviews have taken place under all Governments. Our commitment to the British Tourist Authority and the ETB is the same as the one we inherited from the Conservative Government. The right hon. Gentleman should pay less attention to newspaper speculation and a good deal more to the praise that the ETB, the BTA and the regional bodies have given to the Government, and particularly to their excellent contributions to my right hon. Friend's tourism forum.

Commercial Television

11. **Mr. Chris Mullin** (Sunderland, South): What recent discussions he has had with the ITC regarding the quality of commercial television; and if he will make a statement. [41997]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr. Chris Smith): I meet the chairman of the Independent Television Commission periodically to discuss a range of broadcasting issues. Quality of content of commercial television services is an essential ingredient of the Government's broadcasting policy.

Mr. Mullin: Does my right hon. Friend share the widespread concern about the steady deterioration in the quality of commercial television since the Broadcasting Act 1990? Is he satisfied that the ITC has the powers and the will to reverse that trend? If not, what are his plans?

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend will doubtless know that the report issued by the ITC on the 1997 performance review, which was presented to Parliament on 30 April, addressed some of those issues robustly. This is a matter for the ITC rather than the Government. The Government have a responsibility for the overall promotion of quality, but the assessment of individual programmes must remain a matter for the ITC.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): The ITC is responsible for ensuring the application of the aspects of the Broadcasting Act 1990 that ensure that controversial subjects are dealt with with due impartiality. Will the Secretary of State raise with the ITC in his next meeting the discussion programme scheduled for ITV next Wednesday evening, which will feature a raft of conspiracy theorists, including one notorious fabricator and defamer, who intend to exploit the death of Princess Diana to put their crazy theories forward, to the distress of the families and without any balancing argument?

Mr. Smith: I am sure that the ITC and, indeed, the Broadcasting Standards Commission, will have heard very clearly what the hon. Gentleman has said.

Millennium Projects

12. **Mr. Paddy Tipping** (Sherwood): What proportion of millennium projects will be outside London. [41998]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr. Chris Smith): The Millennium Commission has awarded just under £1.24 billion to 185 capital projects across the United Kingdom; 89.5 per cent. of the total has been awarded outside Greater London.

Mr. Tipping: Will the Secretary of State continue to consider the amount of funding going to the English

regions, particularly the east midlands? Will he turn his attention to the coalfield community landmark scheme, which I know he supports, and look at the apparent difficulties between the Millennium Commission and the partners?

Mr. Smith: First, my hon. Friend is right to identify the issue of relative underfunding of the east midlands region. The Millennium Commission is seeking particularly to address that through the awards scheme to individuals, which is up and running and proving to be remarkably successful. Secondly, I very strongly support the coalfield community project in principle. I know that there have been some difficulties with the details of the project, but I shall ensure that the Millennium Commission approaches them sympathetically.

MINISTER WITHOUT PORTFOLIO

(MILLENNIUM EXPERIENCE)

The Minister was asked—

Cost Overruns

27. **Mr. Austin Mitchell** (Great Grimsby): What allowance has been made for cost overruns in his estimates of expenditure on the millennium experience. [42014]

The Minister without Portfolio (Mr. Peter Mandelson): The project has a cash budget of £758 million. Within that, there is a prudent cost contingency provision of £88 million, which is subject to tight control and regular monitoring by the New Millennium Experience Company. The project, my hon. Friend will be pleased to hear, is on time and on budget.

Mr. Mitchell: I am delighted that my hon. Friend has time to be concerned at the looming problem. There is always a danger that, if there were no purpose, one could be bought for the project by throwing money at the problem. Is he as concerned as I am at the report by Rowan Moore in last week's *Evening Standard* of delays, major cost overruns, a lack of sponsorship and private contributions, and a failure to have a central purpose down at the folks' dome? All those looming problems will have to be compensated for by the lottery, draining even more money from the arts, education, health, sport and charities, unless they are tackled.

Mr. Mandelson: The article to which my hon. Friend refers—I gather—is almost entirely unsourced, unchecked and untrue. Money is not being thrown at a problem—far from it. I would have thought that he would be rather more optimistic considering today's news and would be congratulating the New Millennium Experience Company, which has announced with Marks and Spencer, yet another founding partner of the millennium experience, the launch of Children's Promise.

The Government have always believed that the millennium experience should be a truly national event and provide a lasting legacy. I cannot think of a better way in which to fulfil both those conditions than to organise for everyone to give their last hour's salary in this millennium to help children in need in the next millennium. That is what is being launched today. It represents precisely the purpose and values that are embodied in the theme of the millennium experience and the dome—a time to make a difference, which it certainly will be.

Mr. Norman Baker (Lewes): What will happen if there is a shortfall—I hope that there will not be—in funding from sponsors? Will the proposals for the dome be scaled down, will further money be taken from the lottery or will the taxpayer be further called on?

Mr. Mandelson: I have every confidence that the New Millennium Experience Company will raise the necessary funds. Nearly £100 million is already committed and confirmed in the form of private sector sponsorship. That is nearly £100 million of a target set for the end of this year of £150 million. That is what we have gathered since February. I have every confidence that 12 million or more people will want to visit the dome, and that the company's income target from visitors is equally realistic. I do not think that the problem to which the hon. Gentleman refers will arise.

Mr. Richard Spring (West Suffolk): The hon. Gentleman hyped up surfball as the new 21st century sport for the dome. Did cost overruns cause its mysterious disappearance, or was there a fabrication about a non-existent game? Was not the hon. Gentleman guilty of talking complete and utter surfballs?

Mr. Mandelson: The reshuffle beckons, Madam Speaker. The serious play zone, to which the hon. Gentleman refers, will include explanations of the world of sport and games in the 21st century. It will cover the sort of 21st century game for which the term "surfball" was an illustrative title.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): Will my hon. Friend keep careful track of the point when the Jeremiahs and detractors of the millennium experience and the dome suddenly and quietly become enthusiasts? My hon. Friend will know that, increasingly, businesses throughout the country—not just Marks and Spencer, which has today announced the £12 million Children's Promise—see the project not only as a way in which to show the best of British work, skills and products, but as an opportunity to benefit from tourism and travel, as people from all over Europe and the world will come to make this a profitable exercise for UK plc.

Mr. Mandelson: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is because of the enormous progress that we have made during the last year that so many companies and organisations are flocking to the millennium dome to invest and to take part in the project.

We should recall what we have achieved during the past year. The dome is now firmly established on London's skyline and the roofing material is going on over the steel girders right on schedule. Young British-based designers are working hard to ensure that we have contents as inspiring as the building in which they are to be housed. We have five founding partners,

each contributing £12 million to the millennium experience. The fifth of these, Marks and Spencer, was announced this morning.

The New Millennium Experience Company has let 24 main trade contracts, 23 to companies based in the UK. My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister has launched plans for the millennium village at Greenwich and for new riverbus services to open up the Thames. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport has launched the nationwide millennium festival. We have ensured that the dome will have a long and productive life, and will not be torn down after one year, as was originally planned by the previous Government.

In short, we have turned the vision of the previous Government into firm foundations for a unique event which will bring the entire country together. It will inspire us and will make a real difference to our well-being, socially, spiritually and economically.

Ticketing

28. **Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith** (Wealden): If he will make a statement on the role of Camelot as the distributor of tickets for the millennium experience. [42015]

The Minister without Portfolio (Mr. Peter Mandelson): The New Millennium Experience Company announced on 24 February that it had reached agreement in principle with Camelot for it to be official distributor of tickets for the millennium experience at Greenwich. This will mean that there is a ticket outlet within three miles of 95 per cent. of the population of the United Kingdom.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that Camelot has already contributed to the dome? Can he confirm that no additional pressure was put on Camelot to spend more money on the distribution of tickets or to pay for the commissions of those people who retail at the point of sale?

Mr. Mandelson: Absolutely no pressure has been placed on Camelot or on any of the other private sector organisations that are increasingly keen to take part in this unique national event, no doubt partly for perfectly laudable commercial reasons, but, more importantly, because they want to contribute to the nation's millennium celebration. It is particularly welcome that Camelot should be playing the role that it is, as ticket purchases to allow people to come to the dome for the millennium experience should be as simple, straightforward and accessible as possible—it should be as easy to get tickets as it is to play the lottery. I believe that Camelot's involvement will greatly help us in achieving that.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): The House is aware that my hon. Friend does not believe that there will be a shortfall in sponsorship moneys. However, if there is a shortfall and the contingency money is swallowed up in cost overruns, for which such capital projects are notorious, where will the additional money come from—from the taxpayer or from lottery funds?

Mr. Mandelson: I do not envisage that the scenario that my hon. Friend describes will arise, as I do not believe that there will be cost overruns. I assure her, however, that in no circumstances will any deficit be met from taxpayers' money.

Mr. Francis Maude (Horsham): Leaving aside the extraordinary reversal in recent months in the Government's view of Camelot, does the hon. Gentleman agree that Camelot sponsorship of the dome is nowhere near sufficient to fill the huge gap that still exists? Will he confirm reports that the cost of the contents of the dome have been spiralling out of control and that, given the huge gap in sponsorship, his grandiose plans, which were revealed with such drama in February, are having to be radically scaled down as, in effect, the chief executive of the dome recently admitted? Has not the hon. Gentleman's stewardship of this important project been so catastrophic that a reshuffle is the only way in which he can hope to save face and to be taken out of a disaster area of his own making?

Mr. Mandelson: No. I shall be at the opening night on 31 December 1999 whatever my capacity. It is a great shame that, as the right hon. Gentleman bids farewell, he should be characteristically churlish in his contribution. I hope that he does not think that I am being equally churlish if I say that I hope that he makes as little impact in undermining the Government's economic policies as he has in his attempts to torpedo the dome in the past year.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

The hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, was asked—

Bishops' Chauffeurs

35. **Mr. Norman Baker** (Lewes): If he will make it his policy to reallocate money currently provided for bishops' chauffeurs. [42024]

Mr. Stuart Bell (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners): No.

Mr. Baker: I am disappointed by that answer. Does the hon. Gentleman recognise that many people regard as an affront the fact that £317,000 is being spent on chauffeurs for bishops when poor people could benefit from that money? Would not it be better if the bishops dispensed with their chauffeurs and used the money to help the poor?

Mr. Bell: The two are not mutually exclusive. The money spent on full-time and part-time drivers enables the bishops who make use of those services to work while travelling to their many commitments, both in their dioceses and nationally. The service can also remove pressure, especially as travel, often late at night, is an unavoidable part of a bishop's job. The money spent represents about 0.05 per cent. of the Church's annual running costs.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Faversham and Mid-Kent): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, if the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Baker) became a Minister in any conceivable

Government, he would expect to have a driver for exactly the same reasons? Does not his question represent a Liberal Democrat hypocrisy that we could do without?

Mr. Bell: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's assistance. In fact, seven bishops use their own cars and are paid a mileage allowance. In 1997, 31 bishops employed full-time or part-time drivers, which is hardly a heavy burden on the Church.

Assets

37. **Mr. Ben Bradshaw** (Exeter): If he will make a statement on the returns made on the commissioners' assets for 1996–97. [42026]

Mr. Stuart Bell (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners): The commissioners' financial year runs to the end of December. The total return on their assets was 17.1 per cent. in 1996 and 20.8 per cent. in 1997. In both years, their returns have been significantly higher than the performance of the United Kingdom pensions fund average.

Mr. Bradshaw: I thank my hon. Friend for his answer. Can he confirm that that means that the commissioners have now recovered the £800 million that they lost through their disastrous deals in the late 1980s and early 1990s?

Mr. Bell: I appreciate my hon. Friend's question, but the amount that he mentions relates to the fall in the valuation of the Church's assets between 1989, when the property market peaked, and 1992. Since then, the value of our assets has increased from £2.1 billion to £3.5 billion, and during my stewardship of one year, we have increased their value by £500 million. Success may have a thousand fathers, and I may be the 995th.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that a large proportion of the income of the Church Commissioners goes towards meeting the stipends and pensions of a considerable number of clergymen? Should not the House encourage the Church Commissioners to maximise their assets, albeit within ethical constraints?

Mr. Bell: We do pay the pensions of clergymen and their widows. Following the Pensions Measure passed last year, they will be paid by the dioceses in future, but the hon. Gentleman's point is important: the assets that we accumulate today mean better possibilities for the Church in years to come.

Ethical Investment

38. **Ann Clwyd** (Cynon Valley): What recent discussions he has had with the Church Commissioners on ethical investments. [42027]

Mr. Stuart Bell (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners): Earlier this year, as a member of the commissioners' board of governors and of the assets committee, I was able to discuss and endorse the commissioners' revised statement of ethical investment policy. The secretary to the ethical investment working group also keeps me regularly briefed on ethical issues.

Ann Clwyd: In view of GEC's long and continuing involvement in the arms trade with Indonesia, what exactly do the Church Commissioners think that they are achieving in their meetings with its board?

Mr. Bell: As always, I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her question.

Representatives of the ethical committee met senior management of GEC not long ago to discuss those very issues. We discuss them constantly with GEC, and we obviously have a strong ethical policy of not investing in companies whose main business is armaments. The current position in GEC does not constitute a breach of that policy, but we shall, of course, keep it continuously under review.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): Following the question from the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) and earlier questions on the same subject, can the hon. Gentleman tell us whether the forthcoming Lambeth conference will seek to agree a tougher regime on ethical investment—especially in relation to countries where democracy is at stake, such as Indonesia, or where nuclear weapons may be developed, such as India and Pakistan?

Mr. Bell: The hon. Gentleman may be interested to learn that the ecumenical Church investors group met today to celebrate 25 years of working together on matters of mutual concern in which the hon. Gentleman has an interest. I have already drawn the Archbishop of Canterbury's attention to the last question on this issue that the hon. Gentleman tabled for the Lambeth conference to consider, and I am sure that his voice will be heard.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMISSION

The Chairman of the Public Accounts Commission was asked—

Non-departmental Public Bodies

39. **Mr. David Heath** (Somerton and Frome): What recent discussions he has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the financial implications of extending the scrutiny of the National Audit Office to non-departmental public bodies not presently covered. [42028]

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Chairman of the Public Accounts Commission): The Comptroller and Auditor General has inspection rights in regard to virtually all the 265 non-departmental bodies; however, he is not the auditor of nearly half those bodies, and, in the circumstances, accountability to Parliament is exercised only by his inspection rights. If the Comptroller and Auditor General were to be auditor of those bodies, he would be able to provide a more efficient and effective service to Parliament. The Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee and I met the Chancellor of the

Exchequer on 26 March this year, and we raised the possibility of the Comptroller and Auditor General's becoming the auditor of all non-departmental public bodies.

Mr. Heath: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his reply. He is clearly dealing with the matter, and he clearly agrees with me that there are now gaps between the Audit Commission and the Comptroller and Auditor General in terms of audit. Does he not also agree that, if Ministers cannot abolish quangos, they can at least regulate them properly?

Mr. Sheldon: Of course I agree with the hon. Gentleman. It is a great pity that the European Court of Auditors has access that the Comptroller and Auditor General has not, as that means that the Comptroller and Auditor General cannot undertake the scrutiny that the House has a right to expect.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): The Chairman of the Public Accounts Commission will recall that I have raised this matter with him before in oral questions, particularly in relation to housing associations. Does he agree that a huge number of non-departmental public bodies are not properly scrutinised and that, therefore, there must be a risk that public money is being ill spent, possibly even fraudulently so? Will he renew his representations to the Chancellor that the Comptroller and Auditor General should have an auditing role over such bodies?

Mr. Sheldon: I fully agree, as £1.2 billion of public money is being spent in that area, and the Comptroller and Auditor General should be able to undertake the sort of examination that the House determines in so many other cases of that sort.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

The hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, was asked—

Assets

40. **Mr. Brian Jenkins** (Tamworth): What the ratio of assets will be in *(a)* property and *(b)* shares for the financial year 1997–98. [42029]

Mr. Stuart Bell (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners): At the end of the commissioners' financial year in December 1997, the proportion of their investment assets in commercial property was 14 per cent. Their agricultural and residential estates amounted to a further 8 and 6 per cent. respectively. The proportion of their assets in UK equities was 52 per cent. and in overseas equities, 9 per cent.

Mr. Jenkins: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. Is he as concerned as I am about the move that the Church Commissioners have been making into equities? Bearing in mind the turbulent nature of some of those markets, does he feel that that is an investment that gives the security that the electorate deserve?

Mr. Bell: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the volatility of the equity markets, certainly those in the far east. Having studied independent research, the commissioners believe, however, that UK equities provide the best long-term match with their expenditure commitments and intend to retain them as the cornerstone of their fund, whatever the short-term fluctuations in the market.

Nuclear Tests (South Asia)

3.30 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Robin Cook): With permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the recent nuclear tests in south Asia.

The Government of Pakistan have declared that they carried out six nuclear tests—five on Thursday and a further one on Saturday. We recognise that the Government of Pakistan were under immense pressure to conduct those tests to match those initiated by India, but we are dismayed by the decision to respond in kind, and believe that the interests of Pakistan have been badly served by their decision to do so.

Pakistan's foremost concern is its national security. That security has not been strengthened by the tests. Long-term security for Pakistan can come only from lowering tension with India. It cannot be built on the unstable foundation of an arms race, which will only raise those tensions. Already, it can be seen from news reports from the region that the voices that have been encouraged by the recent confrontation are the voices of extremism.

However, Pakistan's loss is wider than its own reduced security. Pakistan had the chance to win international support and respect for its restraint. That opportunity has now been lost. As with India, the effect of the nuclear tests by Pakistan has been to diminish, not to enhance, the status of that country within the international community.

We have made clear to the Government of Pakistan our dismay at their decision. The Pakistani high commissioner was summoned to the Foreign Office the day after the first tests to receive a message for his Government of our concern. I have recalled the British high commissioner from Islamabad for consultation in London.

We have already taken a number of measures to bring home to the Government of India the strength of our concern at their nuclear test programme. Last week, we cancelled the visit by the Indian Chief of Naval Staff and we have also cancelled a forthcoming visit by its Chief of Army Staff. At the meeting last week of the General Affairs Council of the European Union, we obtained agreement to a presidency text that invited the Commission to review India's preferential trade treatment. Having taken such steps against India, I would expect comparable measures to be agreed by European partners against Pakistan for similar action by it.

Britain's aid programme, unlike that of some other countries, is directly targeted on providing help to the poorest people in the poorest regions. We remain convinced that it would be wrong to penalise the most vulnerable citizens in either country by suspending that aid programme. However, no one, least of all the Governments of both countries, should understate the economic price that they will pay for isolation within the international community. Already, the value of the Indian rupee has fallen. Last week, the Indian Government offered $1 billion of Government bonds and got no takers. In May, there was a net outflow of foreign institutional investment and, last week, the World bank deferred three loans to India for energy and highways projects of almost a billion dollars as a result of member states' objections, including Britain's.

The adverse impact of those economic developments will make it more difficult for India or Pakistan to reduce poverty. That is why it would be a tragedy if both their Governments were to persist in an arms race to acquire the most expensive weapons, which would do nothing to help the millions of their citizens who live in poverty.

A regional arms race would have an impact that would stretch far beyond the region. Other states that have already demonstrated their interest in acquiring nuclear weapons technology will watch closely to see how the international community responds to the precedent set by India and Pakistan. Their nuclear programmes are not, therefore, merely an internal matter for India and Pakistan, but a legitimate matter of concern for the world.

At the suggestion of the United States, the permanent five members of the Security Council of the United Nations will meet in Geneva on Thursday to discuss the security implications of the nuclear test programmes and the heightened tension in the region. As President of the G8, Britain has called a meeting of the group's Foreign Ministers in London next week to co-ordinate the response of the leading economies to the nuclear test programmes, and to consider how best to promote dialogue with India and Pakistan, and between India and Pakistan.

There must be two strategic objectives in our dialogue with the two countries. First, we must press India and Pakistan to sign up to the global regime against nuclear proliferation. The best ways to reduce tension in the region would be for both India and Pakistan to sign up to the comprehensive test ban treaty, to join negotiations at Geneva, without conditions, and to halt production of fissile material for nuclear weapons. Neither the interests of Pakistan and India nor those of any other country in the world are served by encouraging the spread of nuclear weapons.

The second objective must be to tackle the roots of tension between the two countries. There must be a meaningful dialogue between India and Pakistan on the issues that threaten stability in the region. Their security would be much better promoted by confidence-building measures than by nuclear testing programmes.

We must seek a balance in our approach to the issue. We must confront firmly the dangers of nuclear proliferation, but without seeking confrontation with the peoples of India or Pakistan. Britain has a long history of close ties with both countries, and millions of people in Britain have community links with relatives throughout the sub-continent. Britain does not voice its dismay at the recent nuclear tests out of hostility, therefore. On the contrary, it is as a friend of both countries that Britain is appalled at the risks and costs to the peoples of the sub-continent of a nuclear arms race. I ask the whole House to show our united resolve in condemning the nuclear tests and in calling on the Governments of India and Pakistan to stop testing and start talking.

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): The Foreign Secretary is, of course, right to emphasise the extreme seriousness of the situation in which we find ourselves. Nuclear proliferation is one of the greatest dangers to face humanity as we move towards the millennium. When the Foreign Secretary last made a statement on the matter on 14 May, he urged the leaders of Pakistan to show restraint. I share his dismay at their actions since then, and at their failure to respond to his call.

Does the Foreign Secretary accept that these events represent a definitive crisis for the international community and its policy towards non-proliferation?

[Mr. Michael Howard]

If the actions that he has identified do not have the consequences that he seeks, will not the approach thus far taken by the international community to the range of problems posed by non-proliferation have failed? Does not the failure of the consequences for India to which he referred to deter Pakistan suggest that the omens for the continuation of this policy are not good?

We wish the right hon. Gentleman well in his efforts to participate in a resolute response by the international community to this grave state of affairs, but I hope that he accepts that what has happened thus far in the sub-continent, to the dismay of those who are friends of both India and Pakistan, means that the task that he and his colleagues face is immensely serious.

Mr. Cook: I am grateful to the right hon. and learned Gentleman for what I take as support for my statement. If we look back over the past decade, the history of nuclear non-proliferation is not one of failure. What is so depressing about the decision by India and Pakistan to proceed to nuclear tests is that, over recent years, a large number of countries have renounced the nuclear weapons path. The Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Belarus, emerging from under the Soviet Union, explicitly rejected the nuclear option and asked for removal of nuclear weapons. Brazil and Argentina have signed treaties that gave each other the confidence not to proceed to nuclear weapons. Throughout Latin America, countries that could have gone down that path have chosen not to do so. Perhaps most encouragingly of all, South Africa, with the change of Government and constitution, has dismantled its nuclear weapons programme.

The tragedy of India and Pakistan is that they are not going with the trend of the rest of the world but against it. For that reason, I would not at all dissent from the right hon. and learned Gentleman's description that this poses us with a critical challenge to the international response. It is up to us all to make sure that the international community rises to that challenge.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): Is my right hon. Friend aware that to condemn the tests carried out by Pakistan is an especial duty for those of us who for many years have regarded ourselves as friends of Pakistan, and continue to do so? Is he further aware that the world now faces the greatest danger of nuclear war since the Cuban missile crisis, that such a war between India and Pakistan almost took place in 1994, and that there was a danger of a war only last week? Is he aware that the danger of nuclear war between India and Pakistan, which would not be a regional war, will continue until Kashmir is solved between India and Pakistan? Will he therefore consult the United States Secretary of State, the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth and other people of good will actively to bring the parties together to prevent what otherwise will be a global catastrophe?

Mr. Cook: There has been no stouter friend of the people of Pakistan in the House than my right hon. Friend. His words therefore carry particular weight when he criticises this decision by the Government of Pakistan. I agree entirely with him and I said in my statement that the best way to build security for both countries is to tackle the source of tension between them. Any such meaningful dialogue, to be comprehensive, must include their disagreement over Kashmir. I agree that that must be part of the overall solution to the crisis. It is, of course, primarily for the parties concerned themselves to find the solution, but the search for it must now be all the more urgent, and a solution to the tensions over Kashmir would do far more for the security of both countries than 100 nuclear test programmes.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): There is nothing in the Foreign Secretary's statement with which I would disagree. I suspect that many hon. Members are in that position. Notwithstanding what he said in response to the shadow Opposition spokesman, the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), is it not the sad, harsh and incontrovertible fact that the efforts of the declared nuclear powers under the non-proliferation treaty to discourage nuclear proliferation have failed? The five declared nuclear members—who are, of course, the permanent members of the Security Council of the United Nations—have to take some responsibility for that failure, because they did not implement vigorously their responsibilities under article 6 of the non-proliferation treaty.

Ten days ago, when I raised the question of the level of the United Kingdom's nuclear deterrent, the Foreign Secretary said that that was a matter for the Secretary of State for Defence. Has he had time to reconsider that position? If we are to persuade India and Pakistan to exercise restraint and to become signatories to the comprehensive test ban treaty, should we not demonstrate some restraint ourselves? In that respect, will the right hon. Gentleman now confirm his Government's manifesto commitment to deploy no more warheads on the Trident nuclear missile system than there are on the Polaris system it replaces?

Mr. Cook: To repeat a point I made to the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), we have to keep in perspective any failure of the non-proliferation regime. After all, 150 countries have now signed the comprehensive test ban treaty and 180 countries have signed the non-proliferation treaty. It is India and Pakistan which are very much in the minority and on the margin of the international community, not the five permanent members of the Security Council, which have all played a leading part in negotiating those treaties.

As for the record of this Government, since coming to power we have withdrawn the free-fall bomb, the WE177, so there is now only one nuclear weapon system currently in deployment. In April, we, along with France, were the first countries among the nuclear weapon powers to sign the comprehensive test ban treaty. We are playing a leading part in Geneva in negotiating the fissile material cut-off treaty and we very energetically observe the moratorium on nuclear tests.

I said to the hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) last week, not that what became of the British nuclear deterrent was nothing to do with me, but that he had invited me to make a statement that would come best from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence. My right hon. Friend will be making his own statement about the disposition of our nuclear forces come the response to the strategic defence review.

When the hon. and learned Gentleman hears that, I think that he will find confirmation that our plans for nuclear arms control are both ambitious and practical.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): How seriously does my right hon. Friend take the danger that Pakistan might be tempted to use battlefield nuclear weapons first, using weapons technology given them by the Chinese and North Koreans, with the escalation that might follow from that, if, in any future armed conflict—he will know of the three armed conflicts since independence—the Pakistani armed forces were to be worsted because of the disparity in the armed forces of the two countries? What confidence-building measures does he envisage in the short term, especially in trying to get some form of hotline communication between the two countries?

Mr. Cook: Our objectives must be more ambitious than a hotline; in particular, we must put every possible pressure on both India and Pakistan to make sure that they do not proceed from tests of nuclear devices to deploying those devices as weapons in deliverable systems. My hon. Friend is right to say that there will be particular interest in those countries in battlefield nuclear weapons systems. Over the past few days, I have been dismayed to read what I think are dangerous analyses suggesting that the European experience can necessarily be replicated in south Asia, but if people want to learn from our experience, we in Europe took the deliberate decision to dismantle the theatre and battlefield systems first, precisely because they were the most dangerous systems and might have been used first. I therefore very much hope that that is not a line down which south Asia will now go.

Mr. Tom King (Bridgwater): Does the right hon. Gentleman accept the analysis of the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) that not only is this a most critical situation and the worst since the Cuban missile crisis, but there is a real risk that the events of the past week have given the impression that we might have been extremely close to nuclear conflict of some sort? At such a time, of such urgency and with such a need for leadership, is it not clear that there is not much question of where that leadership lies? This country has the presidency of the G8 and of the European Union, and a role in the Commonwealth. Should I read into what the right hon. Gentleman said about the meeting of the G8 and about opening a dialogue that an effort will be made to send, under this country's leadership, emissaries to both countries immediately to start negotiations and discussions? That could be done as well as withdrawing ambassadors and using conventional means, which, I understand, may be necessary in the protocol of such matters. Is it not now necessary to make a much greater impact in a very grave situation?

Mr. Cook: I take it from what the right hon. Gentleman said that he does not disagree with our decision to recall our high commissioner for consultation. Not only is that a way of bringing home our concern, in Islamabad as in Delhi, but it is of practical benefit, in that it enables us to have the advantage of the experience and direct knowledge of those high commissioners.

On leadership, I assure the right hon. Gentleman that the point of summoning the special meeting of the G8 Foreign Ministers, as with that of the Foreign Ministers of the permanent five, is to consider how, together, we can re-strengthen dialogue with India and Pakistan and encourage dialogue between them. That will be at the centre of our discussions. As to the precise method by which we shall choose to pursue that—whether it is by special envoy, by inviting their representatives to meet us or by another method—we shall be considering that until those meetings take place. We are all seized of the critical importance of this matter, and the world must act together to respond to it.

Mr. Roger Godsiff (Birmingham, Sparkbrook and Small Heath): I concur with what my right hon. Friend has said and I, too, condemn the Pakistani Government's decision to conduct nuclear tests. I welcome his statement that until the main issues that separate India and Pakistan are resolved, there will never be peace in that region.

On Kashmir, does my right hon. Friend acknowledge that, in the past, bilateral discussions between Pakistan and India have not, sadly, achieved a resolution of the dispute? Does he agree that it is incumbent on him, at meetings of European Foreign Ministers and of the G8, and on Britain, as a member of the Security Council, to bring Kashmir to the top of the international agenda, because without a resolution there will, regrettably, never be peace between India and Pakistan?

Mr. Cook: The House will be aware that, conventionally, I am criticised for paying too much attention to Kashmir rather than for paying insufficient attention. I agree with my hon. Friend's analysis, but, ultimately, the solution to the problem of Kashmir can be found only with the concurrence of India and Pakistan. The countries that wish them well and organisations such as the G8 and the permanent five members of the Security Council, which are now exercised about the tension between India and Pakistan, might have a role to play, but that role is to encourage the two main parties to find the solution with which they can both live.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid–Sussex): Will the Foreign Secretary consider examining the number of military students in Britain who are from Pakistan and India—he will find that there are quite a number of them—and whether it continues to be appropriate for them to undergo military training in this country? Secondly, will he consider following the model used in the discussions between the Palestinians and the Israelis, whereby a country that is quite dissociated from the area, such as Norway or Sweden, could take on a role that may be appropriated by the G8 to oversee a series of talks that would go on until they came to a conclusion?

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman's latter point will certainly be under examination when we meet. The role of mediator may not be appropriate, but perhaps there will be a role for a facilitator.

On the hon. Gentleman's other point, I shall consider what he said and inquire about the numbers of such students. As I have said, we have already acted to stop high-level military contacts and we are being particularly vigilant about any contact with nuclear scientists from either country. I would not necessarily wish to rupture the ties to which the hon. Gentleman referred. We can resolve the situation only by reducing the tension through dialogue between those countries. We need to achieve the

[Mr. Cook]

right balance between conveying our dismay at the decisions and promoting our contact with the countries, to avoid creating a sense of isolation and to encourage them to be drawn into, not to shy away from, the obligations of the international community.

Mr. Piara S. Khabra (Ealing, Southall): Does the Foreign Secretary agree that, following the nuclear tests by India and Pakistan, it is the moral duty of the five big powers to reduce their stockpiles of dangerous weapons to a level that encourages India and Pakistan to sign the comprehensive test ban treaty and the non-proliferation treaty? Does he further agree that countries such as China and America have in different ways helped Pakistan to develop its nuclear technology and that that has been a folly in American foreign policy?

Mr. Cook: Of course I would agree with my hon. Friend that the permanent powers, which happen also to be the nuclear weapon powers, have a special obligation under article 6 of the non-proliferation treaty. As it happens, Britain has reduced its nuclear stockpile within the past 12 months. Much more progress would have been made if the START 2 treaty had not been blocked in the Duma. I hope that a healthy consequence of the current international anxiety over south Asia will be to prompt some rethinking in the Duma as to whether it is doing its best for Russia's interests by blocking the progress of that treaty.

On the question of collaboration with Pakistan, America has been vigilant over recent years in its relations with Pakistan. There are obvious links between Pakistan and China, but if India reflects on the Chinese reaction to the nuclear test programme, it will realise that it is difficult for anybody in India to convince himself that he now has greater security in relation to China than he had before. Relations with China are now at a 20-year all-time low.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): I am sure that the Secretary of State realises that more than half of the world's poorest people live in India and Pakistan and that 5 million people suffer from AIDS in the Indian sub-continent, where the epidemic is totally out of control. Nearly 1,000 people died recently, simply from the effects of drought. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that this is an obscene recent example of countries not getting their priorities right? How can he make his ethical foreign policy work without jeopardising the poor in those countries?

Mr. Cook: I have to say bluntly to the hon. Lady that there is no way in which we can impose any form of economic sanctions without having an impact on some of the poorest at the margins of those societies. Of course that is one of the guiding principles that we are trying to apply, to make sure that we soften the impact as much as we can. That is why we do not propose, unlike some other countries, to withdraw our aid programme and why we are trying to target measures, such as reviewing trade preferences, in ways that may make some senior business men recognise that perhaps they should speak to senior politicians about the effect of the nuclear test programme. I cannot deny that if those measures were put into effect, they would worsen India's economic position and, therefore, that of its poorest people.

I entirely agree with the hon. Lady about mistaken priorities. One of the great ironies of the Indian nuclear test programme is that on the day that the tests were greeted with demonstrations of support in the streets, there were riots resulting in the smashing of electricity sub-stations because of dissatisfaction with the poor quality of India's electricity grid.

Mr. Dale Campbell-Savours (Workington): May I welcome my right hon. Friend's desire to promote discussions between India and Pakistan? I do not think that the process will be helped in any way if we introduce measures that will penalise either India or Pakistan. Such a process would be totally counter-productive. Given our special relationship with the peoples of those two countries, our function is to get in there, using friendships that have been built up over many generations, and ensure that they sign the necessary treaties as soon as possible.

Mr. Cook: I have great sympathy with the objective that my hon. Friend mentions, and I sought to make it clear in my statement that we are giving a balanced response that seeks to bring home our concern about the nuclear tests, but not to drive the peoples of those countries into a sense of isolation that might encourage them to support their Governments in the steps that they have taken rather than to be critical of them. Therefore, I am very conscious of the point that my hon. Friend makes, but if we do nothing, there is a real danger that the wrong lesson will be taken—that we do not really care about the fact that those countries have broken the world's non-proliferation regime. That is why it is important that we act in a way that cannot be portrayed as hostile to the peoples of those countries, but which brings it home to their Governments that we view this serious step with the greatest gravity.

Mr. Tony Baldry (Banbury): I am sure that the Foreign Secretary will agree that no hon. Member could have any quarrel with anything in his statement—indeed, we support all of it—but I suspect that he will also understand that everyone here is concerned that there should be some movement towards resolution of the issues that divide India and Pakistan and that, of all the countries in the world, neither Pakistan nor India has a better friend than the United Kingdom.

What we should like to hear is this. Of course the work that is done in the G8, the Security Council of the United Nations and the European Union is invaluable, but the UK, as the best friend of India and Pakistan, has a particular role. It would be interesting to hear whether the Foreign Secretary is prepared to signal to both India and Pakistan that quietly we are always willing to help to act as a facilitator, if India and Pakistan ever felt that that would be helpful. As has been said, the experience has been that it is only when a facilitator has been prepared to help that India and Pakistan have made any great progress. Of course, these matters have to be resolved between the two of them bilaterally, but they need help, and the UK is in a unique position to offer such help.

Mr. Cook: I have said to both countries that Britain is willing to offer its good offices if both countries are

willing to accept them. Some of the recent statements of support for that view would have been welcome at the time that I expressed it, but the offer is on the table and I welcome the fact that there is now increasing recognition of the importance of the issue and of the need for action to tackle it, particularly by the two parties concerned.

Of course, Britain, with long historical and close community ties, is well placed as a friend of both countries, but with that friendship and understanding, perhaps the best role that we can play is to ensure that the international community also understands those countries and acts with us in a way that helps to produce a solution and to reduce tension between them.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is my right hon. Friend aware that it gives those of us who marched the streets from Aldermaston to Hyde park and elsewhere, to call for unilateral nuclear disarmament, no comfort to know that the nightmare scenario that we talked about at that time has come about? Does he appreciate that the sad thing is that Britain does not have the same moral authority as many other countries that do not have nuclear weapons? Will he take a suggestion from me not to call on people in America, Russia and other countries that possess the bomb to intercede? Perhaps the best person to do the job would be Nelson Mandela, the President of South Africa, which has renounced nuclear weapons. He could take charge of some kind of mission to intercede on behalf of the big powers, because he commands more moral authority in this affair than we do.

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend speaks with great consistency. However, I do not think that Britain can be accused of speaking falsely on this issue. We do, after all, have the capacity to carry out nuclear tests. We have chosen not to do so. It would have been better for south Asia if both India and Pakistan had shown the same restraint.

My hon. Friend is right that South Africa's international stature and respect have grown immensely because it renounced its nuclear weapons and wound down its nuclear weapons programme. That may make it an acceptable interlocutor with India and Pakistan, but I hope that the Governments of both those countries will reflect on the fact that they, too, could have gained the same respect that South Africa now commands if they had shown the same restraint and the same responsible approach to nuclear weapons programmes.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): May I inject less of a doomsday scenario into the discussion? I remind the Foreign Secretary that he, like me, is old enough to remember the Cuban missile crisis of October 1962. I respectfully suggest to him that comparisons between that incredibly tense situation and what is happening now are overblown hoo-hah. May I also remind him that two years later, in 1964, the Chinese acquired the bomb and first exploded it? At that time, there was an hysterical reaction and people said that it would lead to an uncontrollable arms race and to disaster, but it did not. May I finally suggest that it was inevitable that, once India had exploded its bomb, Pakistan would do likewise? Their actions will not be affected by empty moral gestures by Labour Back Benchers or by a Liberal Democrat Front-Bench spokesman suggesting that the explosion of such weapons has something to do with the number of Trident warheads held by the British.

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman obviously believes in the theory that nuclear weapons at all times and in all places are a good thing. It is not clear to me from what he said where exactly he would draw the line or who he would suggest should not have nuclear weapons. The responsible attitude—which was also taken by the Conservative Front-Bench spokesman—is to seek to prevent the proliferation and escalation of nuclear weapons.

I am not sure that I take it kindly to be reminded that I am old enough to remember the Cuban missile crisis, but I remember it very well and how glad we were when it was all over. I would not wish to visit such a hair-trigger situation on the peoples of south Asia, and I hope that we can avert such a crisis.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): When my right hon. Friend visited India and offered to mediate, he was absolutely right about the issue of Kashmir, despite what some of his critics have said. He is right now to say that that is the root of the problem between India and Pakistan. A strong body of opinion believes that a free and independent Kashmir would perhaps be the answer. Would he consider raising the issue of a plebiscite, so that the people of Kashmir can say what they want?

Mr. Cook: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her kind words. The matter that she raises is the one issue which could unite Delhi and Islamabad, because neither is enthusiastic about an independent Kashmir. We have consistently taken the view that, to be just, the solution must be acceptable to all the peoples of Kashmir—Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist. Finding a solution that would be acceptable to all is a difficult task. Many of them will have a different view of where their future lies. They must be involved in finding a solution, and it must be acceptable to them.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): Does the Foreign Secretary agree that Britain's primary role as a good friend of both India and Pakistan is to urge restraint? Such restraint would be much more likely if a potential solution to the Kashmir problem could be found. This problem has existed since 1947: three wars have been fought and more than 1 million people have been killed. Is it not high time that Britain and America exercised some real leadership and sought a Security Council initiative to determine whether a solution to the problem of Kashmir is forthcoming? Does the Foreign Secretary agree that merely adopting the position of meaningful dialogue between the two countries is no longer acceptable?

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman highlights one of the ironies of India's actions. For 30 years, India has sought to prevent Kashmir from being an issue provoking international attention, but its nuclear test programme has achieved what has been the objective of its policy to prevent for all that time. As to the hon. Gentleman urging us to be more proactive on Kashmir, I repeat to the House that our offer of good offices and to work with other countries and multilateral organisations to find those good

[Mr. Cook]

offices is on the table if both parties are willing to participate. However, when I last made that offer, I do not recall his congratulating me on it. Those who now recognise the gravity of the situation in Kashmir should perhaps reflect on how much humbug they spoke last autumn when I raised the matter.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): As secretary of the all-party parliamentary Pakistan group and as a friend of India, although I understand the pressure on Pakistan to carry out nuclear tests following the tests by India, I believe that Pakistan's decision is regrettable and should be condemned. I strongly support my right hon. Friend in that respect. Unless we solve the tensions that simmer between those two countries, I fear that there will be a fourth war between them. Whether it is nuclear or non-nuclear, it will solve nothing.

I respect my right hon. Friend's views, and I completely understand that India and Pakistan must take the lead on the Kashmir issue, but we still need to spell out to them, time and again, that the only way to unblock the logjam is to get those two countries to sit down at a table and sort out the problem.

Mr. Cook: I agree absolutely: a solution can be found only with the co-operation of the two parties. That is why any willingness to help from outside must proceed with their agreement. But we would urge India and Pakistan to find a solution consistent with their own agreement at Simla and with the UN resolutions.

Mr. Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): While I agree with the condemnation of India and Pakistan, does the Foreign Secretary agree, after many years of the covert development of nuclear weapons by both countries, that there are now overtly seven nuclear weapons states? Is it not time that the five members of the Security Council called an urgent meeting with those two overt nuclear weapons states to discuss what they and some other countries have hitherto regarded as unfair and discriminatory treaties? I do not accept that argument, but it is used by India in particular. In that way, we can ensure that the process is not extended to the middle east and elsewhere.

Mr. Cook: I, too, reject the argument that my hon. Friend has outlined. The non-proliferation treaty has been signed by 180 countries, and it is difficult credibly to argue that it is an unequal treaty, when nearly every country in the world, with the exception of a few such as India and Pakistan, has signed up to it.

As for inviting the two countries to sit down with the five nuclear weapons powers as new nuclear weapons powers, I would urge extreme caution. In the wake of the tests, we must be careful not to appear to reward those countries for carrying them out. If we did so, I fear that that would encourage other countries to follow suit, secure in the knowledge that there was a precedent for them, too, to be treated as de facto nuclear powers.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): I speak as a friend of Pakistan with thousands of Kashmiris in my constituency. Is it not sick madness when a country such as Pakistan, 70 per cent. of whose population is illiterate, spends 25 per cent. of its national budget on defence? Should not that be unreservedly condemned?

When the button was pressed last Thursday evening, I was speaking in my constituency to a reception held by the Kashmir Welfare Association, where my message was the same. Many of my Kashmiri constituents, moreover, were very exercised by the line put out by the Pakistan authorities on Thursday as a pretext for the explosion—that the Indian Government were at that moment preparing to launch an attack on Pakistan's nuclear installations. Does the Foreign Secretary have any intelligence to confirm or reject that?

Mr. Cook: If I had, it would be most unwise of me to share it with the House. I notice that the Indian Government have denied any such intentions, and I have no reason to doubt their word on that.

I strongly agree with my hon. Friend's opening remarks; I know his constituency and his constituents, and I know that he speaks with genuine affection and concern for the peoples of Pakistan. It is deeply tragic that a country where combating illiteracy should be a real national priority carries a defence budget that so greatly outstrips its education budget.

Northern Ireland Referendum

4.14 pm

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Marjorie Mowlam): With permission, Madam Speaker, I shall make a statement about the outcome of the referendum held in Northern Ireland on 22 May.

There was a very positive result: 81 per cent. of the people in Northern Ireland voted, and 71 per cent. of them supported the agreement reached on Good Friday. There is no doubt that it was an emphatic endorsement of the agreement from all sections of the community—republicans, loyalists, Unionists and nationalists. Now they want to see the agreement as a whole—every part of it—work.

In their own referendum, the people of the Irish Republic voted by 94 per cent. to endorse the changes to the Irish constitution required to implement the agreement.

By these referendums, the people of Ireland, north and south, have voted overwhelmingly to say yes to the principle of consent; yes to using only peaceful means to resolve political disputes; yes to fairness and equality; and yes to building new relationships based on agreement, not coercion.

The people have spoken. Those who seek to frustrate that—whether by violence or by other means—fly in the face of democracy. Our job now—both as the Government and in this Parliament—is to act as the people wish.

Let me briefly set out for the House the steps that are now being taken. Last Wednesday, I signed an order bringing into force all the remaining provisions of the Northern Ireland (Elections) Act 1998. The elections to the New Northern Ireland Assembly will take place on 25 June, with the nominations closing at 4 pm on 3 June, this Wednesday. It would not be right for the Government during the election campaign to seek to influence the people's choice, directly or indirectly, but I hope that, on 25 June, those who voted in the referendum will finish the job by voting in the assembly elections as well.

In the meantime, we will work to implement the agreement. Both the British and the Irish Governments will very soon bring into force schemes under the Northern Ireland Arms Decommissioning Act 1997; I am grateful for the efforts of my predecessor, the noble Lord Mayhew, in establishing that legislation and its amnesty provisions. When that happens, there will then be no practical barrier to a start to decommissioning. We look to all parties to honour the commitment that they made to use any influence that they may have to achieve the decommissioning of all paramilitary weapons within two years.

I shall also present to the House shortly a Bill to implement the provisions of the agreement relating to prisoners. The Government are committed to seeking to enact the appropriate legislation to give effect to new arrangements by the end of June. The Bill, which I know the House will wish to examine carefully, will include the safeguards that are in the agreement and to which my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister drew attention in his speech in Belfast on 14 May. The agreement is to be implemented in all its parts, not cherry-picked.

As the Prime Minister said, we need to be sure that both the terms and the spirit of the agreement are met. The Prime Minister set out a range of factors on which it would be possible to make an overall judgment so that we can be sure that all parties are committed exclusively to peace and democracy and that violence is genuinely given up for good.

There are a range of factors to take into account, as the Prime Minister said:

"first and foremost, a clear and unequivocal commitment that there is an end to violence for good, on the part of republicans and loyalists alike, and that the so-called war is finished, done with, gone; that, as the Agreement says, non-violence and exclusively peaceful and democratic means are the only means to be used;

that, again as the Agreement expressly states, the ceasefires are indeed complete and unequivocal; an end to bombings, killings and beatings, claimed or unclaimed; an end to targeting and procurement of weapons; progressive abandonment and dismantling of paramilitary structures actively directing and promoting violence;

full co-operation with the Independent Commission on decommissioning, to implement the provisions of the Agreement;

and no other organisations being deliberately used as proxies for violence."

As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister again made clear:

"we are not setting new preconditions or barriers".

However, we will be giving legislative expression to those factors in the Bill relating to prisoners and the Bill to implement the remainder of the agreement which we shall introduce later this Session.

Our aim is to transfer powers to the assembly and to establish the north-south ministerial council, agreed implementation bodies, the British-Irish council and the British-Irish intergovernmental conference at the same time. We are aiming for early 1999.

In the meantime, following the elections, the assembly will meet first in shadow form in July. In the shadow period of the assembly, Members will elect a Presiding Officer, consider Standing Orders, elect a First Minister and Deputy First Minister, examine Northern Ireland departmental structures and arrangements and allocate other ministerial posts.

In the period after the assembly elections, there will also be meetings of the British-Irish council and the north-south ministerial council in shadow form. In the shadow north-south ministerial council, representatives from Northern Ireland and the Irish Government will undertake a work programme in consultation with the Government with a view to identifying and agreeing by 31 October this year areas for north-south co-operation and implementation.

The agreement also provides for a range of measures to promote rights and equality of opportunity in Northern Ireland which the Government will continue to implement.

I hope very shortly to announce the other members of the independent commission to review policing in Northern Ireland who will serve alongside the chairman, Chris Patten. I also hope to announce soon the arrangements for the review of criminal justice, including the assessors who will provide an independent element in the review.

On 22 May, the people voted overwhelmingly to endorse the Good Friday agreement. I commend that endorsement to the House as we undertake our clear duty to follow the will of the people and implement the agreement in the weeks and months ahead.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): I am sure that the Secretary of State was correct to say that the referendum

[Mr. Andrew MacKay]

was a remarkable milestone in the history of Northern Ireland. The turnout of more than 81 per cent. frankly shames the rest of the United Kingdom, where the participation rates in recent elections have been much lower.

There is absolutely no doubt that the overwhelming majority of people in Northern Ireland are anxious to show their democratic credentials and yearn for a lasting settlement and an end to the troubles. The result for the yes campaign was equally significant. By any reasonable statistical judgment, it was a vote in both communities for the agreement, and we must never let critics of the agreement say anything else, as it would be a plain untruth.

Looking forward to the assembly elections, may I ask the Secretary of State for slightly more detail about the forthcoming legislation which will be introduced before the elections are held? When I was campaigning for a yes vote in the Province with my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition, it became very clear indeed, particularly in the final few days of the referendum campaign, that a significant number of moderate, ordinary, decent people in both communities finally decided to vote yes only when the Prime Minister had given them clear, unequivocal assurances that decommissioning and the renunciation of violence would be incorporated in the legislation on early prisoner release and setting up the assembly, with particular reference to members of the assembly taking ministerial or Executive office. It would be a tragedy if those assurances were not fully incorporated in the legislation to be introduced shortly. I should like to be certain that they will be. If they are not, I fear that more politicians who will not act positively will be elected to the assembly, which would be a great pity and not in the interests of the people of Northern Ireland.

The Secretary of State was right to announce that the Government wish in no way to interfere in the assembly elections. Her Majesty's Opposition share that wish. However, this is a time for great sensitivity. I wonder whether the Secretary of State was right to have invited Sinn Fein-IRA leaders to the Hillsborough reception. Such acts will destabilise the Unionist electorate and community. We have been fortunate that, for wrong and inexcusable reasons, Mr. Adams and Mr. McGuinness have declined the invitation. I should like assurances that there will be no further such insensitive acts before the elections, which could bring about the wrong result.

Marjorie Mowlam: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's opening comments about the reasonable statistical judgment that there was a majority in both communities in favour of the agreement. We have done a fair amount of work on that and agree whole-heartedly with his interpretation. We also welcome his support for non-interference by Her Majesty's Government or Her Majesty's Opposition in the Northern Ireland elections. However, if individual Members of Parliament from either side want to go over, that is a choice for them. It is not up to us to dictate to other Members.

The hon. Gentleman's point about decommissioning and holding office is central, but I should like to deal first with his more minor point about the garden party later this week. It is normal to invite representatives of all political parties to the garden party. All those who signed up to the Good Friday agreement have been invited. That is the only just way to proceed. We cannot expect people to participate together in the assembly if we judge them by different standards. More than 90 per cent. of the invitations this year went to people from the national health service, because the 50th anniversary of the NHS is being celebrated at the garden party. We have kept the arrangements fully under discussion with all concerned parties. I was well aware of the sensitivities among the families who have been victims of the violence, including the royal family. Had matters turned out differently, as the organiser of the event I would have ensured that nobody suffered any further hurt or pain.

The hon. Gentleman also raised the more substantive point of the Prime Minister's comments on 14 May, outlining the factors that are crucial to moving the process forward. My right hon. Friend has made it clear that there must be a genuine and unequivocal commitment to peace by those participating in the assembly. We shall make an overall judgment based on those four factors, which I listed in my statement, so I shall not bother the House by repeating them all. One was about ensuring the full co-operation of the parties with the independent commission on decommissioning to implement the agreement. Our judgment will be based on consideration of all the factors. I cannot prejudge that decision, but I assure the hon. Gentleman that his point will be answered in the settlement Bill and the prisoners Bill. As he well knows, there are arrangements in the agreement for excluding from office those who are not genuinely committed to peace.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Rather than dwelling on invitations to garden parties, is it not far more important to dwell on the bigger picture—the fact that the attempt by terrorism, murder and violence to force Northern Ireland out of the United Kingdom has been defeated by democracy, something in which the whole House rejoices? Are there not two dangers? The first is of terrorist breakaway groups from the IRA, and possibly from loyalist murder gangs, that do not accept the ceasefire and would do their utmost to destroy the democratic decision of the large majority in Northern Ireland. Secondly, although I understand and appreciate why the Secretary of State does not want to intervene in the election for the assembly, would it not be extremely unfortunate if anyone elected were elected only on the basis of trying to wreck the agreement, and therefore, in his own way, undermined what the majority of people in Northern Ireland agreed to last week?

Marjorie Mowlam: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments. It is important that we act in a fair and just way in the weeks and months ahead as we try to put into practice the plans for building peace and ensure that the process begins to work. I agree that we should focus on the fact that democracy has spoken. The people in Northern Ireland—71 per cent. of them—have said that, by consent, they want to find a peaceful way forward. That is the answer to the terrorist breakaway groups, whether they be the Irish National Liberation Army, Loyalist Volunteer Force, Continuity IRA or the 32 County Sovereignty Committee. They in no way represent the people of Northern Ireland or of the Republic. There is a wish to find another way forward. I assure the House that terrorist breakaway groups that

continue to function will be treated very firmly by both the Governments in the north and in the Republic, working together where necessary to ensure that such groups do not destabilise the process, as they are clearly intent on doing. We will do our best as much as possible to ensure that destabilisation does not take place.

In the elections on 25 June, we would obviously want people who are committed to taking forward the spirit of the Good Friday agreement into the assembly. The election is the people's choice; it is their voice. The electorate in Northern Ireland are very savvy, they know how the electoral system works and I have faith in them.

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): The Liberal Democrats very much welcome the decisive referendum on 22 May. We congratulate the Secretary of State and her Ministers on the job of work that they did, as we do former Ministers on their work in bringing about the historic decision. We also welcome the fact that legislation, especially to deal with prisoners, will be brought before the House sooner rather than later. That will be a litmus test of whether the entire agreement will be followed through.

I spent last week partly in Northern Ireland and partly in the Republic of Ireland. As the concert at Stormont in Belfast was going on, I was speaking to people who voted no. We must remember that about 28 or 29 per cent. of the people of Northern Ireland voted no. It is crucial that we do not forget that large number, the majority of whom are not terrorists, bombers or wreckers but people who have genuine worries about the future of their Province. What efforts will the Secretary of State and her Ministers make to ensure that those people are not excluded from the future but are brought into the fold and can play a positive part in what we hope will be a very successful transition to peace in Northern Ireland?

Marjorie Mowlam: I thank the hon. Gentleman, and would add to his list of thanks gratitude for the support and help that the Liberal Democrats have given. I avoided giving a great thank you in my statement because it took so long last time. The people who have put in the work know who they are. Their collective effort has brought us to where we are today.

I agree that it is welcome that legislation on prisoners is before the House sooner rather than later. It is in the agreement that it will be in place by the end of June. We must not ever forget that we are dealing with a package and cannot cherry-pick. Some people do not like some bits and others do not like other bits, but we must treat the agreement as a package in order to be able to keep the whole thing together. That is what the parties signed up for and that is what we must keep on the table.

I agree with the hon. Gentleman's last point—the same point was made by the hon. Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay). There are many who voted yes for peace, and there are those who have concerns—there is no doubt about that. The Prime Minister, when he was across on 14 May, did his best to reassure those who were seeking more information.

Like the hon. Gentleman, I would like to build bridges, as we did during the referendum. We funded all the parties during the referendum to put their case because we did not want to discriminate against anyone, whatever their position. We are talking with all parties about the elections. We will do all we can—not just with the parties, but with the people—to answer questions and to ease fears, because unless we can allay those fears, trust and confidence will not exist for the future.

Mr. Peter Brooke (Cities of London and Westminster): I congratulate the people of Ireland, in both parts, on the clarity of their decision, and I congratulate the Government on their conduct of the referendum. Does the Secretary of State agree that, during the referendum, the two Governments made at least one decision that might have had serious adverse consequences? I speak delphically, but I think she knows to what I refer. Will the right hon. Lady acknowledge that, during this next difficult year, there will not be much margin for similar errors to be made?

Marjorie Mowlam: I do not know whether the right hon. Gentleman prefers to be seen as the father or the grandfather of this agreement, but his input eight or nine years ago created what happened early this year, and it took place, in many ways, thanks to his initial work and the risks that he took.

The releases, to which the right hon. Gentleman was referring, were different in nature. One was not ours—it was the Irish Government's. We have made releases to try to bring the process forward. The other point is that those releases are part of an overall package of prisoner compassionate and temporary leave that was put in place by the Government of which the right hon. Gentleman was a member. I had to decide whether to change the system on this occasion because of the individuals concerned, bearing in mind the impact of their release on the prisons and the impact on individuals of changing the system for external reasons. I thought that it was safer to stick with a scheme that had been in place for many years.

Kate Hoey (Vauxhall): The Secretary of State will be aware of the vital role played by the Prime Minister in the referendum campaign, particularly in the last few days. She will be aware particularly of the personally written pledges he gave when he spoke to an audience in Coleraine a couple of days before the vote. How will these pledges be incorporated into the Bill, as that is what the people of Northern Ireland thought was going to happen?

Marjorie Mowlam: I fully concur with my hon. Friend on the central role of the Prime Minister in the last days of the referendum campaign. On the personally written pledges which she and I saw in Coleraine, I repeated them in the House today and I listed them as the four factors. I have said that the four factors are part of the overall agreement and will be written into the Bills on prisoners and on the settlement.

Sir Brian Mawhinney (North–West Cambridgeshire): The right hon. Lady is absolutely right to propose legislation on the release of prisoners, however distasteful that will be to a lot of people and however inevitable it is, given Irish history. As she prepares the Bill, will she give a moment's thought to the horror of more than 3,000 murders in the past 25 years? Within that horror, will she recognise that some of the murders were so horrible that the sense of revulsion swept across the community, irrespective of political or religious view? Would she be willing to give herself reserved powers in the Bill so that,

[Sir Brian Mawhinney]

after consulting—perhaps on a bipartisan basis—it might be agreed that there are certain people on both sides of the community whose deeds were so dastardly that they ought not to be part of the release process?

Marjorie Mowlam: I give more than a moment's thought to the victims, and, as the right hon. Gentleman knows, we set up the Bloomfield commission many months ago to consider what responses we could make on a much larger scale than previously. It is difficult for everyone to cope with change, but victims' families will find it even harder—we want to ensure that they receive fair treatment in the consideration of the issues. I have appointed a Minister to ensure that the commission's recommendations are taken seriously, pushed through the system and delivered, so that the victims' families see a change in the policies that we adopt.

I thank the right hon. Gentleman for what he said in the first part of his question. There is no doubt that the release of prisoners has been an on-going factor. He and I know—as do many Conservative Members—that that process was started in 1995 under the previous Government, and that 240 prisoners have already been released early, some of whom are those horrific people to whom he refers. Half those who will be given accelerated release under the proposed scheme would be out even if we made no changes. Safeguards have been built in—I know that the right hon. Gentleman has considered them—such as the revocation of licences if there is a breach in the commitment to the ceasefire and to a peaceful way forward. Moreover, particular conditions apply to lifers.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): I welcome the neutrality of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on the election, but I think that we are all aware of the areas on which her glint of approval will fall. It is appropriate that the Government should not adopt a particular attitude, as there is no Labour party in Northern Ireland; if there were, the Government's approval might appropriately be given to it. Will the Republic adopt a similarly neutral attitude to the election?

Some of us, as Back Benchers, have the advantage of not being bound by the self-denying ordinance and can involve ourselves in the arrangements, although we should consider whether it would be tactically wise to do so, or whether people would be offended by our involvement. Nevertheless, I believe that we should all support the parties that are with the agreement 100 per cent. It is by no means the case that all those who voted no will not accept the decision that was made in the referendum—it is perfectly possible for people to vote one way, to find that the result went against them and then to operate in the new framework.

Marjorie Mowlam: It was exactly my hon. Friend of whom I was thinking when I said earlier that some individuals would want to do their own thing. I find it difficult, if not impossible, to speak for the Republic, and I should not speak for another Government, but it would be fair to say that they have shown sensitivity to the issue—I do not think that there will be any difficulties on that front.

I agree with my hon. Friend's final point—some who voted yes may vote in the elections to the assembly for a party that said no, and some who voted no may vote for a party that said yes. That is what I mean when I say that it is the people's choice and decision.

Mr. Tom King (Bridgwater): Will the right hon. Lady accept my congratulations on the roles that she and the Prime Minister played in securing the significant achievement that we are recording today, which is another important step in the long march towards a happier Northern Ireland and island of Ireland? She said that it is not for her to speak for the Republic of Ireland, but does she recognise the significance of the fact that a referendum was held on the same day on, in effect, the same issue in both parts of the island of Ireland? Those people who have said that the people of Ireland have not been able to express their will since the 1918 election no longer have a hiding place—let no one forget that that excuse is now totally expunged from a valid record of Northern Ireland events.

Will the right hon. Lady confirm that she made a slip of the tongue in saying that 71 per cent. of people voted for peace? I know that she meant to say that those people voted for the agreement. I strongly endorse the remarks of hon. Members that many of the people who desperately want peace but did not have the conviction to vote for the agreement can be won by the Government's confidence and resolution in the weeks and months ahead.

Marjorie Mowlam: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his contribution, partly because I know what a tough time he had in doing my job—it was not easy in those days, so I appreciate his comments. The consent of the majority of people north and south is historically crucial. I accept his slight rebuke, in that people voted for the agreement, but I believe that the agreement was the best option for getting all the parties together. Agreement on the basis of consent has given us a chance that we have not had for years, and I appreciate the support that he has given today.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): May I add to the congratulations to politicians on both sides of the House my congratulations to the armed forces and to the police? If those people had not put their lives at risk—and, in many cases, lost their lives—in manning the front line for so many years, the men of violence would not have recognised the importance of making peace.

I re-emphasise a point on prisoner releases that I made during one of the Secretary of State's previous statements and which she seemed partly to acknowledge. Does she agree that one of the reasons why men of violence from both sides of the divide have been keen for the agreement is to secure the release from gaol of convicted murderers? Does she accept the importance of retaining the incentive to prevent such people from returning to violence? If it is proposed that convicted killers should be let out en bloc on licence, will she confirm that, if the peace agreement breaks down, they will be put back in gaol en bloc, and not only if they, as individuals, are caught committing another crime?

Marjorie Mowlam: May I set the record straight in a number of ways? There are no releases en bloc; each case is considered individually by an independent commission.

If there is any breach in the conditions on which a prisoner has been let out, the licence will be revoked and the prisoner will be put back in gaol.

The agreement will work only if all the parts move together. There is no general release of prisoners at one point in time. To build trust and confidence between the groups, we must move in parallel on the different elements—prisoners, decommissioning, the north-south ministerial council and the New Northern Ireland Assembly—if we are to make progress. If we do not move on one element, the agreement will not work. That is why the four factors to which I referred in my statement are central to this process, as will be reflected in the forthcoming Bills. Those four factors encapsulate the essence of the six pledges that the Prime Minister made in Coleraine.

Mr. Tim Collins (Westmorland and Lonsdale): Given the importance of the commitment, which the Secretary of State repeated today and which the Prime Minister originally made, that participation in the Executive of the Assembly will be contingent on full co-operation in decommissioning, will she confirm that, for that assessment, she will continue to treat Sinn Fein and the IRA as the same organisation?

Marjorie Mowlam: I have already said that Sinn Fein and the IRA are inextricably linked. I also said today that the agreement sets out arrangements for excluding people from office if they are not genuinely committed to peace. The Prime Minister has made it clear that if the arrangements are not working, we shall support changes to them. The overall judgment on whether parties are genuinely committed to peace will be based on the range of factors set out by the Prime Minister, which will, as I said, be given legislative expression in both Bills that will come before the House later this year.

Crown Prosecution Service

4.49 pm

The Attorney-General (Mr. John Morris): With permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a statement.

The report of the review of the Crown Prosecution Service has today been placed before Parliament and published. I set up the review on 12 June 1997, under the chairmanship of Sir Iain Glidewell, to examine the organisation and structure of the CPS and to consider what changes might be necessary to provide for more effective and efficient prosecution of crime. Its terms of reference reflected the widely held concerns expressed about the Crown Prosecution Service in the Labour party paper "The Case for the Prosecution", published shortly before the election.

The report concludes that the CPS has not achieved the improvement in the effectiveness and efficiency of the prosecution process that was expected to result from its establishment in 1986. It recognises a number of reasons for that, extending back to the earliest days of the service, and recommends significant change in the structure and form of management of the CPS. It also makes clear, however, that the CPS has achieved much in its short life in establishing itself as a cohesive, national and independent prosecuting service. Moreover, the review team is certain that it can overcome its problems and that it has the potential to become a lively, successful and esteemed part of the criminal justice system. Sadly, it adds, none of those adjectives applies at present to the service as a whole.

The report—which, in large measure, confirms the judgments that we formed in opposition—sets out an agenda for an organisation that is less centralised and in which lawyers spending less time on management and more on prosecuting. Our paper "The Case for the Prosecution" covered only one, but a very important, facet of the Government's programme of reforming the criminal justice system. That programme includes improving the management and organisation of the magistrates courts system, changes in the youth justice system and proposals for speeding up justice generally.

The core proposal for the CPS—a national headquarters setting clear standards and policies, but with implementation effected by better-run and more local organisations enjoying real autonomy—is fully in line with the Government's approach on a range of issues. While the Government are keen to see toughly audited targets for performance and priorities, they also want the professional to be left to get on with what the professional does best.

The report endorses the Government's decision, announced in May last year, to divide the CPS into 42 areas coterminous with police areas, and recommends that the reorganisation needed to give effect to that decision be used as an opportunity for a genuinely new start for the service.

The report is comprehensive in its analysis and recommendations. I shall mention a few highlights. It proposes that each of the new areas should be headed by a chief Crown prosecutor. The 42 chief Crown prosecutors will be crucial to the success of the new CPS. They must be people of stature in the local community

[Mr. John Morris]

who are recognised by local people as their chief prosecutors. They must be able to stand on equal terms with the chief constable, the local judiciary and other key players in the criminal justice system, and they must be recognised as being responsible, with them, for the effective delivery of criminal justice in the area.

The report makes recommendations aimed at ensuring that staff in the CPS should be allowed to get on with their core activity of prosecuting and be released from the burden of management. Moreover, it recognises the need for a better career structure for the staff of the service. The report proposes a radical and far-reaching reorganisation of the CPS. It proposes that the role of headquarters should, in addition to some casework responsibilities, be focused on core functions of setting the national framework and resourcing and monitoring the areas, and that a chief executive, who would rank second in the organisation to the Director of Public Prosecutions, should be appointed. That individual would be responsible to and work closely with the DPP, but would relieve him or her of the great bulk of managerial and administrative work.

The report's recommendations are intended to enable the CPS to handle cases in magistrates courts speedily, while devoting greater effort to more serious cases in both magistrates courts and the Crown court. It recommends that the CPS should take over the conduct of a prosecution immediately after the police charge the defendant and proposes that some support functions of the police service and the CPS, which often involve substantial duplication, should be undertaken by an integrated unit, staffed by a mixture of CPS lawyers and caseworkers assisted by police officers attached to the unit. The unit would prepare and deal with many straightforward cases in their entirety. These are innovative proposals which will need to be considered with special care.

The report also deals with the role of central casework—the section of the CPS that deals with very serious and sensitive cases from all over the country, such as terrorism and cases involving serious allegations against the police. The report describes a series of long-running problems in that section which are now being addressed. It endorses the need for realistic staffing, external recruitment, better training and improved casework audit procedures. It also recommends that central casework should not be treated as if it were like a geographical area, but should be incorporated into headquarters, where the unique nature of the work done and the need for special expertise can be recognised.

The Glidewell proposals add up to a real challenge, not only for the CPS but for the Government. We must examine them in the context of our existing initiatives. The review team's report contains much that accords with the Government's approach. In particular, it recognises the need for the agencies that make up the criminal justice system to have shared and mutually reinforcing objectives. It recognises that the problems of the CPS cannot be viewed in isolation from those of the other agencies that make up the criminal justice system and that the improvements to the system that are so urgently required will come not just from improving the individual parts, but from ensuring that the various agencies involved operate together better. That approach is fully in accord with the Government's approach in setting up the cross-cutting spending review of the criminal justice system.

The Government fully accept the need for change in the CPS. We intend to lose no time in starting the process. A first major step will be the selection of the 42 chief Crown prosecutors, a programme put into abeyance on the advice of the review team. The new DPP will proceed with that, once in post.

The announcement by the Director of Public Prosecutions on 20 May 1998 of her intention to stand aside before the end of her contractual period so that her successor can be appointed to drive forward the necessary change is a generous move, reflecting her commitment to the interests of the service. I pay warm tribute to Dame Barbara Mills for some nine years of public service, first as Director of the Serious Fraud Office and currently as DPP. In both cases, she has provided strong leadership, and her contribution will long be valued.

The report contains some 75 recommendations covering a wide range of issues. The Government accept the thrust of its proposals for reordering CPS priorities to focus more on the core business of prosecuting, greater separation of management from legal work, greater autonomy for the areas and better prospects for staff. We accept the recommendation for the appointment of a chief executive. Mr. Mark Addison has been appointed and will take up his appointment within a matter of days. Other recommendations relating to the more detailed internal management of the CPS will be for the chief executive to consider as one of his first steps.

A number of the recommendations affect the responsibilities of other Ministers, notably my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and my noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor. Decisions on those recommendations will be taken in consultation with them. It is important that our views be informed by contributions from as wide a range of sources as possible. Therefore, I invite interested organisations, practitioners and others who may be affected by, or otherwise wish to comment on, the proposals in the report to forward their views to me or my ministerial colleagues.

The Government will publish a formal response to the recommendations, setting out our response to each recommendation, whether it will be implemented, and if so how. A plan of action will also be drawn up and published.

The quality of the report shows the hard work and talent of the review team: Sir Iain Glidewell, Sir Geoffrey Dear, Mr. Robert McFarland and the secretariat to the team. I could not have expected more. I extend to them on behalf of the Government the warmest possible thanks.

Finally, I should like to pay my own tribute to the staff of the CPS. The report recognises in many passages their commitment and professionalism. I have seen that myself during visits, both before and after the election, to CPS branches. There is a strong desire for change in most, if not all, of the CPS. I know that the staff of the CPS are willing and able to take their proper place in the criminal justice system. I also know that they are the most precious resource of the CPS. They have undergone a period of intense and demoralising uncertainty during the review. I believe that today marks the beginning of a new way forward for the CPS and its staff. In the making of

the decisions for the future, the staff must be consulted. Their interests must be considered and implementation must be phased so as to minimise disruption to them.

I have no doubt that the talent, enthusiasm and commitment exist to permit the CPS to take its rightful place in the criminal justice system. Change is needed. The work of the review team provides us with a firm basis on which to make decisions for the future. While there is more work to be done, I believe that the process has now well and truly begun which will permit the CPS to become a more effective and esteemed national prosecuting body.

Sir Nicholas Lyell (North-East Bedfordshire): First, we join the Attorney-General in thanking Sir Iain Glidewell and his team for the obvious hard work that has gone into the report. I was glad to hear the Attorney-General's tribute to the Director of Public Prosecutions, Dame Barbara Mills, and I hope that he will not think it out of order if I express some regret that the spin doctors that the Labour party often so effectively employs in other fields were unable to prevent—or at least balance—the disgraceful hatchet job in *The Sunday Times* this weekend, which she did not deserve.

Does the Attorney-General agree that the key to the way forward is the close working together of the police, the Crown Prosecution Service, the Court Service, the judiciary and the probation service? For that reason, I am pleased to see the Home Secretary is sitting beside the right hon. and learned Gentleman.

The Labour party must be careful not to believe too much of its own propaganda. In its report before the election, "The Case for the Prosecution", much was made of the fact that crime had doubled and the number of prosecutions or convictions had dropped to a third. The impression was given that that was somehow the fault of the CPS. Does the Attorney-General accept that that is not and could not be the case? The CPS prosecutes the cases brought forward by the police and it prosecutes in an overwhelming proportion of those cases.

I am glad that the report recognises that there remains a strong need for a powerful central core to the CPS, which will need strong and effective leadership in the future. Can the Attorney-General tell us what is happening as regards the appointment of a new Director of Public Prosecutions? Will the post be advertised? From where is he seeking to find such a person? When does he hope to make the appointment?

Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman recognise that in appointing 42 new chief Crown prosecutors—one for each police area—he is to some extent substantially increasing a higher level of management? I do not criticise that, but does he recognise that the prime reason for focusing a chief Crown prosecutor on a police area is to emphasise that the police and the CPS have a joint responsibility and that it will take all the backing that the Home Secretary can give and that of chief constables—as well as anything that the right hon. and learned Gentleman can do—to enable a chief Crown prosecutor who, in many areas, has perhaps 30 lawyers and 100 support staff under his command to gain proper respect equivalent to that given to a chief constable, who has perhaps 1,200 officers?

On magistrates courts and the preparation of work there, if the CPS is to run effectively the administration support units that are at present run by the police, does the Attorney-General agree that two things will have to happen? First, the CPS will have to be given the necessary resources. They will have to come out of the criminal justice budget, and the Home Office may have to give some ground in that respect. Secondly, there are 60 police officers for every CPS lawyer and one cannot conjure out of thin air lawyers to run the administration support units. They will need effective backing from senior police officers to ensure that the units deliver effective prosecutions.

Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman recognise that he is following the course that we were taking? I am glad that he and the Home Secretary are also following that course in seeking to speed up cases into magistrates courts, through the Narey report. Can the right hon. and learned Gentleman confirm that that will continue?

At least a year before the election, I saw some valuable studies in which e-mailing techniques were being used between the police, the CPS and the Court Service. Surely it should be possible to take that forward rapidly so that those three services can communicate better. I accept that information technology has been a bugbear for the CPS over the years. Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman agree? What will be done to improve that situation?

I welcome the fact that there are to be contributions from outside before the Government finally deliver their response, but can we now expect an early response? Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman accept that the report has been published six months later than he originally believed and led us to believe, and that there is little time to lose? Finally, can we expect a debate in Government time on this important subject before too long?

The Attorney–General: I shall try to deal with the right hon. and learned Gentleman's catalogue of questions. He started by mentioning what he described as a hatchet job in *The Sunday Times*. I, too, deplore that unnecessary personal attack on the Director of Public Prosecutions. I would not be responsible for allowing any spin doctor to do that. Indeed, the reverse would be true.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman may take a great deal of comfort on liaison with the police. Joint units are complicated and need to be carefully worked out, but they will require considerable discussion involving me, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, the Lord Chancellor's Department and the Association of Chief Police Officers. I believe that they are the right way to prevent one side blaming the other—a practice which used to prevail much more than it does now, but which I have experienced dozens of times in court. I want to bring that to an end.

I want high-calibre chief Crown prosecutors in each of the 42 areas. We will do away with the 13 areas set up in 1993, which were approved by the right hon. and learned Gentleman. Although some advantages have obtained from that reorganisation, including the welding of a better national system, Sir Iain Glidewell and his team have found, perhaps with hindsight, that it was a mistake. Whatever the intention, the system resulted in each area headquarters becoming an extension of the principal headquarters. Real devolution has not taken place, which is the defect of the previous reorganisation.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman is absolutely right to say that resources have to be considered whenever there is a new arrangement regarding the police and the

[The Attorney-General]

CPS. If the CPS takes more responsibility for managing cases after charge, including warning witnesses, comforting victims and matters of that kind, I believe cardinally—I have believed it all the years I have been a Minister—that no decision should be taken on the transfer of departmental responsibility without a decision at the same time about resources. It is no good complaining years later about lack of resources; the decision should be taken at the same time, as we have all learnt from experience. I am determined that that will happen.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman takes particular interest in speeding up justice. The object of the new arrangements is to streamline cases to avoid overlap and duplication and to shorten lines of communication between the investigator and the prosecutor.

There are detailed proposals on information technology. The Government are considering better means of ensuring a closer interface between various IT systems. When I was a young Minister in 1964, there were 12 gas boards and 12 electricity boards, and I took no comfort from the fact that each ordered its own computers. The situation has not changed a great deal, but we hope to do something about that, if very late in the day.

On the right hon. and learned Gentleman's point about our reporting six months late, I must say that we promised in "The Case for the Prosecution" that the report would be completed within a year of our taking office. Today is 1 June, so we are only a month after that date. I had hoped that it would be done earlier, and have from time to time indicated that it would be done earlier, but I do not believe that the right hon. and learned Gentleman has a great deal of room for complaint that we have missed the date by a month. Despite our hopes that it would be done more quickly, it was necessary that Sir Iain and his team should carry out full consultation, and they have done so.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman asked for a debate in Government time. He knows that that is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, who will have heard his words.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): I endorse my right hon. and learned Friend's tribute to Dame Barbara Mills. Whatever has gone wrong in the Crown Prosecution Service, it would be quite wrong to blame her.

Has obstruction by the police played any part in CPS difficulties? My right hon. and learned Friend will recall that the police resolutely opposed the independent prosecution service when it was first set up.

Would the CPS's problems be alleviated if its lawyers had rights of audience in the higher courts? When Dame Barbara Mills last came before the Home Affairs Committee, she said that the Bar Council was being obstructive on that.

Does my right hon. and learned Friend have any plans to deal with returned briefs, a problem endemic in the criminal justice system? Lawyers discover, often at the last moment, that something more interesting or immediate has turned up, which leads to severe difficulties.

The Attorney-General: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's remarks because, as Chairman of the Home Affairs Committee, he keeps a close watch on developments. When the CPS was set up there were difficulties between the police and the new organisation, but the whole idea of the new organisation was to separate investigation from prosecution. The independent reviewing of cases was the main reason for creation of the CPS. There were bound to be difficulties, but, in my experience the situation has improved enormously over the years. We want to build on that, and closer liaison and better machinery—the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Sir N. Lyell) attaches importance to it—will help us get over any remaining difficulty. There is a real need to speed up prosecutions as effectively and efficiently as possible. I hope that the Government can find the machinery to do so in these recommendations.

Sir Iain Glidewell and his team have commended what has already been done on limited rights of audience for the CPS. Further rights are a matter for my noble Friend the Lord Chancellor, who is concerned about that point.

The Home Affairs Committee, the National Audit Office and Sir Iain have all written a great deal on the return of briefs. The CPS will have to consider that issue carefully and, although I do not detract from Sir Iain's comments, there is a need for great improvement.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): We welcome the Glidewell report and congratulate Sir Iain and his team. We hope that we will soon have an opportunity to debate this important matter in the House, but welcome the establishment of 42 areas that will have significant autonomy.

The Attorney-General will agree that justice must be seen to be done, and be open and accountable. When the CPS decides not to prosecute, will he ensure that it gives its reasons? We understand that the CPS has to work closely with the police, but it is vital that it should be independent of the police. That is a difficult balance. What safeguards does he propose in sensitive areas, such as prosecutions of police officers? How much work is being done by unqualified staff at the CPS? Is he satisfied that there are sufficient experienced, legally qualified staff not only to cope with the burden of cases but to do so efficiently and expeditiously? More than anything else, that would restore the morale of the CPS and the public's faith in it.

The Attorney-General: I have already dealt with the question of a debate.

I welcome the hon. Gentleman's comments on the areas, which we regard as important. That is why we decided on the matter within weeks of taking office. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and I attach considerable importance to having chief constables responsible for areas that are coterminous with those of the chief Crown prosecutors. I believe that that is an important step.

Sir Iain and his team considered decisions not to prosecute, or to downgrade an offence, closely. Such decisions are of public concern, and many hon. Members—I for one—receive letters from constituents on them. Unfortunately, the statistics and the evidence are not clear. The team said that there are suspicions that downgrading happens. It varies in respect of particular offences and of different areas. These are matters of

concern, and further work needs to be done. As the hon. Gentleman said, it is vital that justice is seen to be done. Where someone has committed, or is alleged to have committed, an offence, he should be charged with an appropriate offence.

There is considerable emphasis in the report on unqualified staff, and qualified staff who hope to exercise their rights of audience in the Crown court, having adequate and proper training. I believe that they have an important role to play if they have such training.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): My right hon. and learned Friend knows that the House feels that this report is long overdue. The service had become constipated, incompetent and sadly lacking in leadership. The sooner action is taken, the better. Can he assure us that the reorganisation back to local units that are truly responsive to local needs will be undertaken as soon as possible? Will there be an audit of the quality of casework undertaken by those units? Above all, can he assure us that the public will no longer be subjected to cases being allowed to drag on for five years before they are finally lost?

The Attorney-General: I know of my hon. Friend's concern with a particular case. I have written to her substantially about her very real concern. She knows my interest in the matter.

The intention is to implement the report as rapidly as possible. That is what we did by setting up the 42 areas and what I do today by announcing the chief executive. I did not deal with this in my reply to the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Sir N. Lyell)—I should have told him that, in the summer months, the new Director of Public Prosecutions will be appointed by open competition, following advertisement. We hope that he or she will be in place by the autumn.

I assure my hon. Friend that all the other facets of reorganisation will be done as soon as possible. We have taken all the steps possible, but I was anxious that we should have the evidence before moving further than establishing the 42 areas. Sir Iain has provided me with the evidence, chapter and verse, so that I can go on, in concert with my right hon. Friends, to ensure that we deliver the parts of the Glidewell report that we deem, on further consideration, to be right and proper. It is a very detailed, careful and well worked out report.

There are proposals for expanding and enhancing the Crown Prosecution Service inspectorate by having a lay chairman and lay members on the committee that will oversee it. We attach importance to that, as we did in opposition.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): The report has much to commend it. I welcome the references to integrated units. The Attorney-General mentioned that in the past there were—I believe that they are still current—some areas where relations between the police and prosecutors were not as good as they should have been. Implementing the integrated units will go far to ensure better co-operation and better quality of service all round. I was pleased by the report's reference to prosecutors coming in earlier in the process, thereby applying the prosecution guidelines earlier in the process. That, too, has much to commend it.

The Attorney-General: The hon. Gentleman has considerable experience in the criminal field—professionally, of course. *[Laughter.]* I knew that I would do that; it was not intended. Both as a solicitor and now as a barrister, he is well acquainted with the problems in the service. I accept and value his comments. There is a need for integration. The interface is better, but there is a need for improvement. Hence Sir Iain and his team have set out distinct proposals that someone should take over the process of prosecution once the charge has been preferred. I hope that it will be done jointly between the police and the CPS, but the exact machinery needs to be considered carefully. I hope that it will achieve the aims that the hon. Gentleman has in mind. There is a need for improvement if we are to have speedy justice. That underlines his proposal, which I must reserve the need to consider, that the CPS, should take charge, if we approve of the proposal, of prosecutions earlier. I hope that that reassures him.

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): My right hon. and learned Friend was a distinguished Secretary of State for Wales in previous Administrations. How does his statement point to a much better service in Wales, especially in north-east Wales, where it has received criticism? Recent changes in magistrates courts have been controversial. I hope that the changes that he presages today will be less controversial. Can he confirm that Wales will not have American-style district attorneys?

The Attorney-General: Perhaps I may kill off that expression once and for all. I have no intention of having American-style district attorneys. I do not know where that came from and I am not the parent—or grandparent—of the description. They have quite different responsibilities. Some, if not all, district attorneys take part in the investigative process as well, and some are elected. I do not propose to go along that road any more than with the election of judges, which also takes place in many parts of the United States.

There are four police areas in Wales and there will be four chief Crown prosecutors in Wales. I am confident that the system in Wales will rise to the needs of the situation in exactly the same way as will the system in England.

Mr. Ross Cranston (Dudley, North): May I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on the appointment of Sir Iain Glidewell so soon after the election? It was a key manifesto commitment and he implemented it quickly. Knowing Sir Iain, I am sure that his is a full report, but may I raise one matter that does not seem to have been dealt with so far—excessive bureaucracy? My casual observation in court suggests that it is an important problem and when I visited my local CPS in Wolverhampton, the staff seemed to have files running out of their ears. Does Sir Iain's report address that important problem and make recommendations about dealing with the excessive paperwork?

The Attorney-General: I agree with my hon. Friend—it was certainly my impression when I toured a few of the CPS branches before the election that lawyers would complain that far too much of their time was taken up in form filling. How far those forms are read at the end of the day I know not, but the Glidewell report makes it clear that 400 of the senior prosecutors—the senior lawyers in the CPS—devote only a third of their time to case

[The Attorney-General]

advocacy and the preparation of cases, so there must be something wholly wrong. Sir Iain has said—I commend that part of his report with great pleasure—that much greater autonomy should granted to the chief Crown prosecutors in each area and that while, obviously, the headquarters in London should have responsibility for standards, ensuring that resources are available and monitoring, there should be a great slimming down of unnecessary bureaucracy in a system that is undoubtedly over-centralised. I am confident that we can achieve that.

Mr. David Lock (Wyre Forest): I am grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend for bringing the report before the House. As a former barrister who used to prosecute for the CPS in magistrates courts, I know not only that the amount of paperwork generated by each case is substantial, but that the law is complicated and the job that prosecutors do is extremely difficult. Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that lawyers are better being lawyers and managers are better managing? I hope that he can tell us that the Glidewell report will ensure that, in future, lawyers and managers will each do what they do best and that we will get a better prosecution service as a result.

The Attorney-General: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his remarks. The main ethos—the main thrust—of the Glidewell report is to ensure that lawyers do what they do best, which is prosecuting, and that managers play their part, which is an equally important part of the whole. After all, some people become lawyers because they want to practise the law, not because they want to practise management. My hon. Friend is right; there is an excessive amount of paper. Although it has been slimmed down over the years, there is more work to be done.

Mr. Andrew Dismore (Hendon): I welcome my right hon. and learned Friend's commitment to employing a chief executive for the Crown Prosecution Service. That mirrors recent experience in private practice in large solicitors firms, which have been effective in appointing chief executives, so freeing lawyers' time for lawyering rather than managing. Allowing lawyers to do lawyering is probably one of the best ways of raising morale in the CPS, because it allows them to get on with the job for which they were trained. Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that unqualified CPS staff are every bit as valuable as qualified staff and that, in many cases, unqualified staff with a lot of experience can do the job as well as, if not better than, qualified people?

The Attorney-General: The chief executive will play an important part in the future administration of the CPS and, as I said, I hope that he or she will be in post before the end of the week. Undoubtedly, and regrettably, morale has been low. That problem has been ignored over the years. Surveys that have been carried out—disagreed with by some and agreed with by others—have a common ground of highlighting low morale in the service. I believe that our proposals will be warmly welcomed.

As regards unqualified staff, I am old enough to remember the senior managing clerks who used to play a formidable role in the Inner London quarter sessions and all the other courts; they knew far more about the law and practice than many lawyers and I attached great importance to their role. There is an important role in the CPS for unqualified staff with proper training and standards. I want to ensure that both go hand in hand.

Orders of the Day

PETROLEUM BILL *[LORDS]*

Read a Second time.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 58 (Consolidation Bills),

That the Bill be not committed.—*[Mr. McFall.]*

Question agreed to.

Read the Third time, and passed, without amendment.

AUDIT COMMISSION BILL *[LORDS]*

Read a Second time.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 58 (Consolidation Bills),

That the Bill be not committed.—*[Mr. McFall.]*

Question agreed to.

Read the Third time, and passed, without amendment.

National Lottery Bill *[Lords]*

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

New clause 2

ADDITIONALITY

'. In Section 25 of the 1993 Act (Application of money by distributing bodies) after subsection (4) there shall be inserted—

"(5) A body shall distribute any money paid to it under section 24 only in areas that are not the responsibility of government.".'.—*[Mr. Spring.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

5.36 pm

Mr. Richard Spring (West Suffolk): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following: New clause 3—*Additionality (No. 2)*—

'. In Section 25 of the 1993 Act (Application of money by distributing bodies) after subsection (4) there shall be inserted—

"(5) A body shall not distribute any money paid to it under section 24 where it would substitute for funds that would otherwise have been provided by conventional public expenditure.".'.

Amendment No. 7, in clause 7, page 8, line 37, leave out 'such'.

Amendment No. 2, in page 8, line 39, leave out from 'environment' to end of line 40.

Amendment No. 3, in page 9, line 9, at end insert—

'(5) The New Opportunities Fund shall be a body for the purposes of sections 24 to 27 and 34 of the 1993 Act.'.

Amendment No. 4, in page 9, line 10, leave out from beginning to end of line 30.

Mr. Spring: In Committee, we had the extraordinary experience of seeing Labour Members voting, again and again, against their own manifesto commitment. The irony appeared to be lost on them, which is a reflection of their attitude toward their manifesto.

The new clause would bring additionality to the heart of the Bill. Of all the important issues relating to the Bill, it is on additionality that there is a huge gap between what the Government avow and what they are actually doing. The Government claim—no doubt we shall hear it again today—that they remain committed to the arm's-length principle, but, by any objective standard, that is manifestly not true. We shall clearly outline that failure in Government thinking this afternoon.

The Government claim to be holding to the principle of additionality, but, again, that is demonstrably not true. The proposals to deprive the original good causes of a share of the proceeds of the lottery are designed to enable the Government to divert money to finance their failing political agenda. That is a shabby piece of opportunism, made worse by the Government's hypocrisy and their determination to maintain that they are not breaking the principle they so vigorously sought to defend when in opposition. In Committee, the Government rejected Opposition amendments that would have clearly enshrined, without a shadow of doubt, the principle of additionality. The Minister rejected them, saying that

[Mr. Spring]

although the Opposition had made a reasonable attempt to define additionality, we had not been successful in doing so. That argument lies at the heart of the Bill.

We remain deeply concerned about the precedent set by the Government's decision to divert money from the good causes for which the lottery was originally set up to matters such as health, education and, eventually, environmental projects. We are trying again to persuade the Government of the virtue of our thinking and the importance of maintaining the integrity of the national lottery. We are trying to persuade them to incorporate a requirement to adhere to the principle of additionality in the Bill, in an effort to prevent the Bill from being a form of voluntary taxation and, indeed, an outpost of the Treasury. I trust that, this time, on further reflection, the Minister will not so airily dismiss the points made by the Opposition.

The Prime Minister's commitment to additionality was made clear in the White Paper, "The People's Lottery". The definition in new clause 3 is, apparently, that preferred by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport. The White Paper clearly stated that the Labour party was not abandoning the additionality principle. The Prime Minister is quoted as committing the Government to additionality when he said:

"We don't believe it would be right to use Lottery money to pay for things which are the Government's responsibilities".

We entirely agree with that. If only the Government could act according to the spirit of the Prime Minister's comments.

New clause 2 is based specifically on the point made by the Prime Minister. It would insert in section 25 of the National Lottery etc. Act 1993, which deals with the application of money by distributing bodies, a new provision, subsection (5), which says:

"A body shall distribute any money paid to it under section 24 only in areas that are not the responsibility of government."

I trust that the Minister will recognise that wording, which echoes the words of the Secretary of State, and the integrity of what the Opposition are trying to do to ensure, in turn, the integrity of the national lottery.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross): Will the hon. Gentleman clarify whether, in terms of the new clause, he believes that the arts should not be regarded as being within the responsibility of Government?

Mr. Spring: It is perfectly fair for the right hon. Gentleman to refer to the arts. Of course that is an area on which Government money has traditionally been spent. The difficulty with the Bill, as he will be aware, is that it deprives the arts of money and, because lottery money may be substituted for Government money, it thereby deprives the original good causes of an additional sum. That is the danger about which many people in the arts are legitimately concerned.

I hope that the Government will not dismiss new clause 2 by claiming that it uses an inadequate definition of additionality. New clause 3 is based on the definition that the Secretary of State says that he prefers. In Committee, the Government rejected an Opposition amendment that would have enshrined in the Bill the principle of additionality and—I make this point very clearly to Government Members—that was identical to an amendment tabled by Labour Front-Bench Members during the passage of the 1993 Act. There we have it. The Minister for Arts dismissed the amendment, claiming that it was a reasonable effort, but an inadequate definition—it was Labour's own definition. That demonstrates that Labour's view of what is additional has been changed to accommodate its new proposal—to grasp money from the existing good causes to put towards its political agenda.

On Second Reading, the Secretary of State said:

"I shall quote . . . a passage in the reply given to the Select Committee on National Heritage, as it then was, in July 1996 by the then Secretary of State for National Heritage, the right hon. Member for South–West Surrey (Mrs. Bottomley). She said very clearly—this is the precise definition of additionality:

'Lottery funds are not intended to substitute for funds which would otherwise have been provided by conventional public expenditure'.

We stand firmly by that principle; there is nothing in the Bill that undermines it."—[*Official Report*, 7 April 1998; Vol. 310, c. 162.]

New clause 3 would, therefore, insert in section 25 of the 1993 Act, which deals with the application of money by distributing bodies, a provision that:

"A body shall not distribute any money paid to it under section 24 where it would substitute for funds that would otherwise have been provided by conventional public expenditure."

I trust that the Minister recognises that the wording of the new clause comes directly from that of the Secretary of State. If Government Members reject the new clause, we shall be in the ridiculous situation whereby they reject the Secretary of State's words. We are making it easy for the Secretary of State. How can he seek to reject his own words? I trust that he will have no objection to the inclusion of the new clause in the Bill.

The reason why the Opposition object so strongly to the new opportunities fund—this is why we tabled the new clause—is that it flagrantly breaches the additionality principle. The lottery was established to fund initiatives—it was done with cross-party support and true nobility of intent—that are additional to core Government spending programmes funded from taxation. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) said on a number of occasions, these are areas that have traditionally been under-resourced by Governments of whatever political complexion.

5.45 pm

No one can seriously believe that the Government are committed to additionality in practice. The hon. Member for Hove (Mr. Caplin) certainly does not. In an outbreak of candour that must have had his pager humming for at least 48 hours, he said in an "On the Record" interview:

"I think what we said in Opposition was clear, and it was right at the time that the lottery was introduced. But what we have now is a situation where the Budget spending level is set, and we have said that we are going to stick to that level for two years. I think it's right that a Government can say, 'We have a different view of how the lottery should operate.' That is a view that we've consulted on. We've received the consultations back and we're now developing a Bill to reflect these priorities, so I don't think there's anything wrong with that. I don't think they're compromising the lottery in any way".

All I say to the hon. Member for Hove is that if he does not recognise Alice in Wonderland, here it is in black and white. He no doubt now has a bright future behind him.

The new opportunities fund represents a significant departure from the original purpose of the national lottery, which was set up to fulfil a Conservative manifesto pledge to

"restore our heritage and promote projects which will become a source of national pride".

Mr. David Prior (North Norfolk): Does my hon. Friend agree that the only safeguard against diverting lottery funds into core Government spending areas is for the money to be distributed by bodies that are genuinely at arm's length from the Government, and that it is the breach of the arm's-length principle which compromises additionality more than any other factor?

Mr. Spring: My hon. Friend is exactly right because the centralising, control-freak tendency that is part and parcel of the way in which the Government seek to do business, and which is manifest in the Bill, is damaging to the future success of the lottery.

The Government claim that the Bill is a matter of fine-tuning the national lottery and that it only puts right problems that have arisen since the creation of the lottery. There are, indeed, elements of the Bill to which we have no objection. However, the Government's view that they are remaining true to the original principles on which the lottery was established certainly does not have foundation. The Secretary of State has affected to be mystified that the Opposition have not been lining up to support the Bill.

I simply challenge the Minister to explain how the homework clubs, child care and teacher training that he proposes to fund from the lottery accord with its original aims, which were set out in 1992, to

"restore our heritage and promote projects which will become a source of national pride".

They do not—that is the simple truth. The original intention of the national lottery was to focus on areas of expenditure that were traditionally under-resourced by Government.

The initiatives that have been put forward under the umbrella of the Bill fall directly under the remit of the Secretaries of State for Education and Employment and for Social Security. Apparently, they were rejected by the Treasury and the Secretary of State's great friend and admirer, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who was not prepared to spend taxpayers' money on them, so the raid on the lottery has taken place. Of the schemes that the Government propose to fund from the new opportunities fund, teacher training, education and public health programmes have traditionally—there is no escape from this—been funded by general taxation. The Government admitted that in a series of written answers.

The proposals are the thin end of the wedge. The legislation will give the Government power to divert money to any of their pet projects, providing an alternative to money from taxation. The Government's response to that accusation is that they have not breached the additionality principle, that the initiatives that they have announced are additional to core spending and that Governments have not previously funded such programmes. That is simply untrue.

Mr. Tim Collins (Westmorland and Lonsdale): Does my hon. Friend agree that matters are getting worse? If the lead story in today's issue of *The Times* is to be believed, the Chancellor has imposed an absolute cap on public spending for the remainder of the Parliament. That will mean that raids on the lottery will increase in frequency and in scale.

Mr. Spring: My hon. Friend makes exactly the right point. There has already been an increase in Government spending, with European Union rebates and a Treasury underspend. More and more will be taken from the lottery because all the early pledges on education and health are manifestly failing, and people clearly know that.

It is flagrantly incorrect to say that the Government are somehow separating spending on the proposed new programmes from what has gone before. That is sheer sophistry. Even if the initiatives were genuinely new, they would still fail the additionality test because they relate to areas for which Governments traditionally accept responsibility—health, education and the environment. In Committee, the Minister for Arts amply demonstrated the absurdity of the Government's case when he was challenged by my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) to provide an example of spending that would breach the Government's new definition of additionality.

My hon. Friend said:

"I have repeatedly tried to think of a project that would breach additionality under the new, wholly elastic definition, but have not been able to do so. I hope that the Minister will be able to give one or two examples, and I would be happy to give way to any member of the Committee who can. The fact is that additionality will now mean whatever Ministers want it to mean."

Of course it was impossible to find an example; perhaps the Minister can work harder to try to find one today. Under the Government's new, narrower definition, no spending breaches the additionality principle, provided it is additional to existing spending. However, spending from the lottery is, by definition, additional.

The fraudulent nature of the Government's case was clearly demonstrated by the Minister's wholly inadequate responses to my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne. The Minister employed the traditional Front-Bench trick of trying not to answer questions. He said that there were no examples of breaches of additionality because the Government had not breached the principle. He said:

"The hon. Member for Eastbourne was incapable of finding an example of expenditure that had replaced Government funding. That holds true throughout the history of the national lottery under the previous Government and during the past year under this Government."

When challenged to refute the suggestion that the Government had introduced the Bill specifically to breach the additionality principle, the Minister fell back on the Secretary of State's definition, which is, effectively, "If it is lottery money, it is by definition additional." He said:

"It is vital to make a distinction between grant and aid, or core Government expenditure, and expenditure by the national lottery."

At the third attempt, the Minister at last came up with two examples that would not be eligible for money from the new opportunities fund because they would breach additionality. He said:

"The hon. Member for Eastbourne asked whether it would support hospital beds or text books. He wanted an example of Government expenditure that would not be eligible for the fund and, inadvertently, gave two such examples. The fund will not fund hospital beds or text books."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 30 April 1998; c. 125-32.]

[Mr. Spring]

However, under the Government's definition, there is no reason on earth for the new opportunities fund not to fund text books and hospital beds in due course. We shall simply wait to see. We already know that it will fund the digitisation of material in public libraries and services that are already offered by general practitioners. It will simply be a short leap to text books and hospital beds, or whatever is politically expedient, to echo the words of my hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins) about the supposed rigour of the Chancellor's public spending limits.

The Government will pay for teacher training from the new opportunities fund although they have already admitted that they currently provide £296.8 million to train serving teachers under the grants for education support and training programme, approximately 5 per cent. of which is spent on information technology training. Money from the budget of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport is spent on training library staff despite the fact that the Government plan to use the lottery for such funding.

Tellingly, the Chancellor announced in his pre-Budget statement that the Government intended to set up child care schemes, the cost of which would be met by the Treasury and the new opportunities fund. He did not even seek to disguise that fact. He said:

"Funds will be available to set up as many as 30,000 new out-of-school clubs, which will provide places for almost 1 million children. The total cost over five years is £300 million, which is now budgeted for in our plans and represents the biggest ever investment in child care. The cost will be shared between the Exchequer and the new opportunities fund . . . A national child care strategy is no longer the ambition of workless parents; it is now the policy of this country's Government".—[*Official Report*, 25 November 1997; Vol. 301, c. 777.]

There was no attempt to disguise the fact that, according to the Chancellor, Government policy is being paid for by the lottery. Despite the Secretary of State's claim that out-of-school-hours activities are not part of core statutory school provision, which course it is, of course, the Government's responsibility to fund, it is clear that the Government already provide money for out-of-school child care initiatives from the Department for Education and Employment budget. There we have it in black and white; it totally contradicts the spirit of what the national lottery was destined to be when it was set up, and it certainly contradicts the basis on which the lottery has been such a success.

Healthy living centres will compete either with NHS services, particularly those of GP fundholders and other primary health care providers, or with private sector health clubs, or both. Almost all the services that the healthy living centres will provide are already provided by GPs through the taxpayer-funded national health service. It is arguable that the whole basis of the NHS has moved further towards the provision of primary care. That was highlighted and emphasised in the White Paper, "Health of the Nation", and it is encouraging that, in the past few years, there has been such a focus on primary care and preventive medicine. The White Paper makes it clear that healthy living centres are to be part of the Government's health care provision. The document states:

"healthy living centres will play an important role in the Government's public health strategy".

Mr. Ivor Caplin (Hove): Hear, hear.

Mr. Spring: The hon. Gentleman says, "Hear, hear", but we are debating taxpayer-funded activities within the NHS being paid for by the lottery, at the expense of good causes. If, after sitting for weeks in Committee, he does not understand the importance of that, he understands nothing. The Government's published analysis of the responses to the White Paper makes it clear that many of the responding organisations, such as local government, health, education and voluntary service organisations, were concerned that the new opportunities fund would simply be used to replace rather than add to core Government spending.

The document states:

"A section of respondents from the education sector argued strongly that some of the proposed areas of activity and interest in the New Opportunities Fund, (as well as NESTA), especially the training of teachers and librarians to use and teach information and communications technology, and out of school hours activities are core to the education mission. There were doubts and uncertainties amongst the same groups about whether the principle of additionality could be adhered to. Some education authorities and professional bodies as well as campaign groups were clear that this principle would not continue to be supported over time, and that this should be faced up to openly".

6 pm

The respondents to the White Paper who strongly supported the establishment of the new opportunities fund demonstrated, in doing so, how clearly the Government are breaching the additionality principle and how the lottery is destined to become, tragically, the engine of the Government. Many of those respondents were concerned that initiatives funded by the lottery should be co-ordinated with other aspects of Government policy. "Analysis of Responses to the Lottery White Paper Proposals" states:

"There was a very positive welcome for developing Information and Communications Technology training programmes for teachers and librarians, consistently linked with the proviso that the programme should fit in with other DFEE initiatives. There was a particular concern that the apparent synergy between this White Paper and the *Excellence in Schools* White Paper should be captured. The *Excellence in Schools* White Paper proposes to increase levels of literacy, numeracy and information and communications technology skills. It was important that the Lottery initiative neither conflicted with nor repeated these initiatives".

Similarly:

"For example, one local authority said that it hoped that the development of Healthy Living Centres would be firmly placed within the broader public health remit of the White Paper *Our Healthier Nation*".

In Committee, Labour Members not only made it clear that they supported the Government's decision to breach the additionality principle, but unashamedly admitted that they looked forward to taking credit for some of the Government's schemes. I can just imagine, as the next general election approaches, lottery-funded schemes being sold as being somehow a Government initiative, paid for by the taxpayer and of some great benefit, purely for party

political reasons. My hon. Friends and I had the clear impression that Labour Members were simply drooling at the prospect of this raid on the lottery providing things that they might find electorally attractive in their constituencies. As the expert in these matters, the Minister for Sport, will know, photo opportunities galore appear to be very much in their mind.

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Tony Banks): I feel a photo opportunity coming on now.

Mr. Spring: I fear that the Minister may be disappointed.

There is another, more practical test of additionality. I confidently look forward to seeing queues of anxious Labour Members lining up to try to take credit for initiatives that have been funded from the lottery via the new opportunities fund even if, in the words of the Prime Minister, they are not the responsibility of Government. I hope only that they will have the decency—although I doubt it—to own up to the fact that these things will have come about at a certain cost, and that that will be faced by the good causes and the arts, heritage, charity and sports projects that should have received the money that has been diverted into the new opportunities fund to suit the Government's political agenda.

We all know what is going on here. Peter Riddell was correct when he wrote in *The Times* on 6 April of the proposal to create the new opportunities fund:

"a Treasury raid it still is, to evade tight limits on public spending and to find new sources of revenue without having to raise taxes."

There we have it. The Government have not lost the itch to spend. They happen just to be spending money from the national lottery at the expense of the arts, sport, the heritage and the caring charities. It gives new meaning to the seven-year itch.

Amendments Nos. 7, 2, 3 and 4 seek to re-establish the arm's-length principle in the distribution of lottery money, which, again, is under threat from the Bill. It is not only my hon. Friends and I who are concerned about that. For example, the Sports Council said in a letter:

"We believe that the arms length principle between government and the Lottery distributing bodies should be maintained, and that the new power given to the Secretary of State to instruct us to 'comply' with directions to delegate to specific organisations is too prescriptive.

We are also concerned that the powers on the Secretary of State to issue directions to us in relation to our distributing strategies should not be too prescriptive. Delegate bodies must demonstrate that they can effectively account for expenditure of lottery funds."

Here again we come to what is at the heart of our objections to the Bill. The Government claim, as they have on additionality, that they are adhering to the arm's-length principle, but, if that is true, why are they introducing in the Bill many powers that will enable them clearly to breach that principle by controlling how lottery money is spent?

Obviously, I accept that the Secretary of State has the existing power under the National Lottery etc. Act 1993 to give directions to the distributing bodies. That is not in dispute, but the Government recently published new directions that will, in effect, reduce the lottery's efficiency and its overall impact by allowing the distribution bodies to dispense with the requirements for matching funds to enable them to carry out the Government's political objectives.

That unwelcome development will, yet again, reduce the lottery's effectiveness and ultimately the public's faith in the national lottery, which stands at a high level at present. It will reduce the overall purchasing power of lottery funds; it represents a drift from encouraging initiative to fostering dependence. As ever, the Labour party is filled with rhetoric, but entirely misses the critical point that so endangers the success of the national lottery. The powers proposed for the Secretary of State in the Bill represent a wholly new departure from arrangements for the good causes in the 1993 Act. We object in principle to the idea of the lottery being used to fund areas that are the absolute responsibility of Government, but we also strongly object to the introduction of the order-making power in the Bill, which effectively gives the Secretary of State control of the new opportunities fund.

We have a flavour of what is to come in the draft directions for the new opportunities fund. We see, for example, that the Secretary of State has already given a direction that healthy living centres should cover 20 per cent. of the country. One can argue, "Why not 15 or 25 per cent?" It is an arbitrary decision, made on a political basis. The new opportunities fund has, in a sense, had its instructions made in advance.

If the Government planned to respect the arm's-length principle, they would have set up the new opportunities fund in the same way as the other good causes were set up. There is no need to have done it in this way. They would not have proposed an order-making power for the Secretary of State to specify on an ad hoc basis how the money in the fund should be spent. To enable them to get their hands on the proceeds of the lottery to supplement general public expenditure, the Government have dramatically increased the Secretary of State's control over the lottery.

That order-making power does not exist in respect of any of the other good causes and was simply not envisaged when the lottery was first conceived, when both sides rigorously defended the arm's-length principle. It is a great tribute to those who introduced the Bill in 1993 that that principle being enshrined in legislation was approved by all hon. Members. It was achieved with true nobility of purpose. Why, therefore, is it being changed? The Government are incapable of providing a satisfactory answer.

The Bill contains deliberately vague definitions of health, education and the environment. It enables the Secretary of State to make ad hoc decisions. Can the Government offer any other explanation or justification for including this order-making power, which is a great departure from previous legislation, other than that it will enable the Secretary of State flagrantly to use the lottery to pursue the Government's political agenda?

It is extremely unfortunate for the long-term health and success of the lottery that the new opportunities fund will, unlike the other good causes, be under direct ministerial control. That is directly in conflict with the arm's-length principle supported by both parties when the original Bill was enacted, and it was much prized by the lottery industry.

The Secretary of State and his successors will be able to specify new causes that will benefit from lottery money without further reference to Parliament. There is no point

[Mr. Spring]

the Minister telling us that new initiatives will have to be approved by affirmative resolution. In Committee, he said:

"I want to make one further point clear, which I hope the hon. Gentleman will consider before, I hope, deciding to withdraw his amendment. He raises the spectre of the Secretary of State extending matters further: any further initiatives, over and above those in which the New Opportunities Fund will get involved, will—as he will appreciate from his close reading of the Bill—require affirmative resolution of the House. So, the powers remain with the House, rather than the Secretary of State."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 28 April 1998; c. 70.]

How can the Minister sit there with a straight face believing that that in any way justifies the centralisation of power to the Secretary of State? That is utterly absurd. It was not the crowning parliamentary explanation of the Minister's life. He knows perfectly well that affirmative resolution is not the same as primary legislation: it will not require any measure of public support.

Was the Minister really suggesting that an order-making power receives anything like the same scrutiny as a Bill during its passage? Of course it does not. Is he suggesting that the Secretary of State would have difficulty getting such measures approved by Parliament? The Government will not even have a proper debate on their proposals. Parliamentary scrutiny of something as important to the life of the nation as the lottery is crucial for its continued acceptance by the public and for its continued success, but the Government reject such a provision.

By contrast, as the Minister knows full well, the 1993 Act required primary legislation to divert money from the original five good causes. This Bill gives the Secretary of State a mechanism to pay for any new scheme he chooses to fund. In Committee in the other place, the Minister admitted that the new opportunities fund was fundamentally different from the other distributing bodies in the way in which it was being set up and would operate. Lord McIntosh of Haringey said:

"Of course, the relationship between the Secretary of State and the new opportunities fund, as proposed in the Bill, is different from that which exists between the Secretary of State and the other lottery distributors. There is no pretence otherwise."

We are grateful for the candour of one Minister at least.

Lord McIntosh went further when he made it clear that the activities of the new opportunities fund had deliberately not been clearly defined. The Bill has been drafted to give the Government maximum room for manoeuvre. Lord McIntosh said:

"The relationship is different because the new good cause is different. The existing good causes are pretty well defined and the distributors are in the main well established as expert bodies within their fields. In the case of sport and the arts, the distributors are the key sectoral bodies; the Heritage Lottery Fund was not the biggest player but was well placed to understand the whole sector, and the National Lottery Charities board has quickly established itself as a respected and knowledgeable body in the charitable field."

He added:

"By contrast, the new good cause ranges over a vast area. It encompasses health, education and the environment, each of which in itself is broader than any of the other good causes."—[*Official Report, House of Lords, Grand Committee*, 22 January 1998; Vol. 584, c. 71-72.]

6.15 pm

Mr. Prior: May I draw to my hon. Friend's attention the definitions in clause 6, which states:

"'education' includes training and the provision of activities for children;

'the environment' includes the living and social environment"

Those definitions could hardly be wider.

Mr. Spring: My hon. Friend is absolutely right; that is the danger of the Bill. It includes an order-making power and centralisation measures, but it lacks provisions for parliamentary scrutiny. It could result in an increase in activities under the umbrella of the new fund without proper scrutiny, to the great cost of the original good causes, which need most support and financial backing.

Mr. Christopher Fraser (Mid-Dorset and North Poole): I concur with the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for North Norfolk (Mr. Prior). Does my hon. Friend agree that "environment" in this context also means the political environment? The Government may seek later to develop the political environment, and that is increasingly worrying.

Mr. Spring: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. At the airport the other day, I saw an advertisement for a cosmetic called "Control Freak"—this may be of interest to the Minister for Sport; I mean that in the nicest possible way. The advertisement talked about taking the oil out of the system and replacing it with something better. It reminded me of the way in which the Bill is being orchestrated by the Secretary of State of a Government who are the most incredible bunch of control freaks in the history of government in this country.

The Minister in the other place admitted that the order-making powers in the Bill were different from what had gone on before. We are not in agreement with the establishment of the new opportunities fund, as the Minister for Arts implied in Committee, although none of us understood what he was on about. The Minister seemed unable to grasp the fact that we were fundamentally opposed in principle to the establishment of the new opportunities fund. As some Labour Members pointed out, although it may be desirable to spend money in some of these areas, it should not be pinched and raided from the national lottery.

We want to make it absolutely clear by our amendments that we are opposed to the establishment of the new opportunities fund, and to the way in which the principle of additionality and the arm's-length principle are being flouted. We believe that the removal of those two key elements will gravely damage the long-term success and viability of the national lottery.

Mr. Fraser: Before I speak—

The Minister for Arts (Mr. Mark Fisher): Before you speak?

Mr. Fraser: Before I come to the main thrust of my speech, I should like to allude to some of the work that Labour Members did or, rather, did not do in Committee. The hon. Member for High Peak (Mr. Levitt) came top of the list, with nine interventions and two speeches. I should

like to continue down the list as an illustration of how the Bill should have been more fully debated by Labour Members—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. This is all very interesting, but the hon. Gentleman must deal with the terms of the amendments.

Mr. Fraser: I will indeed, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is, however, sad to note how the Government ignored what we had to say about additionality. The *Hansard* reports of the Committee would make interesting reading in that respect.

The purpose and heart of the Bill are to allow the Government to get their hands on money from the lottery. The Government have tried to dress up the legislation in nonsensical talk about the evolution of the lottery and the need to restore public confidence in it. However, the Government's approach to the Bill in Committee was a sure-fire way of destroying that public confidence. The fact is that, after so many years of whining in opposition, the Labour party now, in government, has to make decisions, circumscribed by the difficulty of being bound by the previous Government's spending limits.

In Committee, Labour implied—although not in so many words—that power has come its way, and it will be used to raid the lottery for health, education and the environment. The Government argue that they must look to the lottery for funding. Of course they must: the Chancellor has presented his case to the country over the past year, and that has left the Government with no alternatives. That means ditching the additionality principle straight away. Labour Members failed to recognise that in Committee; they also failed to speak up in defence of what the Government are doing.

Governments can always make up new definitions of good causes, thereby moving the additionality goalposts. That is precisely what the Government are doing. They have introduced a range of devices allowing the Secretary of State to control how lottery money is spent. The fact that Labour Members seem to believe that that is fine is extremely worrying, given that the Bill will have profound effects well beyond those that the lottery was set up to achieve.

The arm's-length principle has been ditched, too—and the Government appear equally unconcerned about that. The silence from the Government Back Benches has been deafening, and it has been left to the Opposition to table amendments designed to preserve the original intentions behind the lottery. No one in the Labour party seems to care about the fact that, when in opposition, Labour stood four square behind the principles of additionality and arm's length and sought to enshrine them in the original Bill. Now we are told, "That was then." Labour's former principles appear to count for nothing, and it would seem that the Government have changed their priorities. Their view is: if the lottery has to be used to fund these new priorities, so be it.

Put simply, the Government intend to use the national lottery to subsidise public spending without raising taxes. The Treasury is seeking an additional £1 billion by the back door, and the Bill paves the way for that.

By setting up a new lottery distributing body under the direct control of the Secretary of State, the Government are giving themselves the chance to do as they please with the money. Writing in *The Times*, Peter Riddell made the point very clearly:

"The new fund also violates the basic principle, reaffirmed by Tony Blair last summer, that it would 'not be right to use the lottery to pay for things which are the Government's responsibilities'".

The Government are breaking the additionality principle that was so vehemently supported when the lottery was set up in 1993; and they are doing so to finance mainstream health, education and environment programmes. "Environment" is a generic word, covering a multitude of projects that we cannot anticipate at present. It is open to this or a future Government to misuse the term, which is why I would argue against its inclusion in the Bill.

The idea of an information-rich and an information-poor society has been debated at some length elsewhere, and the Government have stated that they want everyone to join in the information-rich society. In Committee, I told the Minister that schools should therefore offer all pupils an equal chance to participate in that society—hence the teaching of technology must be part of core Government spending. I was not wholly convinced by the response that I was given by the Minister. Public spending programmes continually evolve. Some hon. Members, including me, made the point on Second Reading that the Government cannot justify transferring to the national lottery the costs of such evolution. I should like to know how any of the planned projects fall within the remit of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport—on current evidence, they do not. They all fall into areas for which Governments have traditionally accepted responsibility. The projects in question have been mooted by the Secretaries of State for Education and Employment and for Social Security; but they were rejected by the Treasury, so now they have to be paid for by the lottery.

As has been said, the Bill brings in an order-making power allowing the Secretary of State to determine how lottery money is spent, thereby at a stroke overturning the arm's-length principle. It is the Secretary of State who will specify initiatives. Other distributing bodies set up by the National Lottery etc. Act 1993 are truly independent of Government, and all involved in that arrangement have witnessed the benefits of such independence. Now the Secretary of State will exercise enormous control over the new opportunities fund. That runs against the whole spirit of the establishment of the lottery, which thus far has been a remarkable success.

Evolving Government spending programmes should not be paid for by plundering the lottery. Because of the initiatives that the new opportunities fund will carry, the Secretary of State will become a distributing body. I concur with the view of my hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring), that the whole idea is Treasury-led and means abandoning the hands-off principle. The independence of the good causes will be put in jeopardy. Had the Government wanted to respect the arm's-length principle, they would have set up the new fund along the lines of the other distributing bodies: they chose not to do so. Furthermore, they would not have proposed for the Secretary of State a power to specify, on an ad hoc basis, how the money in the fund is to be spent. The fact that the Secretary of State can involve himself fully justifies the concern expressed by my hon. Friends that he will decide on the scope and direction of his involvement on a whim or fancy.

[Mr. Fraser]

The Minister may recall that I put it to him in Committee that the arm's-length principle and the additionality principle go together. If the Secretary of State did not have the power vested in him, he would not be able to breach those principles. The power vested in him means that anything he spends has to count as Government spending because he is part of the Government. He has given himself the mandate that he needs.

6.30 pm

The truth is that the Labour party is changing the purpose of the national lottery. I am sure that the Secretary of State and the Minister for Arts will agree that the Secretary of State is intervening in the way in which lottery money is distributed, as the Labour party manifesto promised he would. Labour stated:

"There has been no overall strategy for the allocation of monies and no co-ordination among the five distributor bodies about the projects deserving to benefit from the National Lottery."

That quotation comes from a document entitled "New Labour: Because Britain Deserves Better", published in April 1997.

Policy directions by the Secretary of State will be introduced with the passage of the Bill. On Second Reading, the Secretary of State referred in detail to some directions when he said without any intended irony that they were important to ensure that

"lottery money is going where it counts."—[*Official Report*, 7 April 1998; Vol. 310, c. 170.]

I wondered at the time whether that was not a Freudian slip and whether the Secretary of State had unconsciously decided to reveal that the money would be spent where Labour votes counted. That has been my suspicion since that comment was made.

The Government want to establish a new direction for the lottery, one that fits with the broader sweep of Government policy and which will serve as a means for redistributing wealth by funding a range of social programmes. To make matters worse, the activities of the new opportunities fund have not been clearly defined. Why have the Government drawn up such vague definitions of health, education and the environment? As I said, "environment" is a generic term, and I should be interested to hear the Minister explain his precise understanding of the environment—social, economic or political—in this context.

We have had few clues from the Government, so we cannot be clear what their intentions are. The Government will not even have a debate in the House on what they propose. The 1993 Act would have required primary legislation to divert money from the original five good causes, yet these proposals come from a party that professes to support open government. I support the new clause.

Laura Moffatt (Crawley): I am a little confused about why the hon. Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole (Mr. Fraser) should be amazed that in Committee Labour Members found it difficult to take an active part, when all that we have heard today from Conservative Members is a rehearsal of what we heard then. Given the uninspired new clause, I am beginning to wonder whether there is truly any real opposition to the Bill.

It was very difficult to sit and listen to the arguments about additionality and the wonderful contribution to the debate made by Mr. Riddell in the newspaper. I am sure that he is a terribly interesting writer, but I listen much more to the people I meet in the street who are in favour of the proposals.

Mr. Spring: I am interested to hear the hon. Lady use the word "contribution". Will she confirm that she made no speech in Committee and that her sole contribution was a single intervention?

Laura Moffatt: I am glad to say that that intervention left the hon. Gentleman speechless for few moments, which pleased me immensely.

I hope that we shall shortly finish this debate and see the Bill in place, so that it can reach the people who are interested in what the new opportunities fund will bring. It is sometimes galling to have to listen to the same trite old nonsense, when people want lottery money to be spent as the Government propose.

I was recently lucky enough to attend a session organised by my local health authority to deal with healthy living centres. They are the reason why I was inspired to contribute to debates on the Bill. I am a nurse of 25 years' standing, and the proposals seemed to me to be a new way to bring good health to our communities and to inspire people to take their health into their own hands.

Mr. Prior: Will the hon. Lady explain what is wrong with raising taxes to fund health?

Laura Moffatt: This is a new way, a way to involve communities. We get caught up in the nonsense about additionality, but people on the street are asking when they can contribute and how they can work with their general practitioners. It has been said that the proposals would do terrible damage to private health clubs, but if private health clubs had any sense, they would be entering into partnerships with the local groups that are setting up the healthy living centres. The Opposition have completely missed the boat.

Mr. Fraser: The hon. Lady is ranging rather wide, so perhaps I can ask her to clarify whether she agrees that the money going to healthy living centres will undermine the good work currently being done by GP fundholding practices.

Laura Moffatt: I do not believe for one moment that it will undermine the work being done by GP fundholders. In fact, I shall carry on talking about the meeting that I attended with many GPs in West Sussex. They were very keen to take part in the programme and were asking whether it would be only for inner cities or whether rural areas could contribute. They wanted to know how they could show that they knew people who suffered poor health and whom they could help to adopt a healthy way of living, so I do not think for one moment that GPs will be threatened. In fact, they will welcome the proposals with open arms, as will others in our communities and our children.

The new opportunities fund involves new initiatives, things that have not been done before and on which we shall be able to expand. Indeed, 20 per cent. of our communities will be able to take part. That is very exciting. I understand that the areas where the health action zones are located will naturally have priority, but I shall be very excited when the first centre is set up.

I listened to the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring), who is currently involved in a conversation, saying that we must have a sense of national pride in our arts and treasures. Of course we must, but, as a nurse of many years' standing, my national pride means making sure that we have a healthy nation that can be proactive in achieving good health and which can live longer. I shall be very proud when the first healthy living centre is set up.

Mr. Collins: The hon. Member for Crawley (Laura Moffatt) made an interesting speech. Although I agreed with her on one point, I shall start with another, with which I disagreed. The hon. Lady said that as people want the proposals in the Bill, we should jolly well get on with them. No doubt some people want them, but it is equally clear that others do not. It is the duty of the House properly to debate matters on which there is division in the country and not simply to sweep aside debate on the ground that because the Government want something, they should have it without debate or discussion.

I agree with the hon. Lady about the importance of health, education and the environment. If I had a limited sum of money, I would always prefer to spend it on schools or hospitals rather than on skating rinks or opera houses. For precisely that reason, some of those facilities are clearly intended to be funded by the taxpayer, under a system whereby one can go to prison for failing to contribute to the national health service or state education. Other things that are less important but still valuable are funded in another way. That is why the lottery was set up. As long as those good causes were reliant on taxpayer funding, politicians of any party would always sideline, exclude and reduce them. The lottery was set up on a principle of additionality, which not only had bipartisan support at the time, but arguably enjoyed stronger support from Labour than from the Conservatives.

I pay tribute to the role played by my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) as Prime Minister in bringing about a national lottery. Had it not been for his drive in overcoming the bureaucratic and political obstacles to the creation of a national lottery, we would have nothing to discuss today.

The principle of additionality is extremely important and so is new clause 2, in the names of my right hon. and hon. Friends. The principle of additionality that it sets out is defined in exactly the language employed by the Prime Minister, not in an off-the-cuff speech in a Sedgefield pub, but in his foreword to the White Paper "The People's Lottery", on which the Bill is based. Therefore, it falls to the Government and the Labour party to explain precisely why they are not happy with the wording in new clause 2, which seeks carefully to include in the Bill the words used by the Prime Minister in a declaration of Government policy after the general election and in an official White Paper.

Some Opposition Members believe that the Government are not happy about the principle of additionality being written so clearly on the face of the Bill, precisely because the story in *The Times* this morning is right. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, in his own campaign—which has rather less to do with the progress of the British economy and rather more to do with his ambition to become the next leader of the Labour party—is seeking to prove his own toughness by establishing tough public spending limits for as far ahead as we can foresee. That means that the Government can fulfil their early election pledges—such as those on class sizes and hospital waiting lists, which they have failed to fulfil in their first 13 months in office, that they have little prospect of meeting in the next 13 months in office and which they may or may not meet in the lifetime of this Parliament—only by raiding national lottery moneys to fund education and health spending, which, in the normal course of events, should be funded by the taxpayer. That is one agenda pursued by the Bill, and it would be limited by new clause 2.

There is another agenda, however, which is addressed by amendment No. 4, in the name of my right hon. and hon. Friends. Clause 7, as drafted, would allow the Secretary of State to set out initiatives that would apply throughout the United Kingdom or in one or more areas.

The Minister for Sport is listening carefully to one of his hon. Friends, but I believe that he has a direct and personal interest in the possible use of the new opportunities fund in one particular part of the United Kingdom. He represents a London constituency, and London is doing extremely well out of the national lottery. As we all know, the Minister for Sport may have another rather more personal political agenda relating to a certain political post in London. If the new opportunities fund could be used to benefit London, perhaps to the disbenefit of other parts of the United Kingdom, but to the great joy and happiness of the citizenry of the metropolis, the Minister for Sport might feel that the citizenry of London would reward him for his part in that, by electing him to the post of lord mayor.

The Minister knows that he has tough opposition. Lord Archer has made it clear that were he to be elected lord mayor of London, he would never write another book, and that makes it a tough electoral platform for the Minister for Sport. He will find it extremely difficult to come up with a platform policy to beat that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We really cannot have a diversion about what may happen in the future election of the mayor of London.

6.45 pm

Mr. Collins: I apologise for that, but it relates to why the new opportunities fund and the provisions that amendment No. 4 would strike out—enabling the new opportunities fund to benefit one particular area of the United Kingdom—are so important. There should not be even a suspicion of doubt that the Government or any Minister within it might seek to use lottery funds to benefit a particular geographical area within the United Kingdom. If I cannot refer to London, for reasons that you rightly pointed out, Mr. Deputy Speaker, perhaps I may touch on the prospect of the provisions that would be struck out by amendment No. 4 being used to benefit areas that happen to be represented by members of the governing party.

It is worrying that the Bill grants such enormous discretion to the Secretary of State to direct moneys to enormously popular projects relating to education and

[Mr. Collins]

health, wherever and for whatever reason he or she deems fit. My hon. Friends who served on the Committee tell me that, throughout the discussions on the Bill, Labour Members were enormously excited by the prospect of lottery money being spent on projects in their constituencies, having been directed there by the Government.

Mr. Fraser: I am sure that my hon. Friend will agree that in Committee the high aspirations of Labour Members resulted from the knowledge that the Government could deliver on those aspirations.

Mr. Collins: My hon. Friend makes his point extremely clearly. If amendment No. 4 were not accepted, we would risk the Government being able to use lottery funds in the pursuit of pure party political advantage.

Mr. Banks: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. First, may I remind the hon. Member for Mid–Dorset and North Poole (Mr. Fraser) that he should not get up to make a point while clutching a brown envelope?

I remind the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins) that I receive letters from hon. Members of all parties asking, "Why hasn't scheme X in my constituency received more money?" It is perfectly valid for hon. Members to lobby on behalf of organisations. Hon. Members of all parties have been present when large cheques have been handed over from the lottery or the Millennium Commission in the presence of the press. No one ever claims that the hon. Member managed to get the funding or that the Government provided it. It is a form of publicity in which all hon. Members have indulged.

Mr. Collins: I bow to the Minister's expertise on public relations initiatives and stunts, but his analogies relate to the Millennium Commission, which is an arm's-length body. There is no question of any Secretary of State being in a position to instruct the Millennium Commission as to how it spends its money. Amendment No. 4 would strike out the provision that

"the New Opportunities Fund shall comply with any directions given to them by the Secretary of State."

That is what causes concern, not just among Opposition Members, but among bodies that supported the principle of arm's-length responsibility in respect of the distribution of lottery funds and which are extremely worried by the way in which the legislation is moving towards hands-on control by Secretaries of State who currently serve under a Labour Government. In future, they may be of a different political party, but, in any event, they should not be directly involved in such decisions. That is why our new clauses and amendments would return the national lottery to the principles that led to its creation, its great success and its widespread public support.

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford): I support the new clauses and amendments, which would save the Government from themselves. The Government believe that their policies will give them short-term popularity, but they will lead to long-term opprobrium when people realise the damage that is done to the national lottery, which has for several years supported many good causes which are valued throughout the country. Once the lottery is damaged and has lost the trust of the people, it will have great difficulty regaining that trust and will no longer be able to provide as much support for good causes as it has during its first four years.

The Government's warm words disguise their ill-intentions. The new clauses and amendments would restore the two principles that the Bill badly breaches: additionality and the arm's-length principle. All fair-minded people—certainly all those who have followed every kick of the ball in this match—agree that additionality has always been difficult to define, but the Government are clearly trying to sweep the principle away. Under the Bill, any spending could legitimately be funded by the lottery, and the current division between spending on what is essential, which should be funded from taxation, and spending on what is desirable, which the lottery has always funded, could not be maintained, unless the Government accept the new clauses and amendments—which I do not expect them to do.

There is nothing that would not be covered by the principles set out by the Government. The lottery could fund anything under the new system. Conventional public spending has always covered a wide range of activities. The level of public spending that society regards it as sensible to fund has gone up and down over the decades, but there has always been a clear core of services that are best provided from collective endeavour through taxation. That covers spending on defence, the police and, under the welfare system that we have had for most of this century, health and education.

Items of expenditure that would be funded by the new opportunities fund, such as information technology training for teachers and the healthy living centres on which the hon. Member for Crawley (Laura Moffatt) is so keen, would normally fall within those broad boundaries of conventional public spending without anyone blinking. If the Government announced that they proposed to spend public money on extra IT training for teachers, nobody would consider it remotely remarkable; it would be a reasonable use of conventional public spending. However, saying that this year's priority was a new set of opera houses or sports stadiums would be bizarre, particularly for a Government who claim to want to put pressure on public spending.

Although the theoretical boundary for what should fall under the additionality principle may be difficult to define, in practice the distinction between the essential and the desirable is clear. If the Bill is not amended, it will drive a coach and horses through that division and allow almost any expenditure to be funded by the lottery. We all know that the Government are doing that so that they can spend more money without appearing to raise taxes.

The people will see through that attempted dishonesty. The White Paper was predictably and drearily called "The People's Lottery". The Government seem to forget that the people are not dim and notice political dishonesty. We are witnessing such political dishonesty. The people will see that items that they expect to be funded from taxation are to be funded by the lottery. They will regard the Government as dishonest and cease to trust them. [*Laughter.*] Labour Members may laugh, but I look forward to seeing them in two or three years when their popularity has fallen. I am not greatly concerned about

the Government's popularity. I shall not lose sleep when they sink into unpopularity. However, I shall lose sleep over the fact that they will drag down with them the reputation of the national lottery, which is doing a lot of good for this country. When the lottery is seen to be a plaything for politicians who want to spend money while pretending not to raise taxes, people will be turned off and will stop playing the lottery, resulting in less money being available for good causes. Labour Members should regret that.

The most ridiculous defence that we heard in Committee was that anything that had not been funded before could legitimately be funded from the lottery. That argument supposes that the world stands still and technology never changes, particularly in health and education. Twenty years ago, IT training for teachers would have been meaningless because IT had not been developed. It is now essential for education, and should be funded from education spending. The Government have decided to fund it from money that should not be used for essential spending.

Additionality is not the only principle to be badly breached. The Government profess to support the arm's-length principle, but their actions belie their words. I am delighted that the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan) has returned to his seat, because I am about to say something nice about a Liberal Democrat—admittedly a long-dead one, who once famously said that in the long run we are all dead. Lord Keynes was a Liberal who invented the arm's-length principle when he set up the Arts Council. The Government are doing their best to destroy that principle.

The new opportunities fund destroys the arm's-length principle in many ways. We have already heard about the problems with geographical distribution. I assure my hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins) that Labour Back Benchers eager to persuade Ministers to divert money their way for political reasons were heard not just in Committee: every Labour contribution on Second Reading was designed to elicit extra money. As the Minister for Sport has said, that is entirely legitimate, and we all do it. However, it is not legitimate to give the power of distribution directly to Ministers, because that will result in their indulging in straightforward pork-barrel politics. That will damage public confidence in the lottery and reduce people's willingness to play it, cutting the money available to good causes.

We have heard about healthy living centres. Again, short-term popularity will contrast with long-term political opprobrium for the Government, because they will be available only in the 20 per cent. of the country regarded as most deprived. The general practitioners in West Sussex who are desperately hoping for such centres will not get any. They will be hugely disappointed and the hon. Member for Crawley will have a lot of explaining to do to her GPs in the coming years. With their budgets permanently under pressure, health authorities will decide not to spend money on such centres because they will know that lottery money is going to them. The existing health service budget will be diverted away from such desirable spending.

The new opportunities fund will also have an incredibly elastic definition of the environment. It can mean absolutely anything. The Department of the Environment has grown beyond all recognition in the past 10 years. Over the next 10 years, the definition of the environment in the Bill will also grow greatly and will be seen as another piece of straightforward pork-barrel politics.

My overall reason for supporting the new clauses and amendments is that, without them, the sum of the mass of detail in the Bill will bring the lottery into severe disrepute and greatly concern hon. Members on both sides of the House. In its four or five years, the national lottery has done enormous good for the country. The Bill that damages it will harm the country enormously. Without the amendments and new clauses, that is what the Bill will do.

7 pm

Mr. Andrew Tyrie (Chichester): I well remember discussion about a national lottery first arising when I was in the Treasury in the late 1980s. We thought about whether we should make a serious proposal and worked quite hard on it. As everyone knows, in the end, Mrs. Thatcher ditched the idea. The crucial problem with which we grappled was exactly the subject of this debate—additionality. The problem was how to get money to causes that could be seen to be quite distinct from core Government responsibilities that were funded from general taxation.

Whatever we hear from Ministers tonight, I am absolutely confident that everyone in the country understands the fundamental distinction between spending on, for example, capital infrastructure for the arts, sports and heritage, and core funding in, for example, education and health. People will grasp over a run of years that the creation of the sixth good cause has blurred that distinction. They will realise that, in a world in which some things are clearly black and others clearly white, this area is grey, and that that greyness is enabling the Government to use lottery funding slowly but steadily to substitute spending from general taxation.

The national lottery has been a great success, partly because the Conservatives succeeded in finding a way of creating a lottery in which there was such a clear distinction. People want to participate in something that is not just a ramp for the Government to get hold of extra tax revenue but has a sense of excitement that is derived partly from knowledge of where the money will go. That will be eroded by the Government's proposals, but it will be put right if the amendments and new clauses are accepted.

The Prime Minister has made it perfectly clear that he agrees with the principle of additionality. I shall not bother to quote his words, because they have been cited on many occasions. It is clear that one of Labour's manifesto pledges will be partly funded by the sixth good cause, even though anyone who read the manifesto when it was published would have understood that the pledge would be funded from general taxation. There has clearly been a breach of principle, and people will gradually grasp that.

The sixth good cause represents not only additionality but—to coin an even worse term—subtractionality. It will subtract money from the other five causes. It is no good people saying that the five causes will continue to receive exactly the same funding. It is absolutely clear that they will receive less money than they otherwise would have done.

The creation of the shadow account almost certainly breaches the law. When I asked the Minister for Arts about that in February, he said that the statutory authority for

[Mr. Andrew Tyrie]

setting up the shadow account was the National Lottery Bill. If that is not a clear case of retrospection, I do not know what is. It must be a retrospective action to pass a law to justify an act that has already been executed. If the Minister wants to explain why that is not retrospection, I shall gladly give way. I see that he does not.

The Government have browbeaten the five good causes into accepting the proposal. They know that such retrospective action is challengeable in the courts, but they will not embark on a legal challenge because they need a relationship with the Government. The Government have escaped what should be, and easily could have been, an extremely embarrassing event.

The Minister for Arts is looking at the clock as I speak, so I shall conclude by asking him a few questions. What will he do when lottery fatigue sets in? Will he allow receipts that go to the sixth good cause to fall to protect existing funding of the five good causes? What will happen when people become accustomed to the flow of funds to core activities in education and health but lottery fatigue sets in and resources fall?

Mr. Banks *rose—*

Mr. Tyrie: If the Secretary of State wants to say something, he is welcome to do so.

Mr. Banks: I am not the Secretary of State; I am a humble sports Minister. Does the hon. Gentleman play the national lottery?

Mr. Tyrie: Yes, I have played the national lottery. In fact, not long ago, I won about £80, so I am feeling particularly happy about the lottery. Perhaps the Minister will tell me how he is doing. Perhaps I am collecting some of his losses.

If it becomes clear that the funds for the sixth cause to which bodies initially became accustomed are no longer available, will the Minister for Arts be prepared eventually to use general taxation to plug the gap, or will he allow funding for the sixth good cause to fall? I support the amendments and would very much like to hear answers to my questions.

Mr. Prior: My hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie) spoke of lottery fatigue. Looking at the face of the Minister of Sport, I know exactly what he means: there is a distinct sign of fatigue on the Labour Benches.

We must remember that the lottery has been a huge success and has raised a huge amount of money for the good causes because of the two key principles that underlie it: the good causes identified are in addition to normal public spending and the funds are distributed at arm's length from the Government.

The new opportunities fund will have an extremely broad remit. From the preliminary guidance provided by the Department, it seems that the fund will also be highly prescriptive. We are told:

"The Fund shall, by September 2002, commit funds to projects that, between them, should establish or develop healthy living centres accessible to around 20 per cent. of the population".

We are told:

"The Fund shall commit funds to out of school hours education projects which taken together should provide regular activities involving at least half of all secondary schools".

Proposed section 43C of the National Lottery etc. Act 1993 makes it clear that the new opportunities fund shall comply with the Secretary of State's wishes.

Let us compare that with a brochure that came through the post this morning from the National Lottery Charities Board, which has just distributed £133 million to 1,306 organisations to help the homeless, animal projects, village and community centres and projects to develop the voluntary sector. Most of us know that additionality is a difficult concept to define, but we all know when it is breached. If you cast your eye down the list of projects in your constituencies, you will know exactly what is—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman, but I remind him that he is addressing the Chair and must use the third person.

Mr. Prior: I apologise. It is clear to most of us when the concept of additionality is being broken.

I wish to refer to a point made by the hon. Member for Crawley (Laura Moffatt). I agree with what she said about healthy living centres, and we are not opposed to them. However, we believe that they should be funded through normal, general taxation.

The problem with the Bill is that clause 13 erodes the arm's-length principle for all the other good causes, and makes it clear that all other distributing bodies must produce a strategic plan that must comply with the wishes of the Secretary of State. That extension of Government control is over not only the new opportunities fund, but all other funds. That goes to the heart of our objections to the Bill. It is no longer a people's lottery, any more than the former Governments of eastern European countries were people's Governments. It is now a Government lottery. It is in danger of losing the support of the people, and the ultimate losers will be the good causes.

Mr. Peter Brooke (Cities of London and Westminster): First, I declare an interest. Within the past month, I have won two £10 prizes, which have encouraged me to continue; it was some time prior to last month that I last won. Secondly, as the Minister for Sport has been accusing the whole House of writing him begging letters, I am sure that he would acknowledge that I have never written him one—not least because I pay him the compliment of assuming that he would have nothing to do with the decision. Therefore, I might as well save my ink.

The hon. Member for Crawley (Laura Moffatt) said that she had been listening to a repetition of the Committee debates on Report. That is not true in my case—partly because I was not on the Committee and partly because I want to allude to remarks made earlier today. The hon. Lady did not speak in Committee apart from one intervention—which I have checked—of which she was proud. I cannot tell whether, in her remarks about additionality today, she was implying that she did not believe in the principle of additionality—contrary to her party's previous position—or whether she did not believe in its relevance to the Government's proposals. I mention the matter because it is of some importance to the debate.

I wish to refer to an exchange I had earlier today with the Minister for Film and Tourism at Question Time. I am sorry that he is the only one of the Secretary of State's ministerial team who is not present. I will not say anything hostile about him; I shall just describe what he said. The Ministers present will recall a remarkable definition of additionality given by the Minister on 21 July 1997, which I quoted on Second Reading.

The issue of additionality arose this afternoon when I asked the Minister—as a supplementary question, following a question from the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) about local authority initiatives in tourism—whether the lottery would be paying for English tourism in the future. I do not have access to the Minister's precise reply and we will have to wait for tomorrow's *Hansard*. However, he said that it was not possible for him to say anything about that matter because, as I would understand, a comprehensive spending review was going on and he could not say who would pay for English tourism in future.

The Minister did say that the issue of whether the lottery should pay for English tourism or not had been discussed. The Minister for Arts shakes his head—

Mr. Fisher *indicated dissent.*

7.15 pm

Mr. Brooke: When we look at *Hansard* tomorrow, we will see what the Minister for Film and Tourism said. My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole (Mr. Fraser) was sitting next to me—

Mr. Fraser *indicated assent.*

Mr. Brooke: My hon. Friend nods his head in terms of his recollection of the reply. The implication is that a policy or a principle amounts to a prefabricated decision—a standing fact of Government affairs.

If the lottery will not be substituted for spending on English tourism, the Minister for Film and Tourism did not need to make any allusion to it, or to the comprehensive spending review. He could simply have said that lottery funds will not be used on English tourism. He did not say that. I said that I would not be derogatory about him, but a reasonable description—and not an evaluation—would be that his answer rambled a bit. We will see tomorrow precisely what he said, but he certainly did not rule out specifically the lottery paying for English tourism. Against that background, I am left with concern that the principle of additionality is further eroded by the Government.

The Secretary of State corrected me on certain things I said about the consultation when the hon. Member for Forest of Dean (Mrs. Organ) spoke on Second Reading; it was a helpful intervention. All of us are agreed that fewer than 100 individuals contributed to the consultation. The Secretary of State knows that most of the 600 responses came from organisations. It can be no surprise to anyone that organisations would have said that they were in favour of lottery money being spent on what they do. It would be odd if they had not done so, for the very reason that the Minister for Sport gave when referring to begging letters. I am left distinctly uneasy about where the principle of additionality stands this afternoon.

I wish to refer briefly to the arm's-length principle. The hon. Member for Crawley said, effectively, "All power to the Government's elbow. We hope that they spend any money they wish on things of which we approve." I do not want to sound like Nestor. I have said previously that I was not the architect of the national lottery legislation; one could produce a decent-sized architectural practice from those who said that they were that. I simply had a subordinate job in the master mason's department.

The hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry), to his credit, has sat through the debate today, and he will recall our debates in the Chamber, in Committee and elsewhere when the legislation was forged. As my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) said, one of the principal reasons why this is the best lottery in the world is that the money does not go to the Treasury, and we have avoided it doing so.

The hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde will recall our debate about charities, and their fears that they would be disadvantaged by the fact that they would get only 20 per cent. of the money going to good causes. The only evidence we had to engage in that debate was the experience of Irish charities. It was clear that the problem in Ireland, in effect, had been that the money was going back to the Government for the Government to decide which charities should do better. Some said that they had done very well out of the Irish lottery, while others said that they had done badly; it had depended totally on the Government's whim. Au fond, that is why the Opposition are uneasy about what the Government are about.

Mr. Fisher: For these remaining stages of the Bill, it has been good to have the right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke)—the former Secretary of State for National Heritage, who introduced the original legislation in the House—here to contribute to our deliberations. All hon. Members recognise that we have had enormous benefits from the national lottery, and that is in no small part—despite his modest denial of any role in the architecture of the legislation—due to the right hon. Gentleman. His seeing it through in the first place has given great pleasure and benefit to the people of this country. His speech was, by a long way, the shortest, most intelligent and most interesting contribution from the Opposition Benches. Before he gets too carried away by my compliments, however, I should add that, given the quality of some of the contributions of his colleagues, that remark is modest.

The right hon. Gentleman asked for clarification on what my right hon. Friend the Minister for Film and Tourism said. My right hon. Friend did not mean to imply that the lottery would ever provide a substitute for Government expenditure on and support for tourism through the English tourist board or the British Tourism Authority. He was referring to the fact that, as the right hon. Gentleman will appreciate, tourism-related matters, such as the arts and heritage—piers at our great seaside resorts, for example—have benefited from the lottery, which has been for the good of tourism and of communities. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, we are examining arts and heritage as part of the comprehensive spending review.

Mr. Brooke: As the answer of the Minister for Film and Tourism to my question was long, it is a little

[Mr. Brooke]

surprising that he did not enter the same grace notes as the hon. Gentleman has, with which I have no problem—they were part of the discussions that we had on Second Reading of the original Bill.

Mr. Fisher: I have explained the position of my right hon. Friend and the Government, so perhaps we can move on.

I welcome the hon. Member for East Surrey (Mr. Ainsworth) to his role as shadow Secretary of State. It is good that he is listening to our debate—I hope that he will contribute to discussions later this evening. However, I hope that he has to wait a long time before he succeeds the right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster in introducing legislation—he will do well if he introduces legislation that is as constructive and well respected. We shall do our best to ensure that he has a long, patient wait.

It struck me that, the longer the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring)—who led for the Opposition—spoke, the less he had to say. Despite the fact that, amazingly, he spoke for 44 minutes, he did not seem to add much to the interesting speeches that he had made before—strangely, he seems to be taking a long time to grasp that the Government support the principle of additionality every bit as much as the Opposition do. He is obviously yearning to oppose us, but he cannot find much to oppose, as we all agree on additionality. We have supported the principle, which the previous Government introduced, both in our manifesto and in everything that my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State have said for extremely good reasons of clarity and, as Mr. Peter Riddell said—he has been much quoted in our deliberations—to prevent the Treasury and other Departments from raiding the funds.

It is important that we maintain additionality and arm's-length principles—I make it clear that the Government are committed to the principle and practice of additionality. Our manifesto said that lottery funds should remain strictly additional to Government expenditure, and the Prime Minister said:

> "We don't believe it would be right to use Lottery money to pay for things which are the Government's responsibilities."

That could hardly be clearer, but, despite the fact that we said it time and again in opposition and say it again tonight, the Opposition are slow to recognise it.

In our deliberations on the 1993 Act, on the White Paper and on the Bill, we have all agreed that it is extremely hard to define additionality. That is why both this Government and the previous Government decided that it would be sensible not to attempt to define it, but to create a principle to which we could all subscribe and which could be kept in practice. We can argue the toss—we did so in opposition, as some hon. Members have said—but we learned over the years in which the previous Government ran the lottery that that was the most pragmatic way in which to proceed. It is very difficult to find a definition in law that would stand up and bear the necessary test of pragmatic implementation, so, like the previous Government, we believe that the common-sense test is the best.

I can say little more on the subject. We have clearly failed—the failure is mine—to persuade the Opposition that we believe in additionality. I believe that our actions, and the actions of the arm's-length bodies that distribute lottery funds, demonstrate that belief. I do not think that the people are in any doubt that the sums are in addition to, and do not replace, Government expenditure—the people are under no misapprehensions; they know that, even if the Opposition do not.

The hon. Member for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie), who is no longer in the Chamber, asked what would happen if there were lottery fatigue and the flow of funds dried up. I think that he misunderstands how the lottery funds work—they are project funds for short-term, specific initiatives; not core funding for any of the activities. If he understood that, he would understand why his question was inappropriate.

We have clearly not succeeded in convincing the Opposition, although I believe that we shall persuade the House, as we have persuaded the people. The Government believe in additionality and in the arm's-length principle; we ask the House to reject the proposed measures.

Mr. Spring: I agree entirely with the Minister on one thing: he has totally failed to convince the Opposition or to respond to our points. It is a great disappointment that, instead of dealing in general terms with the arm's-length principle or with additionality in practice, the Government are failing the national lottery and the people's confidence in it.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 121, Noes 276.

Division No. 287] **[7.27 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gibb, Nick
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Major, Rt Hon John

Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John M. Taylor and
Mr. Stephen Day.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Austin, John
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Bennett, Andrew F
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Cabom, Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell–Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Connarty, Michael
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Fyfe, Maria
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mowlam, Rt Hon Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Salter, Martin
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*

Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Kevin Hughes and Jane Kennedy.

Question accordingly negatived.

New clause 4

WINDING UP OF FUNDS ALLOCATED UNDER SECTION 22(3)(c)

'( ) In section 30 of the 1993 Act (winding up of funds allocated under section 22(3) (e)) after subsection (3) there shall be inserted:

"Within one year of exercising its powers under section 28(1) the Secretary of State shall—

(a) prepare a report containing an assessment of the performance of the bodies which distribute money under section 25(1) of the 1993 Act;

(b) set out the criteria governing the reallocation of sums held under section 22(3)(e); and

(c) consult any body which distributes money under section 25(1) and other interested bodies".'.— *[Mr. Maclennan.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Maclennan: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 8, in clause 6, page 7, line 23, leave out from beginning to end of line 10 on page 8 and insert—

'(1) In relation to any sum that is paid into the Distribution Fund under section 21(2) of the 1993 Act after 31st December 2000, section 22(3)(e) of that Act shall have effect as if for "on projects to mark the year 2000 and the beginning of the third millennium" there were substituted "on or connected with education, environment and public health, including children's play.".

(2) Section 30 of the 1993 Act (winding up of fund allocated under section 22(3)(e)) shall cease to have effect.

(3) The Secretary of State may by order substitute a later date for the date that is for the time being specified in subsection (1).'.

No. 1, in page 7, line 43, at end insert—

'(6A) In section 28 of the 1993 Act (power to amend section 22) in subsection (2)(a) for "5 per cent." there shall be substituted "13½ per cent".'.

Mr. Maclennan: I have pleasure in moving the new clause and I shall be brief. It is designed to enable the Minister to give some indication of what the Government propose following the winding-up of the Millennium Commission in respect of the substantial expenditure involved. There is anxiety, particularly in the voluntary sector, that the money is in a sense floating money, which could be diverted from good causes to other, no doubt desirable, public spending objectives—I can candidly declare that the new clause was suggested by the National Council for Voluntary Organisations. There is also concern that the very fact that that shift will take place might impact on the ability of voluntary organisations to attract funding and it is certainly appropriate to raise those fears well in advance.

The Government should be able to give undertakings that they will consult widely with the voluntary organisations and the other good causes about how best to utilise the money, bearing in mind the Government's expressed commitment to the additionality principle, which was underlined in the previous debate and which I do not call into question in general.

The new clause also suggests an appraisal of the work that has been done by the existing distributing bodies, which must be appropriate and sensible when considering how best to deal with moneys that will not be spent in the future. Of course, it is difficult to predict what the volume will be by that time and whether it will have peaked and be on a downturn, but that would only make that course of action more urgent. I hope that the Government will find the new clause helpful and that it will enable them to give us some glimmerings into their thinking.

Mr. Spring: We have listened with interest to the comments of the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan). I was not clear whether he would press the new clause to a Division. I hope to secure your permission, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to separate amendments Nos. 8 and 1, which we have tabled, from the new clause if necessary.

The amendments in this group deal with the Government's raid on the original good causes and the need to protect those causes. The reason for the raid is simple. The Government made a series of promises in opposition that were incompatible with the tight control of public expenditure. Indeed, once a week we have had the sight of the Prime Minister having to defend the fact that those early pledges, particularly on health and education, have not been borne out in practice and that, in fact, the reverse has happened. That is part and parcel of the problem. Given the Chancellor's views on public expenditure, Ministers are scratching around for alternative sources of cash to pursue the political agenda that is inherent in the new opportunities fund. As a result, the lottery, which was set up as a fund to pay for projects that would, in the words of the 1992 Conservative manifesto,

"restore our heritage and promote projects which will become a source of national pride",

is, if Royal Assent is obtained, to turn into the milch cow for Ministers to supplement their departmental budgets by raiding it for that express purpose, through the generosity of the Secretary of State.

7.45 pm

Even under the Government's original plans, the good causes would have lost out. The National Lottery etc. Act 1993, which was enacted under the former Conservative Government, provided for the Millennium Commission, which finances projects to mark the millennium, to be wound up once the celebrations are over and the projects

all paid for. That money would have been re-allocated to the other good causes. However in 1996, the Labour party in opposition decided that it would not reallocate the money to the original good causes but would set up its own fund to subsidise the budgets of other Departments.

Let us be clear. Under a Labour Government, the original good causes were always destined to lose out; it was only a question of when. None of the amendments would prevent the Government from setting up the new opportunities fund. They deal with the fundamental problem of the Government's smash-and-grab raid on the lottery.

Amendment No. 8 deals with whether the new opportunities fund should replace the Millennium Commission, as was promised in Labour's manifesto, or whether it should simply elbow its way to the front of the queue as a sixth good cause. In view of the threat to the lottery, we also want to establish a minimum percentage below which the share of the proceeds of the lottery allocated to the original good causes will not fall. We are concerned that the Government will try to take an increasing percentage of the proceeds of the lottery for their own new good cause and we were not at all assured by the so-called assurances of the Minister for Sport in Committee. I hope that this evening he will give us further assurances, as they have not thus far been satisfactorily forthcoming.

In respect of making the new opportunities fund a replacement for the millennium fund, amendment No. 8 would give the Government the opportunity to honour their manifesto commitment on the lottery. I remind members of the Standing Committee that we had the truly appalling sight on a number of occasions of Labour Members voting against their manifesto commitment—a ludicrous situation. Accepting the amendment would restore to the original good causes some of the money that they will lose under the Government's plans.

In its manifesto, the Labour party gave a commitment to create a new millennium fund—what is now called the new opportunities fund—to replace the existing fund. Indeed, the 1997 manifesto, "New Labour, because Britain deserves better", stated:

"Labour has already proposed a new millennium commission to commence after the closure of the Millennium Exhibition, to provide direct support for a range of education, environment and public health projects, including those directed at children's play, currently excluded from the lottery".

The Opposition's amendments would give effect to that commitment.

Perhaps the House would care to reflect here on the irony of the Government, barely a year in office, facing the embarrassment of being held to implementing their manifesto commitments by the Opposition. I accept that this may be small beer compared with the appalling travesty as regards the early pledges, which have simply not been carried out—the growth in waiting lists and the difficulties in education—but it is a principle of considerable importance for the continuation and success of the national lottery.

We are giving the Government another opportunity to consider their over-hasty raid on the lottery and the damage that the Bill will do to the original good causes by depriving them of money that they had expected. We ask the Government to think about the damage that they are doing to the lottery by turning it into a form of voluntary taxation from which to subsidise general public expenditure on health, education and the environment. The Government have brought forward the creation of the new opportunities fund to let them get their hands on the lottery as soon as possible.

The Bill will mean that the arts, charities, sport and the heritage will lose one sixth of the proceeds of the lottery until the Millennium Commission is closed, and a fifth of the proceeds thereafter. That results from the Government's decision to introduce their own good cause before the Millennium Commission is wound up. The new opportunities fund, to which we object in principle, was conceived as a replacement for the millennium Fund, not as an additional sixth good cause.

The Government are so hemmed in by the embarrassment arising from their failed pledges and their performance on health and education, and by their self-imposed public spending constraints on the Chancellor, that they are desperate for cash. The lottery is the ready source. As has been said, the real lottery winner will be the Chancellor, at the expense of good causes up and down the country.

Labour announced its decision to set up the new opportunities fund before the closure of the Millennium Commission only during the general election campaign. There was no mention of the effects that it would have on the good causes, or on the lottery. It was not made clear then, and the Government have persistently failed to admit it since, that the original good causes are losing as a result of the switch. Sums in the region of £140 million to £150 million will be taken from the good causes and put into the so-called shadow account for distribution after Royal Assent.

The good causes would, of course, have lost out anyway. They had previously expected the Millennium Commission's share to be divided among them when it was wound up. When the decision to bring forward the new opportunities fund was announced, Labour claimed that it had been made possible only by the Wednesday draw. That was complete nonsense, and they knew it. The only reason why the original estimates of about £9 billion rose to about £10 billion was the spectacular success of the first year of the operation, which far exceeded expectations. A midweek draw was always planned, as well as scratch cards and the other games that have been introduced. The Wednesday draw was not an unexpected windfall, and it is nonsense to suggest that it generates a finite sum.

The fact is that the Government wanted to get their hands on the lottery money as soon as possible and were prepared to set up a new good cause to do so, even if it meant taking from existing good causes. In Committee, the Minister acknowledged for the first time that the Government had brought forward their raid on the arts, charities, heritage and sport by saying:

"when we first proposed the new good cause in our manifesto and in the lottery documents published before the election, we anticipated that it should follow the running down of the Millennium fund. We have had second thoughts, however, which is perfectly reasonable. We were surprised and pleased at the strength of support for the new good cause. As it was so widely welcomed, it seemed perverse and unnecessary to delay it for several years. As it was supported by the public . . . we feel that if the content is right we should go ahead now, be decisive and get on with it."

The Minister could offer no credible justification for why the Government should have brought forward the date of their raid, except political expediency. He was not

[Mr. Spring]

prepared to admit that they simply wanted to get their hands on the money. He claimed, unconvincingly, that the proposals were popular—though he presumably did not mean popular with the new causes, which do not share his view. The Minister refused to make public the details of consultation with existing good causes. I asked him to do so, and he talked about some sort of seamless flow. I fear to say that that was not a particularly satisfactory answer.

The Minister has claimed that the distributing bodies agreed. However, he was not so definite in Committee. There was no suggestion then of agreement. He said:

"We have running discussions and consultations with all the distributing bodies. They are fully aware of the plans and happy with them. Consultation is not an exercise, but a continuous process . . . It has always been made clear that the other distributing bodies will receive £1.8 billion each, and they have accepted that. That was the understanding on which they planned . . . The distribution bodies have always accepted that figure; it is the basis on which they have been able to plan. The important thing was the amount of money that they were to receive—£1.8 billion. They will still receive precisely that sum."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 28 April 1998; c. 45-46.]

What a contrast those assertions make with the responses to the Bill made by the original good causes. Many people who have an interest in this subject because of their involvement in the distributing bodies—for example, Lord Gowrie and Lord Rothschild—make a very different interpretation. It is absurd to suggest, as the Minister does, that they are delighted and pleased that traditionally under-resourced parts of our economy that are always put at the back of the Treasury queue will once again be hit severely by this raid.

Labour Members should be grateful to have the opportunity to make sure that the Government keep at least one of their promises. The amendment will let them clear their consciences by doing that. By accepting the amendment, the Minister would ensure that the original good causes continued to get the percentage of lottery proceeds that they were originally promised, rather than the reduced percentage that will result from the premature creation of the new opportunities fund.

Amendment No. 1 deals with the setting of a minimum percentage share for the good causes. The great fear of the original distributing bodies is that the Bill is the beginning of a remorseless chipping away at their resources. They are concerned that the Government plan to take a growing percentage of the proceeds of the lottery to pay for their own new good cause. The bodies fear that this is the beginning of a series of raids.

The Bill is specifically designed to ensure that that happens. Despite being pressed on Second Reading by a number of my hon. Friends—including my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major)—and being pressed again in Committee, the Government have failed to undertake to adhere even to the reduced new percentage allocations contained in the Bill. I extend to the Minister, once again, the opportunity to give that assurance, and I should be delighted if he did.

In Committee, the Minister claimed that it was absurd of the Opposition to want to amend our own National Lottery etc. Act 1993. He was being somewhat disingenuous; he knows that no Government would have had any incentive under the 1993 Act to divert money from one distributor to another. It is different now. The Secretary of State is, in effect, setting up a political fund under his own direct control. He is introducing sweeping powers that will enable him to gerrymander the distribution of lottery money. He is changing the very basis on which the lottery operates and on which it has been such an enormous success. The Government now have an incentive to vary the percentages even further to favour their own good causes, and that is why existing good causes are worried.

I have repeatedly said that it is dangerous to set a precedent for future Parliaments by entrenching in legislation the opportunity for some future Secretary of State to abuse the lottery for political reasons and to change the balance of the lottery in a way that is deeply destructive to the lottery and the under-resourced good causes. The Government are not prepared to offer genuine reassurance to the good causes, and that is why we are resisting the Bill.

As so often with this Bill, it is not the introduction of a single power but the combination of powers, a sort of block building of centralisation of control, that puts a dangerous amount of control in the hands of the Secretary of State. The apparently harmless power to vary the percentage allocation to each good cause in the original Act can be combined with the creation of the new opportunities fund to allow, in theory, the diversion of up to 75 per cent. of money for good causes, and eventually 80 per cent. to the Government's own good cause.

The Government repeatedly resisted this amendment, which was tabled perfectly reasonably by Conservatives and Liberal Democrats in Committee. They combine lukewarm assurance of their good intentions to the good causes with an abject failure to give them statutory effect. They have failed to commit to a percentage for the good causes but say only that the good causes would get £9 billion if the proceeds reached £10 billion. They will not commit even to the reduced percentage share in the event of proceeds exceeding £10 billion, as Camelot confidently predicts that they will. Will they commit to percentages in the Bill today? We await an answer.

8 pm

The Government also made it clear that, in the event of a shortfall, the original good causes will lose out, meaning that there is a possibility of a further fall for them. As Conservative Members have noted, there is always the risk of lottery fatigue, which has been seen in other countries. What assurances can the Minister give against the possibility of revenue shortfall for the good causes, including sport, that are so genuinely concerned about the matter? The Government will not even give a commitment that the original good causes will continue to receive any money at all after the current licence expires in 2001. Will they give clear assurances today?

This is an opportunity for the Government to show good faith and to set a percentage floor below which the good causes will not fall. The minimum share that we propose would not have been necessary without the creation of a new good cause under the direct control of the Secretary of State. The Bill centralises far too much power in his hands.

The new good cause is radically different from the previous ones. The 1993 Act sets out the five areas to be supported by the national lottery on an equal percentage

basis: the arts, sport, national heritage, charity and the millennium. The money was to be drawn on by distributing bodies to make grants to such projects as they chose to support, within their terms of reference. The Secretary of State had no power to tell them what projects to support. The new opportunities fund is to have no such freedom.

As the Government's note on clauses 6 puts it:

"rather than providing general support to its sectors as the other distributors do, it will support a rolling programme of specific initiatives. These will be determined by the Secretary of State."

The first three initiatives are to be IT training for teachers and librarians, out-of-school-hours activities and healthy living centres. The Government claim that such initiatives are consistent with the arm's-length principle. They are not. The new opportunities fund will simply be a Government agency with limited operational autonomy. What is to stop the Secretary of State diverting more and more lottery money to the new opportunities fund at the expense of other good causes? We have not had a satisfactory answer.

We have already been told that the new cause's share will rise to 20 per cent. in 1999 as millennium spending tails off. Why not 25 or 50 per cent? There is nothing in the Bill to stop it. The existing percentages can be varied by ministerial order, and it would be tempting to do so. To set a precedent and give a future Secretary of State the opportunity to do that in an unscrupulous way would be a terrible legacy of our consideration of the Bill.

The sums involved are not negligible. The distributors have so far had about £5 billion. The good causes can expect another £5 billion over the next three years. The Secretary of State is at liberty to channel up to £3.75 billion out of the expected £5 billion to the new opportunities fund. He does not have to give the five other distributors more than 5 per cent. each of the total. That minimum of 5 per cent. was put into the 1993 Act before this voracious new cause made its appearance. That is at the heart of the difficulty.

In view of the changed nature of the national lottery and of the composition of the good causes, we believe that the percentage is too low. It does not sufficiently curb the Secretary of State's political appetite, now or in future. To put it simply, we wish to raise the minimum percentage for all the causes to 13.33, the present percentage allocated for the new opportunities fund. The effect would be to ring fence £3.3 billion of the £5 billion for the five original good causes, as opposed to only £1.25 billion under existing legislation. The Secretary of State would still have the flexibility to give the new opportunities fund more than the others, but not nearly as much flexibility, with all its inherent dangers, as now. I ask again whether the Minister will give a binding undertaking that in this Parliament, he will not reduce the level below 16.67 per cent.

The arts, sport, heritage, the charities and even the millennium fund should have such protection. It is with that protection that the distributing bodies have carried out their work effectively and won the confidence of so many recipients of lottery money. The Bill, with its centralising powers and the ability given to the Secretary of State to interfere in the smooth working of the lottery, demands that if the lottery is to continue to be the success that it has been in the past and should be in future, the good causes need proper protection. The Bill as it stands makes that more unlikely. The minima required to make it work are something that we urgently wish to raise once again for the Government's consideration, in the hope that, even at this late stage, they will think again.

Mr. Fraser: I wish to confine my comments to the protection of the good causes, as mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring). We all accept that the national lottery has so far exceeded expectations. The original good causes had expected to benefit from public enthusiasm and support and to receive their fair share of the £1 billion excess projected over the first seven years of the lottery's operation. Not least, they expected the Government to keep their general election promise that the new opportunities fund would be introduced to replace the millennium fund. There is now a sixth good cause, as well as the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts. Everyone's relative share can only fall. That means that the original good causes will inevitably lose out.

The White Paper is worth quoting. It says:

"Although the existing good causes will be receiving a smaller share of Lottery revenue, the success of the Lottery means that they can still plan on receiving the same amount in total as was envisaged when the Lottery was set up".

The Secretary of State is telling the good causes that they will get less in future. They will get the same amount as was predicted when the lottery was set up as a paper concept. They are being told to forget the years of success and not to worry that the Government will not establish a minimum percentage below which their share of the proceeds will not fall. They must press on and be grateful for what they can get.

Our amendments give the Government the opportunity to honour their manifesto promise that the new opportunities fund should replace the millennium fund. As the Bill stands, the Government have brought forward the creation of the new opportunities fund so that they can get their hands on the lottery money as soon as possible. The Treasury is, after all, desperate for cash that only the lottery can provide.

Public awareness of that grab-for-cash policy is growing. Hon. Members may have seen newspaper reports that the Treasury will take 20p on every lottery ticket when the sixth good cause is introduced. Independent research was carried out by David Wornham, senior lecturer at Bristol business school, and quoted in *The Daily Telegraph* on Monday 25 May. The article stated:

"Mr. Wornham said: 'One of the most disturbing findings is people's assumptions of where the money goes. The public believes that between 15p and 20p in the pound finds its way to charities.

In reality, the figure is less than 6p—and that doesn't take into account how much charities have lost from a drop in charitable contributions since the lottery began. To find out where the money is going,' he said, 'you need look no further than the Exchequer.

Once direct and indirect taxation is taken into account, together with the use of lottery money to replace public expenditure, the Government's "cut" upon realisation of the new sixth cause will turn out to be over 20p in the pound, not the published figure of 12p.'"

I could go on, but that illustrates my point and provides confirmation, if confirmation is needed, that the real lottery winner is the Chancellor of the Exchequer. To rub salt in the wound, the Government continue to dispute that the existing good causes will lose out, which is quite incredible when one considers the evidence. If public

[Mr. Fraser]

confidence in the lottery starts to fall, not least because of newspaper reports such as the one I have just quoted, they will really start to feel the pinch.

The fact that the Secretary of State can involve himself completely justifies the concern expressed by my hon. Friends. The Secretary of State will involve himself and decide on the scope and direction of his involvement at a whim and a fancy. Having recognised that as a dead certainty, we seek through our amendments to limit the powers of the Secretary of State and to limit the amount of money he can divert into the Government's new opportunities fund at the expense of the original good causes. To guarantee them an allocation of 13.33 per cent. offers them a future, albeit a lean one; at the moment, they fear for the future and face the prospect that the Government plan to take an ever-increasing percentage of the proceeds for their own salvation.

The current model of awards is transparent and free from accusations of political gerrymandering. Ministers cannot tell us how that positive characteristic will be safeguarded in future—I hope that the Minister will answer that question this evening. If they believe that there should be safeguards, the Government should be happy to give an undertaking to the original good causes, which they currently cannot and will not do. Instead, the Government have every good reason to vary the percentages even further in future to the benefit of the new opportunities fund as the economic situation inevitably worsens and the calls for health, education and environment spending increase.

The Government have made it clear that, in the event of a shortfall, the original good causes will lose out. The Government's apparent lack of support for the good causes increases the concern felt by those good causes and poses the question: what does the future hold for the good causes? I suspect that their future is not particularly rosy, given the wide range of opportunities for Government interference offered by the Bill. They do not even have the comfort of an assurance that they will continue to receive money after the current licence expires in 2001. I should like the Minister to give an assurance today on the future of the good causes.

Mr. Green: I shall speak mainly to amendments Nos. 8 and 1, but I shall first briefly address new clause 4. I regret the absence of the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan) in more than the usual formal sense in which those words are used in the House, because I am genuinely unsure about whether I have completely understood what he wants to achieve with his new clause. As I understand it, he wants to constrain the behaviour of the Secretary of State after the millennium fund has been wound up. That seems perfectly sensible and there is much to be said in favour of such a course of action, but, in a form of argument that will be familiar to those of my right hon. and hon. Friends who have attended debates at the Conservative party conference, I disapprove of the new clause because it does not go far enough.

8.15 pm

If it is sensible to restrain the behaviour of the Secretary of State after the winding up of the millennium fund, it would be equally sensible to do so now, especially in the context of the Bill which brings so much power over distribution under the Secretary of State's purview. One of the principal objections to the Bill has always been that it involves the nationalisation of large parts of the lottery distribution mechanism, turning it from a national lottery into a nationalised lottery. That lies at the root of many of the Opposition's objections to the Bill. One of the purposes of amendments Nos. 8 and 1 is to retain some independence for those bodies distributing to the good causes that have done so well over the past four years.

I am sure that the Minister will advance once again the specious argument that we heard several times in Committee; that the cake has got bigger, so it does not matter that the percentage of the cake that the existing good causes are to get is being reduced, as they were planning to receive only that amount of cake anyway. There are two reasons why that is an invalid and specious argument. First, if it can be done once, it can be done again. All the good causes will rightly realise that they have become a target for Ministers of this and future Governments—that they are seen as a convenient way of relieving public spending pressures in almost any circumstances. That will have a direct effect on the way they act from now on. The danger is not merely a theoretical possibility for the future, as many of the things the good causes do involve long-term planning; if they are less sure of the level of funding they are to receive for many years ahead and if they are to act prudently, as most do, they will not commit themselves to large projects or long-term revenue funding. That in itself will be damaging.

Secondly, the good causes are being cheated out of money. They recognised that the cake was growing faster than was originally forecast and planned accordingly. It is undeniable that the demand for bids has improved both in quantity and in quality over the years, as more bodies have got used to the methodology of bidding and worked out how to put together a successful bid. All the distributing bodies say that they would like to pass a higher proportion of bids now than they did two or three years ago, simply because they are generally of better quality, but the result of the Bill is that they will be able to pass only a lower percentage than before, which will be extremely damaging.

The ability to plan ahead will be particularly affected, and that will be increasingly harmful. In the past, large capital projects have been funded, but we all accept that, in future, lottery funding will move towards revenue funding. If the good causes feel that they have to cut off revenue funding after two or three years, future artists and athletes may not be given the opportunities that they deserve and that they could be given under the lottery as currently constituted.

Existing good causes will know that the new opportunities fund is open ended and can be expanded to almost any extent. The Bill would allow expansion to continue, so the good causes would be right to be even more fearful about the future as the opportunities for political manipulation introduced by the Bill become ever more attractive to future Secretaries of State.

The present division is crude but fair. Nobody would argue that there is any great science in deciding that five good causes should each receive 20 per cent. of the money. We could have had endless arguments about whether charities were more worthy than the arts and

whether sport was more worthy than heritage. The simple method—which has, as far as I know, received barely a murmur of protest—of dividing the cake five ways by giving 20 per cent. to each cause is seen to be perfectly fair. In this case, complication is the enemy of trust in the long term. By introducing complication into the distribution mechanism, the Government are eroding the trust that exists between them and the distributing bodies. That is likely to damage the bodies' morale and the amount of good that they can do.

I urge the Government to accept the amendments, which are in no way wrecking amendments. They would not stop the Government setting up the new opportunities fund or taking any of the significant measures in the Bill. If the House has a surprising burst of sanity and accepts the amendments, it will enshrine protection for the existing good causes so that although the Government could set up the new opportunities fund, that would not cause the collateral damage to the good causes that the Bill will inflict. I urge the Minister to have a last minute change of heart and accept the amendments.

Mr. Prior: It is rather sad that we have to debate amendment No. 1, which would increase the minimum allocation from 5 to 13.33 per cent. We should not feel obliged to do so. We are debating it because Conservative Members are genuinely concerned about protecting the good causes. The lottery has been a tremendous success, as has the distribution of lottery funds, but, over the past few months, in Committee and in debates in the House, many Conservative Members have come to feel that we can no longer trust the Government to ensure that the money is spent properly.

We do not trust the Government because we are not convinced by their defence of the additionality principle. We are convinced by the Bill's wording that the lottery can no longer be described as being at arm's length from the Government. The combination of those two aspects of the Bill makes us feel the need to increase the minimum percentage allocation to protect the good causes.

What leads me to distrust the Government is the fact that they are legislating retrospectively and have been fiddling around with shadow accounts. There was no need to do that. If they had been honest, they could have increased the percentage to the new opportunities fund later, but they did not want to. They deliberately made the Bill retrospective to make it appear as if the percentage was less. That was a deeply unnecessary and reprehensible act. The Government will grab as much money as they possibly can to use for their own purposes. That was not the intention behind the lottery; it was not even the intention of the Government when they were in opposition, when they fought strongly for the additionality principle.

It is vital to protect the interests of good causes, first, for the sake of the lottery. As long as people see that the lottery is independent and that the money goes to good causes, not mainstream public spending, they will continue to play it. The danger of lottery fatigue setting in will be greater if the Bill is implemented.

We are anxious to protect good causes, secondly, for the sake of good government. It is important that taxation is transparent. The taxpayer and the electorate should know where the money comes from to finance public spending. This is sleight of hand—the Government are taking money from good causes to fund their pet projects. I do not necessarily disagree with the projects that they are spending the money on, but it is wrong that the money is being taken from the lottery.

The third reason why it is important to protect good causes is for the sake of the causes themselves. If lottery fatigue sets in and, over time, the causes that are supported by the distributing funds spend the money on revenue rather than capital, it is essential that they have a longer and longer time horizon. If there is in the background the permanent threat that the Government may take more money away from the good causes, that will undermine the causes in the long run.

For those three reasons I support, with some sadness, the proposed increase in the minimum allocation from 5 per cent. to 13.33 per cent.

Mr. Brooke: I declare an interest as the chairman of a trust involved in archaeology and ecology in the Andes, primarily in Peru, which has made an application to the National Lottery Charities Board. I see concern written on the face of the Minister for Sport; I give him a categorical assurance that I shall not communicate or correspond with him about it. I mention that body because, as the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry) will recall, it was the charities' concern about their allocation in the original Act that occasioned a fair amount of debate between us.

There was a recognition that, as the Millennium Commission money ran out with the coming of the millennium, there would be an opportunity to consider the reallocation of the money and whether the charities should receive more. At that stage, we would know how they had spent the money so far. In that respect, I agree with new clause 4, which has been tabled by the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan) as it relates to the purpose of a review.

I have not had a briefing by the National Lottery Charities Board, which is my constituent. In the fourth sitting of the Standing Committee, on 30 April, my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) referred to such a briefing. I am not in any way acting on behalf of the board. I apologise for some unfamiliarity with the narrative. When I was a child, my mother taught me at her knee what I always believed to be a verse from the Old Testament: man look not back at the furrow ploughed by thee. I have never been able to find it in holy writ, but I have not given up hope. I do not spend much time revisiting my past and, if I am unfamiliar with any detail, I apologise.

My recollection is that the Home Office was originally responsible for the National Lottery Charities Board. I was conscious that my right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Surrey (Mrs. Bottomley), who was then Secretary of State for National Heritage, received into her Department the voluntary activity that had previously been looked after by the Home Office. I do not know whether she took responsibility for the charities fund at the same time, but I am conscious that the Government have moved the voluntary activities back into the Home Office. If the Government are creating a new good cause, it is a little illogical to spend money on issues that have nothing to do with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport when they criticised the earlier movement of voluntary activity to the Department of National Heritage.

[Mr. Brooke]

I say, as a bystander, that there has been a lack of coherence in the development of the Government's thinking. There was a Stephen Leacock character who jumped on his horse and rode off in four directions at once. There has been an element of that in the transmogrification of the Government's policy, which has been curious in view of the emphasis that they have placed on strategy and their criticism that there was a lack of strategy in the previous thinking.

I believe that the Minister for Sport will reply to the debate, and I welcome the opportunity to hear from him more precisely what the Government's intentions are. I do not know whether, in his responsibility for heritage buildings, he has been high over the nave in Wells cathedral, but if he has he will have seen etched on the floor the design work of the masons in the middle ages, which is still visible 500 or 600 years later. We shall see the Minister for Sport set out such markings, and we shall have an opportunity to verify them over the next five years. I had profound sympathy with the observation by my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) that complication is the enemy of trust in these matters. The simpler the Government can make what they intend to do, the better it will be for the lottery.

8.30 pm

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): I should like to add to my considerable reputation for parliamentary eccentricity by saying that I was always doubtful about the whole concept of the lottery. I felt that it would damage existing charities and drain from them funds that would otherwise go directly to them. My outlook was probably soured by the brilliance of George Orwell's description in "Nineteen Eighty-Four" of the effects of a lottery in a totalitarian society. He said:

> "The Lottery, with its weekly pay-out of enormous prizes, was the one public event to which the proles paid serious attention. It was probable that there were some millions of proles for whom the Lottery was the principal if not the only reason for remaining alive. It was their delight, their folly, their anodyne and their intellectual stimulant."

I thought that, with such a start, the lottery could only be a somewhat corrupting force in society. The Bill shows that it is also corrupting the Government. Effectively, the Bill is the second stage in the Government's attempt to make good their promise to try to keep their spending and tax-raising targets at Conservative levels. The first stage of that attempt was the raid on the pension funds and the second stage—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. We are debating the new clause and the amendments. We are not worried about possible inequities of the lottery. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman could hang his jacket on that peg.

Dr. Lewis: The amendments seek to ring fence the amount that will be available for good causes. Good causes were nominated to enable money that formerly went to charities to continue to be spent on such activities. There is an attempt to get away from the safeguards that were provided for the lottery. That is part of a general, corrupting strategy to enable the Government to get their hands on money that, had the lottery not been created, would have gone to charity. That charitable money will be used for Government expenditure. I predict that this is not the last time that such an unethical sleight of hand will be employed.

Mr. Banks: The hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) described himself as eccentric. That is a middle-class word for loony, and he adequately proved his case. The lottery has been a great success and the hon. Gentleman was wrong to oppose it. People go in for the lottery because they want to win oodles of cash. I do not wish to strip away all the talk about good causes, but that is why I go in for it. So far, I have been unsuccessful, apart from a few tenners here and there, but I dream about the big one coming along, as do many people. As I fail, week after week, to win the biggie, I have the consolation of knowing that money is going to good causes. It is clear that people do the lottery to try to win prizes.

The right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke) spoke about Wells cathedral. I have never been high in the nave of that cathedral—I have never been high anywhere—but I was interested to hear that the right hon. Gentleman will not spend much time revisiting his past. According to the interests that he declared, he will spend some time in Peru.

The Opposition amendments demonstrate two matters. First, they show the Opposition's inability to decide their position on the new good cause. As my hon. Friend the Minister for Arts said, in Committee and on Second Reading, the Opposition argued that there was something intrinsically wrong about spending lottery money on health, education and the environment. However, amendment No. 8 accepts the idea in principle, merely postponing it for a few years. Secondly, the amendments demonstrate the Opposition's failure to recognise that we are not harming the existing good causes. They are receiving the £9 billion that everyone expected them to receive when the lottery started.

Perhaps it is rather odd to say in this place that there comes a point when we ought to try to trust each other. *[Interruption.]* I knew that Opposition cynics would not accept that. They have described my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State as if he were Josef Goebbels. Somehow, there was an evil manifestation sitting next to me and planning all sorts of dire happenings to the existing good causes. My right hon. Friend is a perfectly sweet, decent honourable gent who does not have a vicious thought in his mind. The House should trust him.

The Liberal Democrat new clause 4 gives us a chance to explain our approach to the reallocation of the millennium stream, which seems to have worried people.

Mr. Brooke: I greatly enjoyed the Minister's reference to his right hon. Friend. In his capacity as Chairman of the Select Committee on National Heritage, the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) once said to me, "Of course I trust you Secretary of State: it is the ones who come after you about whom I am worried."

Mr. Banks: I do not know anything about impending reshuffles. There has been one in the Opposition and we constantly read about them in the Government. Whoever is Secretary of State—and I know that it will be the present incumbent for many years—can be accorded the same trust as my right hon. Friend. Why should we want

to destroy the existing good causes? It offends me somewhat that Opposition Members should feel that we have ulterior motives—that we are somehow intent on destroying the existing good causes and the national lottery. On Sunday, the front page of *The Observer* stated that the Chancellor of the Exchequer had squirrelled away £50 billion. That is a great deal to squirrel away, but I think that we can rely on our Chancellor to manage the economy in good order and to make sure that there are sufficient funds for our spending priorities.

The right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan) apologised to me for the fact that he would not be here for the winding-up speeches. I thank him for that and for his short speech. I assure him that when the time comes for us to decide how to reallocate the millennium share, we shall carefully consider what the lottery distribution bodies have achieved and the case for giving each a higher share. There is no assumption that it should go to the new opportunities fund. If that happens, it will be because we have concluded, after looking at all the good causes, that it is the right thing to do. We shall obviously take account of the representations by hon. Members and others on the merits of each good cause and, to address one of the issues in the amendments, we shall explain the basis on which we have decided the allocation.

When deciding what to do with the millennium share, we must try to ensure that each body has the potential to achieve at least as much as it has already achieved. We have adequate arrangements in place to ensure that we can evaluate the effectiveness and performance of each body. As the right hon. Gentleman will know from his membership of the Public Accounts Committee, the Department is accountable to Parliament for the effective use of national lottery distribution funds. As part of its normal sponsorship activities for the lottery overall and for individual distributing bodies, the Department is continually engaged in reviewing the performance of those distributing bodies. We will look very carefully at what has been done by each of the bodies and what can be achieved in future. That is the way in which we shall assess the performance of those lottery bodies, but, before reaching any final decision, we shall, of course, listen to what the lottery distributors and others have to say about the case for increasing the share of each good cause.

The hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) effectively said that the Bill goes beyond the manifesto. The manifesto, covering as it did the whole range of Government's responsibilities, dealt with the lottery only briefly. We did publish, as he acknowledged, during the election campaign a policy document, "The People's Money", which set out in more detail our plans for widening the benefits of the lottery. It fleshed out our plans for the new good cause and made it clear that the lottery's success enabled the new good cause to be established while the millennium stream was still continuing. Who could object to that? If having such a new good cause is a good idea, why not do so as soon as it can be afforded without damaging the other good causes?

"The People's Money" received wide and favourable media coverage, and we all know the result of the election that followed a week after its publication. The ideas in "The People's Money" are, in all essentials, the same as those that were put forward in our White Paper last July, which nine out of 10 respondents supported. I fail to see why it is not perfectly legitimate for us to base the Bill on ideas that we put forward so clearly before the election and which were so comprehensively endorsed by the British people.

The hon. Member for West Suffolk is completely wrong to imply that there is some fundamental difference between the new good cause and the existing good causes. Is he saying that arts, sport and heritage are not core Government responsibilities? That may be his view, but it is certainly not mine.

I turn to the matter of damaging existing good causes, which was raised by the hon. Members for Ashford (Mr. Green) and for West Suffolk. The Opposition have returned to the most tired argument that has been used throughout the passage of the Bill—that we are taking money away from the existing good causes. That is simply not true. The Bill reduces the percentages that the arts, sport, heritage and charities will receive, but the greater than expected success of the lottery means that those are smaller percentages of a bigger total—in terms of hard cash, which is surely what matters to everyone, particularly the lottery distributing bodies, the existing good causes will receive £1.8 billion each during the current licence period, exactly the same as was forecast when the lottery started.

The other point that was made was that the good causes were counting on the extra income. The Opposition, when in power, never guaranteed that there would be no changes in the good cause percentage. They must have envisaged the possibility because they included in the 1993 Act provision to change the percentages by order. They never made it clear how they might use that power.

Mr. Brooke *rose—*

Mr. Banks: I will give way to the right hon. Gentleman, who knows a great deal about the 1993 Act. He can explain why no guarantee was given in that Act that there would be no changes in the good cause percentages, and why a 5 per cent. minimum was put in. That meant effectively that, for the five good causes, the amount could have been reduced to 5 per cent. and that could have been done by order in the House, if the present Opposition had been in government. Seventy-five per cent. could have gone somewhere else. We are giving far more of a guarantee to the existing good causes than the previous Government ever gave during their period in office.

8.45 pm

Mr. Brooke: I was seeking to intervene to make a point that flows out of the exchange between us. Given that the original intention was that we should ideally have a debate in each Parliament, with the ability to change the percentages by order thereafter, having listened to the opinions of the House, would the Minister, when the time comes, be prepared to recommend to the business managers the possibility of having just such a debate at that stage, so that the House can contribute to the discussion of the allocation?

Mr. Banks: The chief business manager—my right hon. Friend the Chief Whip—is sitting next to me whispering sweet nothings in my ear. I am sure that he heard what the right hon. Gentleman said and will be seized of the good sense of his suggestion.

[Mr. Banks]

Let me finish on the commitment to the existing good causes. This is very important and it is where the trust element must come in. Time and again throughout the passage of the Bill, here and in another place, the Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Minister for Arts and my noble Friend the Deputy Chief Whip in the other place have made our position on future changes on allocations abundantly clear and I am happy to repeat them.

First, barring the extremely unlikely circumstances in which lottery income for good causes is less than £10 billion in total, we will ensure that each of the existing good causes receives by 2001, when the present licence expires, the £1.8 billion expected at the time that the lottery started. Secondly, the Government have taken no decision on how any returns beyond £10 billion might be allocated—there is no assumption that they automatically fall to the new good cause or any other. Thirdly, the Government have no plans beyond those that they have announced already—the reduction in the millennium share to 13 per cent. and the increase in the new good cause to 20 per cent. in autumn 1999—to alter the funding of the existing good causes. That applies both to 2001 and beyond. That is fairly clear; one cannot be more explicit about that.

There is no way that the Department for Culture, Media and Sport is setting out to ensure that culture and sport do not receive money beyond 2001. I cannot make it any clearer than that and I hope that the hon. Member for West Suffolk will accept that point. I reject both the amendments.

Mr. Spring: With the leave of the House. The reassurances that the Minister has sought to give are wholly unsatisfactory because, as he knows, the new opportunities fund is a creation which involves a massive centralisation of power in the hands of a Secretary of State, which makes this completely different from the other good causes. Therefore, to protect the good causes, we seek to ensure that the minima are changed. As Lord McIntosh accepted, this is a radically different situation. Therefore, we will concentrate on amendment No. 1 to put down a clear marker to those who are concerned—the recipients of the lottery and those in the distributing bodies. We want to ensure as best we can that the smash-and-grab raid on the lottery does not continue and worsen.

Question put and negatived.

Clause 6

THE NEW GOOD CAUSE AND THE RE-ALLOCATION OF LOTTERY MONEY

Amendment proposed: No. 1, in page 7, line 43, at end insert—

'(6A) In section 28 of the 1993 Act (power to amend section 22) in subsection (2)(a) for "5 per cent." there shall be substituted "13⅓ per cent".'.—*[Mr. Peter Ainsworth.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 120, Noes 277.

Division No. 288] **[8.48 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
May, Mrs Theresa
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John M. Taylor and Mr. Stephen Day.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Ashton, Joe
Austin, John
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Bennett, Andrew F
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel

Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Cabom, Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell–Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, Yvette
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Fisher, Mark
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Salter, Martin
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Jamieson and
Mr. Jim Dowd.

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 17

OBJECTS

9 pm

Mr. Spring: I beg to move amendment No. 5, in page 17, line 36, leave out from 'potential' to 'and' in line 40.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss amendment No. 6, in clause 27, page 22, leave out lines 8 and 9.

Mr. Spring: In the course of the past few days, I have read the Secretary of State's book "Creative Britain".

[Mr. Spring]

In it, he describes the huge increase in our exports of radio and television material, the increase in employment in that area and the massive rise in sponsorship of the arts and in the number of cinema admissions. On behalf of my hon. Friends, I thank the right hon. Gentleman for so generously applauding the Conservative Government's 18 years in office. It was precisely the conditions created by that Government which led to the explosive increases so graphically set out in his 27-page introduction.

As we have made clear in respect of the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts—NESTA—we are not against the setting up of a national fund for talent; there is considerable merit in the idea. Indeed, it is based on a Conservative concept. It builds on the well-established and admirable philanthropic tradition of this country. We entirely support the principle of a fund that supports individual talent.

We are fortunate in having many people of considerable talent who have contributed to our national life and won so many Nobel prizes. Our success compares extremely favourably with that of any other country, especially given our small population.

The sad truth, however, is that the Government have missed an important opportunity. Elements involved in the establishment of NESTA in the form suggested in the Bill put at risk the success of the whole venture. We greatly regret the fact that the Government have chosen to establish it in this form. I appeal to the Minister even at this late stage to persuade the Government that NESTA's objectives are incompatible with the sort of body that we believe could successfully nurture our national talent. We are deeply sceptical of the idea of setting up a quasi-governmental body, some of whose objectives will be overtly commercial.

We know now why the Government have determined not to set up NESTA as an independent charity, despite the clear commitment given before the election to do so. As the Minister explained, the Government have decided to graft a commercial remit on to the original concept for NESTA, which, by definition, loses it the advantages of charitable status. The amendments are designed to remove the commercial elements and turn NESTA into the genuine trust for talent that the entire country would applaud. To set up a national endowment with true nobility of purpose would secure the support not only of the House, across party political lines, but of the whole country, desirous of enabling talented individuals to realise their talents to the full.

We accept the advantages of establishing a body such as NESTA as an independent endowment, but, regrettably, NESTA, as proposed, will not be fully independent of the Government. As a consequence, it risks not being able to attract money from independent sources, which is a crucial element in the long-term success of NESTA. That is the crux of our concern about the establishment of that body.

As I said on Second Reading, people simply do not quickly volunteer to give money to Government bodies—even Bernie Ecclestone, I dare say, might find it difficult to be so persuaded.

I remind the House of the Labour party's commitment to NESTA:

"Our immediate objective would be to have NESTA-supported ideas earning copyright revenues by 2001. The National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts would be a national trust for talent, helping to turn bright ideas into successful and innovative businesses. It will be constituted as an independent charity."

I stress those last few words. Labour continued:

"NESTA will invite successful figures in the arts, technology and science to contribute part of the value of their copyrights and patents to help the young talent of tomorrow. These contributions will go into a permanent endowment fund. To give NESTA an initial boost, limited contributions will be set aside from the new Lottery fund to add to this endowment".

That commitment is to be found in the Labour party document of 23 April 1997.

The Prime Minister reiterated those proposals before the election. In a press release on 27 April, he said:

"We propose to give a Lottery-aided launch to our proposal for a national talent fund—a National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts. NESTA will be an independent charity which will encourage successful people in the arts and sciences to donate part of the proceeds of their talent to an endowment fund which will foster new talent for the future".

Those words are to be applauded.

The amendments would remove the commercial aspect of the objectives set out for NESTA. They would give it a proper coherence and a real opportunity to acquire the national support that it deserves. In effect, they would make it work. There is a danger that the initial endowment of £200 million will be put at risk because NESTA, as currently constituted, will not attract the additional funding over time.

As I said in Committee, we broadly support the aims of NESTA and would support the idea of just such an independent body dedicated to nurturing talent, especially in the arts. Indeed, the Conservative manifesto of 1997 included the following pledge:

"We will encourage the use of Lottery money to train young athletes and artists, with revenue funding for bursaries, concessionary tickets to professional performances and support for young people's organisations and productions."

Therefore, there was considerable cross-party support, which the Government have unfortunately now put at risk.

NESTA was in fact the development of an initiative first announced in April 1996 by my right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Surrey (Mrs. Bottomley), to whom I pay tribute.

It was always the view of the Conservative party that the lottery would evolve. That view was reinforced as the popularity of the lottery grew among those playing it and the communities that benefited from lottery grants. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) said on Second Reading:

"there is the prospect of moving rather more from capital funding to revenue funding, which was always envisaged at the outset and, again, is perfectly sensible. The only points at issue are the specific details of what is proposed and the timing."—[*Official Report*, 7 April 1998; Vol. 310, c. 187.]

I am happy to congratulate the Government on following the path set by the previous Administration, but they are risking the very success and popularity of the lottery by using it to fund areas that it was not originally set up to finance. Potentially, that could damage the image of the lottery and could end in failure.

In Committee, we learned of the Government's continuing determination to use the lottery to supplement public expenditure on health, education and the environment—I use those definitions in the broadest possible terms. The amendments simply highlight another unexpected and unwelcome departure in lottery funding under Labour.

We debated in Committee the unfortunate decision—which I believe will be regretted—to place NESTA under the control of the Secretary of State rather than to make it a genuinely independent body, as was at least the Government's original stated intention. We debated the disturbing funding arrangements for NESTA, which show that the Government have no faith that it will ever perform as an independent, self-financing body or that it will ever manage to attract significant contributions from independent sources. The evidence, as we shall see, is the scope for the Government to raid the original good causes to pay for NESTA.

We are also concerned about the requirement placed on NESTA not merely to encourage talented individuals in the fields of science, technology and the arts and to contribute to public knowledge and appreciation, but to seek out and sponsor commercial success in those sectors. It is simply the latest incarnation of Labour's long-standing desire to pick winners, as the previous Labour Government sought to do so unsuccessfully. It is a further sign of Labour's inexhaustible faith in Government rather than the private sector.

As we look back on the development of the venture capital industry in Britain, we must recognise that, although we have had many successes, more could be done. There is certainly an argument that many of the most important British inventions have been commercially exploited elsewhere. However, we recognised that when we were in government, in the considerable changes to the tax regime for venture capital. We sought to encourage and secure seedcorn capital, by the tax changes introduced by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke). That is the way forward. If the dynamics of the small business sector, particularly the seedcorn, are to be nurtured and encouraged, it is through the tax mechanism and not by the Government picking winners. We have been there before, and I believe that once again it will be a considerable failure.

A similar amendment was proposed and rejected in another place, when my noble Friend Lord Skidelsky said:

"The contention seems to be that we are very good at inventions but banks or others are reluctant to back them, so they end up being exploited overseas. The argument that our innovators have suffered from lack of venture capital is an old one, but it is very hard to prove. Surely, whatever the case, NESTA should not seek to become a venture capitalist or business angel in its own right. We should have learned by now that government agencies should not try to second guess the private sector. In the end it is the taxpayer, or in this case other National Lottery initiatives, who suffers the losses of bad decisions."—[*Official Report, House of Lords, Grand Committee*, 29 January 1998; Vol. 585, c. 108.]

The difficulty about establishing that objective for NESTA is that in practice it may well embody the very worst kind of corporatist second-guessing. It is an ominous precedent which I wish to highlight again.

By adding that specific aim to NESTA's remit, the Government are establishing a further call on the lottery in an area that should be the responsibility of the Department of Trade and Industry—if the Government have any role, other than via the clear tax incentives that my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe introduced in the latter years of the previous Government. The Minister should reflect on that. If it is necessary or desirable to amend the tax regime, something should be worked out between the Treasury and the Department of Trade and Industry that would satisfy the integrity of NESTA. We should be happy to support such a policy, which would be separate from the commercial remit being given to NESTA.

9.15 pm

The conventional new Labour wisdom is that the British economy is blighted by short-termism that prevents the British people from fulfilling our true potential; that we do not have a sufficiently vigorous or flexible enterprise culture to take advantage of all our talent for innovation. It was clear from the comments of Labour Members in Committee that the private sector was an alien and mysterious world to them, because so few had any practical experience of it.

The aim of the clause is return to the state-sponsored enterprise for which there is no evidence of success in this country over a long period. If a market for an idea or project cannot be found in the private sector, it is folly for the Government to imagine that they know better. It is regrettable that the Government have chosen to saddle NESTA with that objective. We urgently ask them to reconsider, even at this late stage. If they were prepared to do so, we should happily support the establishment of NESTA.

We discussed all the issues comprehensively in Committee, but the Government rejected outright any amendment that we proposed. At no stage did they even consider looking again on Report at any of the points that we had raised. That is unprecedented in the experience of many and shows the insecurity of Ministers. How much better it would be if NESTA were set up as a charitable trust—as the Government originally intended—along the lines of the National Trust, which was established by a series of Acts of Parliament and commands the support of millions throughout the country, or the Prince's Trust, which makes grants to businesses, but does not take on commercial risks. The Government are proposing a beast that is neither fish nor fowl. It is not charitable in its aims, so it cannot benefit from charitable status and will not attract the general public support that a charity enjoys, but it will not make any money either. Instead of attempting to be a venture capital arm of the Government, NESTA should act as a real endowment for talented individuals.

Governments have a miserable record of picking winners in this country. There is no reason to suppose that that will change. I ask the Minister once again to consider the great potential that NESTA has. A clear message of bipartisan support could be sent out from the House. Creating a widely appreciated national endowment for talent is within the Minister's gift, but he must accept that the commercial element contains the seeds of NESTA's destruction and its lack of public acceptance.

I hope that the Minister will reflect on what I have said today and what my hon. Friends said so often in Committee. He should return to the assurances given when the Prime Minister, then Leader of the Opposition, set out the original concept. If the Government returned

[Mr. Spring]

NESTA to what was originally envisaged, even at this late stage, real hope would be offered to those talented and successful individuals who would enjoy the benefits of the endowment from the national lottery that NESTA offers.

Mr. Tom Pendry (Stalybridge and Hyde): I had intended to make a lengthy speech on Third Reading, but as my hon. Friends on the Front Bench have been so forthright and clear in their answers on Report, I am left with just one narrow point that relates to amendment No. 5. It follows a point that I made on Second Reading which does not appear to have been acted on in Committee. My hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Murphy) made a similar point. It relates to NESTA and our promise—which I wrote—in the sports election manifesto. Page 10 of that document states:

"The endowment will not focus solely on excellence. It will be inclusive in its approach, encouraging access and partnership across the whole range of sciences, humanities, sports and the arts."

On Second Reading, I suggested that the Government might see a way in which to develop a useful sporting role for NESTA in, for instance, sports science or sports information technology—both of which are crucial to developing world-class sport in the UK. Unfortunately, the Government seemed unable to move on that point in Committee. They appeared reluctant even to acknowledge the omission. I am sure that it was merely an omission and that the Minister for Arts was right at the time. Perhaps he is saving his best card until tonight, and will give sport—and me—some encouragement in the concept of NESTA at this very late stage. I congratulate my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench on their handling of the Bill.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): I am grateful for the opportunity briefly to add to the excellent remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) in pursuit of acceptance of amendments Nos. 5 and 6. I want to add to his remarks, not least because his reference to the Labour party's desire to pick winners struck a great chord.

When I entered the civil service way back in 1979, one of our tasks in what was then called the industrial planning division—it seems a rather archaic title now—was to start to dismantle some of the measures that the previous Government had implemented precisely to pick winners. The National Enterprise Board, which was very like what the Labour party proposes, went about the task of trying to put public money into industrial and commercial enterprises with the objective of making money for the country and the taxpayer. Of course, it failed to do either.

I say that as somebody who was once responsible for the science and technology budget in the Department of Trade and Industry. I disposed of £440 million. I shall elaborate briefly on the interesting debate on which my hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk briefly touched. He criticised the Labour party's desire to move towards the market in proposing that NESTA should provide resources, take stakes in companies and acquire property to pursue commercial exploitation of an invention, new product or process.

In moving towards the marketplace, one must realise that one is not behaving in the same way as one would in a genuine market. There is a conjunction of two principles—one of exploitation close to the marketplace and one of additionality. I found when working on the science and technology budget that, when one moves public money for the purposes of subsidy closer to the marketplace and at the same time applies the principle of additionality—I shall be interested to hear whether the Minister says that that is not to be applied in this context, although I suspect that it will be—one ends up with projects right at the margin of commercial exploitation. The market itself is quick to leap on those products, processes and inventions that have readily exploitable commercial potential. It leaves to the publicly funded or publicly subsidised body those projects that are not obviously commercial or will not obtain a full return. The net result is that the market says that the publicly funded operator can have all the projects that are right at the margins where the returns are doubtful.

To reinforce what my hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk was saying, Ministers should not be sanguine about the possibility of the project bringing forward returns to the taxpayer or NESTA for subsequent reinvestment. On the contrary, my hon. Friend was right to emphasise the value of the endowment in relation to talented individuals. That is precisely where the public sector—at some distance from the marketplace—does not necessarily exploit the potential.

I hope that we have learnt not to seek to direct subsidy close to the marketplace in substitution for commercial judgments. I hope that we have learnt that there is a role for the public sector through the subsidy of research that is essentially some distance from the marketplace. There are significant externalities to the United Kingdom economy from subsidising that research because not all the benefits of that research can be appropriated to a particular project or the promoter. That is why the public sector puts funding and subsidy into projects further from the marketplace.

Interestingly, there are precisely the same potential externalities available if one subsidises individuals who have talent—and I say that with a constituency interest. It is highly probable that many individuals in the area around Cambridge are precisely those who have the talent to bring their projects, products, processes and inventions to the marketplace. What they do not lack is the commercial exploitation around Cambridge. What is important to them is the process of bringing them out of some of the world-class research institutes in Cambridge university and giving them a start.

That start will often be focused on their talents as individuals, demonstrated in the research environment. It will not necessarily be in relation to a particular project, but it will be in relation to their broader talent. In just the same way as public subsidy should be directed towards blue-skies research, the endowment should be directed toward people who can look to the blue skies but who are not necessarily close to the marketplace. On that basis, I support the new clause.

Mr. Prior: I wish to make two points in support of my hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring). First, NESTA is mixing its drinks—mixing thoroughly laudable charitable aims and commercial aims. The great risk is that the almost inevitable failure of its commercial objectives will ultimately overwhelm its sensible charitable ones. I entirely agree with my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) that

the history of Government organisations in terms of picking winners is a bad one. When they pick losers, it casts a shadow over the worthwhile charitable objectives.

I am glad to see the Minister for Small Firms, Trade and Industry in the Chamber, as I wish to refer to the myth that there is a shortage of capital in the United Kingdom for decent ventures. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire that, at an early stage, potential entrepreneurs, scientists and artists need help, encouragement, training and education. However, a lot of capital is available in the commercial market and, in Cambridge, there are venture capital groups that specialise in science and high-tech firms. I ask the Government not to delude themselves into thinking that there is a shortage of capital.

9.30 pm

Mr. Fisher: I am glad that there is a measure of agreement that NESTA is fundamentally a good idea and that the United Kingdom is good at invention, design, engineering, science and medical and artistic innovation. Despite one or two comments from Opposition Members, I think that there is also general agreement that we are not so good at developing ideas in the private sector or at developing ideas and bringing them to the market.

In framing NESTA, the Government have been guided by three important reports: the 1997 Confederation of British Industry report "Breaking the Growth Barriers for Technology-Based Small and Medium Sized Enterprises"—a snappily named document—which identified the need for early-stage finance and seedcorn investment; the 1997 House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology report "The Innovation-Exploitation Barrier", which identified the need for management of innovation, highlighting the importance of intellectual property; and the 1996 Bank of England report "The Financing of Technology-Based Small Firms", which called for partnership between the public and private sectors.

All three reports identified a weakness, which is not to say that there is no good work. It was encouraging to hear from the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) that there is, perhaps inevitably, a clustering in and around a great university such as Cambridge, which means that many good ideas will be produced and brought to market. However, Cambridge is perhaps better placed than some other areas to benefit from seedcorn investment; it will not be alone, but success there may not be reflected throughout the country. The belief that we are failing in some respects has led the Government—with, I think, the general support of the Opposition—to press forward with the idea that, good though we are at innovation, we are less good at developing ideas and bringing them to fruition; it will often be for the private sector to take on those ideas, products and services.

There is some confusion about what NESTA will do. It will not be a rerun of the Industrial Reorganisation Corporation—it will not be a Government company sponsoring new ideas. It will do specific things: it will provide limited seed capital; it will provide guidance on the protection of intellectual property rights; it will raise awareness among banks about technological entrepreneurship; it will support networks for creative individuals; and it will provide a one-stop source of information. Those are practical ideas, which cluster around the problem—we do not intend that NESTA will replace the market.

In his short but helpful speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry) asked whether NESTA would also support sport. He will appreciate that the projects that NESTA backs will be a matter for its chairman and board, who will be appointed very soon. However, there is no reason why sports products and services should not be supported, particularly where new technologies can help to improve performances, training or the medical understanding of sport, for example—it is easy to see where there may be interesting and fruitful conjunctions between technology, innovation and sport. I am sure that my hon. Friend will work with those organisations that will present interesting new ideas to NESTA.

There is some confusion about whether NESTA will operate on the margins and whether it will duplicate the private sector. Although we appreciate that there are some dangers that it could do so, it is not our intention that it should. The hon. Member for North Norfolk (Mr. Prior) said that there was plenty of venture capital; I agree that there is plenty for some good ideas, but we should not ignore the 1995 report of the European Venture Capital Association, which identified the fact that, in that year, only £23 million was available for small and early-stage businesses, amounting to only 1 per cent. of the venture capital activity in this country. That suggests that there is not the scale of capital that there might be—which probably accounts for why we have been losing the benefit of the development of some of the innovations and techniques with which we have benefited other countries.

Labour Members consider this a good, constructive, practical idea, and we commend it to the House. We think that amendments Nos. 5 and 6 would knock out the core of the development of products and services, the importance of intellectual property and the economic realisation of what NESTA is intended to foster and nurture, and we therefore hope that the House will reject the amendments if they are pressed to a vote.

Mr. Spring: The Minister made a point about the possible lack of venture capital in this country. The subject is debatable and arguable, but let me make another point to him again.

The Minister fails to understand that if the Government indeed believe that there is a shortage of venture capital as seedcorn investment potential in this country, this is not the way to address the problem. It should be addressed by means of tax and other incentives. We should not put at risk an endowment, thereby depriving it of its charitable status. The Government are responsible for a total confusion of opportunities, which I very much regret. I cannot for the life of me understand why the Government are adopting such a means of dealing with a problem that they think exists.

Mr. Fisher: The hon. Gentleman is being unusually doctrinaire. We are not talking about alternatives. Of course there is room for the tax system and the private sector, which perform their task very well and will continue to do so. They are not alternatives: we need them both. We believe, however, that there are gaps and

[Mr. Fisher]

weaknesses, and that our proposed system can work along with the existing tax incentives and seedcorn capital from the private sector and strengthen this important area.

Mr. Spring: I am afraid that that does not answer my point. The simple truth is that the system will not work. It has never worked in this form before, and it certainly will not work now.

The most important aim of the national endowment was to secure a charitable status. It was an endowment which all of us could have been happy to support. It is a great shame that the Government are so determined to affix this particular commercial remit to the whole concept of NESTA. The House could have sent out the clear message that NESTA has an important role to play, across party divisions, as a national endowment body. Adhering to the old-fashioned and long-past idea that Governments can pick winners and impose a commercial remit destroys the value of NESTA in its entirety.

I do not want to press the matter further, but we want to put on record our fear that NESTA—which has so much potential—is put at risk by the way in which it has been constructed in the Bill. I think it a great shame that the Government have moved away from their original commitments, which we would have been happy to support.

Amendment negatived.

Order for Third Reading read.

9.39 pm

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr. Chris Smith): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

Let me first give a warm welcome to the hon. Member for East Surrey (Mr. Ainsworth) in his new capacity as shadow Secretary of State. In my dealings with him here over a number of years, I have always found his approach both courteous and constructive, and I look forward to fruitful and robust debate with him across the Floor of the House. He seemed to spend most of this afternoon and this evening reading my book. I recommend it to him as a somewhat more productive exercise than reading the fulminations of Mr. George Walden on the subject.

The Bill has been the subject of much interest both inside and outside the House. It has also been subject to thorough scrutiny by the House. I place on record my thanks to members of the Standing Committee and especially the hon. Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale) and my hon. Friend the Member for Bootle (Mr. Benton) for their excellent chairmanship. The Committee was thorough in its scrutiny, and all the issues were debated thoroughly—indeed, so thoroughly that reading the proceedings of the Committee it seemed to me that the same speech was made on different occasions by several Committee Members. On some occasions, it appeared to be repeated several times within the same speech.

I must also thank my colleagues the Ministers for the Arts and for Sport for their sterling work both in Committee and on Report. Nor should I neglect to mention my noble Friend the Deputy Chief Whip in another place and my noble Friend Baroness Ramsay of Cartvale for their careful stewardship of the Bill in that place.

We have never sought to argue that the lottery as introduced by the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) and his colleagues was anything other than a basically good idea. I appreciate the sincerity with which the right hon. Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude), the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) and their colleagues sought in discussions on the Bill to preserve what they see as fundamental aspects of their vision of the lottery. My only regret is that we have not been able to persuade them that we agree with them on more than they realise and, where we disagree, we are improving on what is there already, not spoiling it.

I also thank the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan) and the hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Fearn) for their contributions from the Liberal Democrat Benches. I am grateful for their support on many issues and their intelligent probing on others.

Last, but definitely not least, I should thank all my colleagues on the Labour Benches who played a part in the discussions on Second Reading, in Committee and today. Their constructive and well-informed support, based on their knowledge of their constituents' needs, has been most welcome and has reminded us constantly of the rightness of what the Bill seeks to achieve.

The Bill delivers our clear commitments in our manifesto and pre-election documents to making something good even better. If the amendments agreed by the House find favour in another place, as I very much hope, this Bill will pass into law playing a significant part in achieving the four aims that we set out in our White Paper: first, widening the benefits of the lottery to health, education and in due course the environment; secondly, reforming the way in which lottery distribution works throughout all the existing good causes; thirdly, setting up the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts; and, fourthly, securing confidence in the way in which the lottery is regulated and operated. In connection with the last of those aims, I am particularly grateful that the House has agreed to important amendments to set up a National Lottery Commission and to open up National Audit Office access to the operator.

The Bill is delivering our commitments, but it is only part of a wider picture. I ask the House to note, in particular, that today I am issuing new policy directions, under my existing powers, to the Arts Council of England, the English Sports Council, the National Lottery Charities Board and the National Heritage Memorial Fund.

On Second Reading, I told the House that I was starting consultations on those new directions and it is particularly pleasing that they have been strongly welcomed by the distributary bodies and that they are being issued in final form with very little change.

The new policy directions for existing distributors will, among other things, shift the focus away from big spending on bricks and buildings towards ensuring that more lottery money goes to people and activities. They will acknowledge the developmental needs of children and young people. They will remove the requirement for significant levels of partnership funding, which will make it easier for less wealthy organisations and areas to benefit. They will, for the first time, encourage distributors to consider how their strategies will contribute to sustainable development, and will invite them to consider the contribution that they can make through the

good causes to reducing economic and social deprivation. They will ensure that all regions and parts of society can benefit from the lottery.

I want everyone to have confidence that the money for good causes is allocated fairly and goes where it is needed. That is a central strand in our reform of the lottery, and our new directions will help us achieve it. I am particularly pleased that our proposals have been strongly welcomed by the bodies concerned. The Bill will help lottery distributors to be more strategic and proactive in their use of lottery money. We are streamlining the distribution system and helping applicants to cut through bureaucracy to make it easier for small community groups to find out about the lottery and receive grants. In many cases, decision making can be pushed closer to the grass roots.

Taken together, the Bill and the associated directions open an exciting new phase in the lottery's existence. I commend the Bill to the House.

9.46 pm

Mr. Peter Ainsworth (East Surrey): I thank the Secretary of State for his kind words on my appointment. Our paths have crossed several times in recent years, and I hold the Secretary of State in considerable respect. One afternoon, I even had charge of his dog; we need not go into that now, but I can assure the House that the dog came to no harm.

It is a great honour for me to have slipped out of my stage management role of the past two years into playing a small speaking part at the end of deliberations on the Bill. I am well aware that the real stars were those who slogged through Committee. I pay tribute to them all, particularly to my hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) who guided the Opposition clearly and well. There were valiant contributions from my hon. Friends the Members for Mid-Dorset and North Poole (Mr. Fraser), for Ashford (Mr. Green), for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Simpson) and for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson). I pay tribute, too, to my immediate predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude), who brought his unique blend of elan and intelligence to his role in opposition. He is committed to listening to and speaking up for people whose lives are affected by the Secretary of State's Department.

I have considerable respect for the Secretary of State. It is a pity, therefore, that he has been crunched so early by pressure from the Chancellor of the Exchequer. On the back of his finely decorated book, there is a picture by Damian Green—[HON. MEMBERS: "Damien Hirst."] I mean Damien Hirst; I apologise to my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Mr. Green). The painting is titled, "Beautiful snail crunching under the boot painting", and it reminded me of the Secretary of State crunching under the boot of the Chancellor.

The previous Government set up and handed on the most successful lottery in the world. I hope that all hon. Members agree that that is some achievement, but we would never have claimed that the lottery was perfect. There are ways in which it can be improved. There are some welcome measures in the Bill. We have, for example, no fundamental objection to the clarification of the regulator's powers. We would support any sensible measure to improve the workings of the lottery, such as the introduction of better ways of handling smaller grants or removing bureaucratic impediments.

As my hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk said, we support the principle of the creation of the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts, but we do not support it as a quasi-venture capital outfit controlled by the Secretary of State. Conservative Members warned of the dangers of a Government trying to pick winners. In particular, we will continue to support measures that would increase the funds available to the arts, sport, heritage and charities. Our first objection to the Bill is that far from assisting those good causes, it damages them.

In answering that charge, the Government have sought to claim that the changes that they are making will benefit other good causes, such as out-of-hours activities in schools, health, the environment, science and technology. Those are indeed good causes, but that is not the point. If such causes are to be funded, they should be funded from central Government receipts, not by a raid on the arts, sport, heritage and charities.

The Government also tried to argue that the good causes will not suffer because the lottery is so successful that it is providing more money than originally expected. This is utterly bogus. The extra money may or may not be forthcoming. My hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk mentioned lottery fatigue, which has occurred in other countries. I am glad that the Minister for Sport is not suffering from lottery fatigue and that his lust for the lottery remains unabated, even if the bills are getting onerous.

In any case, expectations have been built up by both the recipients and distributors of lottery proceeds. The Bill puts those expectations at risk. The distributing bodies know that and the Secretary of State knows it, too, as he acknowledges in his book. I have not read it all the way through, but I have read some of the reviews; it is a cruel world. He says:

"the distributing bodies have adjusted their expectations upwards to reflect the success of the lottery."

The Bill is a semi-veiled attack on the arts, sports, charities and heritage. Unease about the Government's ability to deliver their pre-election nods and winks is turning into real concern and anger.

Our second objection to the Bill involves a fundamental breach of the principle of additionality. We have heard much about that today and throughout the course of the Bill. I was on the Standing Committee in 1993 that considered the Bill that introduced the national lottery. My two clearest memories are first, that if the Liberal Democrat spokesman had had his way, we would not have had a national lottery at all; and secondly, I recall the immense pressure brought to bear on the Committee, especially by the arts world and the sports world, to ensure that money from the lottery was safeguarded against any attempt by the Chancellor of the Exchequer to pilfer it to support central Government funding in other fields. Labour members of the Committee voiced their vociferous support for the principle of additionality.

The undertaking on additionality was given, and adhered to, by the previous Government. Despite the promises made by the Prime Minister and others at the general election, that undertaking has been broken by the Bill. Those lottery promises are due to join the mounting heaps of broken promises that the Government seem determined to leave behind.

Our third objection is that the Bill ignores the clearly established principle that lottery money should be distributed by bodies that operate at arm's length from the

[Mr. Peter Ainsworth]

Government. As the sorry story of the Bill has unfolded, it has become increasingly clear that the Government intend to use the new opportunities fund to divert money to its own favoured projects. The new opportunities fund and NESTA will be directly under ministerial control. We do not and cannot accept such a massive increase in political control over lottery players' money. The reason for that, once again, is contained in the Secretary of State's colourful book, although there is a sad lapse from his normal eloquence, so I shall torture the House only briefly with his grammar. He says:

"In a very real way, lottery players think of lottery money as 'their' funds far more determinedly than they do with taxation."

That is exactly the point—it may not be well expressed, but it is perfectly reasonable.

Finally, the original national lottery was based on an understanding that it would be used to support local initiatives by local people with local support. The Bill undermines the principle of local support by introducing an unwelcome and subversive centralisation of power. The distributing bodies will, for the first time, be given explicit powers to solicit bids for money, and who is it has the power to appoint members of the distributing bodies? It is none other than the Secretary of State, who can also give them directions as to how they should distribute the proceeds. For the last time—

Mr. Chris Smith: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ainsworth: I was just about to quote again from the Secretary of State's book, but I give way.

Mr. Smith: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. I am tempted to observe that the face may have changed, but the speech has not. He must accept that all the existing distributors in arts, sport, heritage and charities fall under exactly the same qualification of appointment by the Secretary of State and being subject to directions from the Secretary of State to which he has just referred.

Mr. Ainsworth: Will the Secretary of State deny that the Bill contains new powers that he can exercise in that direction? No, he will not deny it.

Mr. Smith: Let me make it perfectly clear: the new opportunities fund will operate in exactly the same way and under exactly the same rules as the other distributors. Parliament will have the power to introduce new initiatives from time to time, but the independence of the new opportunities fund as a body will be exactly the same as that of the other distributors.

Mr. Ainsworth: The fact is that the Bill and the measure to which I have referred, which the Secretary of State appears not to affirm, is a wholesale attack on the existing good causes and represents a major extension of the Government's control over the national lottery and those who are likely to benefit from it.

For the last time, I shall refer to the Secretary of State's book. [HON. MEMBERS: "More."] I have already referred to it almost as many times as the Secretary of State referred to it in his recent article in *The Spectator* and I do not want to give it any more publicity. In a sinister example of new Labour-speak, the right hon. Gentleman says:

"We now have the chance to reorient"—

I like that—

"the lottery so that it reflects more closely the people's priorities."

We know that, in new Labour-speak, the "people's priorities" are in fact the Government's priorities. The Government always think that they know best. The Bill takes away control from the distributing bodies and gives it to the Government; it takes money away from the arts, sports, heritage and charities and gives it to the Government; it breaks the principle of the arm's-length management and extends the dead hand of Government control to lottery procedures. That is the way to create, not a people's lottery, but a Government's lottery and a lottery for bureaucrats. That is a way to expand political patronage at the expense of the original good causes.

Throughout the debates on the Bill, the Government have failed to acknowledge those concerns and have resorted to the evasion and sophistry that are becoming their hallmark.

The Bill betrays not only the promises made by Ministers before the general election—we are used to that, although that would be bad enough—but the national lottery that we created. On those grounds, I urge my hon. Friends to oppose the Third Reading of the Bill.

Question put, That the Bill be now read the Third time:—

The House divided: Ayes 278, Noes 129.

Division No. 289] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Ashton, Joe
Austin, John
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Bennett, Andrew F
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, Yvette
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew

Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Fisher, Mark
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Salter, Martin
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swinney, John
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Welsh, Andrew
White, Brian
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Jamieson and Mr. Jim Dowd.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David

McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
May, Mrs Theresa
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John M. Taylor and
Mr. Stephen Day.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed, with amendments.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 15 (Exempted business),

That, at this day's sitting, the National Lottery Bill *[Lords]* and the Late Payment of Commercial Debts (Interest) Bill *[Lords]* may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. Betts.]*

Question agreed to.

Late Payment of Commercial Debts (Interest) Bill *[Lords]*

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

Clause 6

RATE OF STATUTORY INTEREST

10.12 pm

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 4, line 1, leave out

'made with the consent of the Treasury'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 2, in page 4, line 10, at end insert—

'(c) avoid the risk that purchasers enjoying a dominant position in a market may seek to renegotiate payment terms to the disadvantage of suppliers in that market.'.

No. 3, in page 4, line 10, at end insert—

'(3) The power to make an Order under subsection (1) above is without prejudice to the making of a further Order varying the provision made under paragraph (a) or (b) of that subsection.

(4) No Order shall be made under subsection (3) unless any preceding Order under that subsection (or, as the case may be, an Order under subsection (1)) has been in force for at least six months.'.

No. 4, in page 4, line 10, at end insert—

'(3) The Secretary of State shall ensure that the terms of any order under this section are promulgated by such means as are calculated to bring them to the attention of businesses and other commercial undertakings as effectively and speedily as possible.'.

Mrs. Gillan: On 14 May, in Committee, I said that, due to the Minister's unsatisfactory responses, I intended to raise matters concerning the interest rate on Report. This group of amendments gives the Minister a chance to clarify the area that she dealt with so inadequately then.

I wish to deal first with the setting of the rate of interest and then the communication of that rate of interest to businesses and the speed and frequency with which the rate may change. In Committee, the Minister set great store by further consultations with business and others to establish the efficacy of the initial rate that was published in the draft order—the base rate plus 8 per cent. I hope that she can explain in detail how that can possibly work as it will be at least four years before some businesses can use the Bill against, for example, the public sector. Will they be excluded from the consultation process for the next four years? I presume that they will, but I hope that the Minister will categorically confirm or deny that point. If it is confirmed, a vast swathe of industry and business will be excluded from the consultation process that she has heralded.

Will the Minister explain in detail how, precisely, she arrived at the figure of 8 per cent? I believe that she initially favoured 4 per cent.—so she has doubled her original figure. That shows how wrong she was, so it is difficult to be reassured that she knows what she is doing.

The mechanisms in the Bill for setting the interest rate are similarly open to question, as the final rate will depend on the Minister's colleagues in the Treasury. Will she explain, in detail, how she expects the relationship

between her Department and the Treasury to work and how potential conflicts between the two Departments will be resolved?

There is no provision in the Bill to protect businesses from rapid rate changes at the whim of the Government. In Committee, the Minister failed to answer my questions, so I hope that she will now deal with them. How frequently could the interest rate be changed? Will it be weekly, monthly or biannually? Would it not be better to provide a minimum period so that businesses could have some certainty? It is feasible that, in times of highly volatile interest rates, the rate could change daily as a result of these measures. The Minister has had due time to consider these matters and I hope that she will come forth with the answers.

Businesses are confused about how they will be told about the changes to the rate. The Minister has said that she will distribute a free users guide to businesses. Perhaps she will elaborate on that. How many copies of the guide will be printed? Does she intend to send it to all businesses, or is this another burden on businesses, which will have to make efforts to find out what is going on? What budget will be set aside for this leaflet? Will it be reprinted every time the rate changes?

The amendments were tabled because of the Minister's poor performance in Committee. I hope that she will now provide the answers to these questions.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): I shall concentrate my remarks on amendment No. 2, which I hope will force the Minister to return to the issue that my hon. Friends and I raised on Second Reading and in Committee. We fear that the Bill would induce companies in a dominant position to renegotiate their terms of trade with their suppliers if the burden of interest set under the Bill were to become too onerous. The more onerous the rate of interest, the greater is the incentive for purchasers to renegotiate their terms of trade.

We have argued throughout that there will be a great temptation for a company that faces an unduly harsh penalty to reconsider its terms of trade instead of being content to operate on a net 30-day basis—admittedly with the possibility that the payments made could drift out beyond that period.

My hon. Friend the Member for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page) has frequently carried out his own expert analysis of the impracticability of a strict adherence to an over-strict payments regime. I hope that he will return to that argument, because I always enjoy hearing it. I would argue that it is certain that businesses, particularly when in a dominant position, will decide that if they are to be held strictly to an impractical 30-day payment regime, it would make a lot of sense to negotiate alternative terms of trade of 45, 60 or even 90 days with their suppliers to make the payment mechanism more operable and to ensure that penalties are not unnecessarily incurred.

The onus is therefore on the Minister to persuade us that such a response by a significant number of purchasers would be unlikely. If it is not, the whole argument behind the Bill will be shown to be fatally flawed. The amendment is a small but significant attempt to countermand such a natural response and inexorable process.

If what I fear actually comes about, it will make nonsense of the Bill. It has been said time and again during the Bill's previous stages that the purpose of the legislation, which I query, is to protect relatively small firms from being dominated or even exploited by larger ones. That argument is false because I suspect that as many late payment difficulties arise among small firms as between small and large firms. If the Bill succeeds in any of its objectives, it will thus end up penalising small firms as much as—perhaps even more than—large ones.

The amendment attempts to get round the dilemma thus:

"purchasers enjoying a dominant position in a market may seek to renegotiate payment terms".

Although I do not know to what extent it will be effective, it at least recognises the dangers that I have outlined and tries to prevent their coming to pass. I want to hear from the Minister why my fears are unfounded and hence why the amendment is unnecessary. If she fails to explain that, I can only assume that her logic—it is usually impeccable—will drive her to accept the amendment, which is a mild but realistic attempt to correct an imbalance that I fear may arise if the Bill is enacted unamended.

My argument has not yet been properly answered, on Second Reading or in Committee. I therefore welcome the fact that my right hon. and hon. Friends have re-presented it, in the hope of a fuller answer from the Minister. The Minister looks as if she is in a generous and compliant mood tonight. I hope that, having heard my speech and the one I sense we are about to hear from my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Hertfordshire, she may be prepared to accept our amendment. Before we proceed any further, we at least expect a proper answer to our points.

Mr. Richard Page (South-West Hertfordshire): Amendment No. 2 has about it the air of a hard commercial head butt. This is the amendment which shows why the Bill will be ineffective when it has to be implemented in the marketplace.

Despite what my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) said, I hope that he does not press the amendment to a Division. It would be impossible to implement, just as the whole Bill will be impossible to implement to the benefit of the small business sector for which it is designed. The Bill will have a marginal effect, which is one of the reasons it has not been introduced before.

I ask my right hon. Friend not to press the amendment because the Government have no answer to the question that lies behind it. He is absolutely right to ask for an answer. If a valid answer were forthcoming, it could revolutionise the approach to the Bill taken by some Conservative Members, but I strongly suspect that such an answer will not be forthcoming.

The amendment basically asks what is to stop a purchaser negotiating disadvantageous terms with a supplier. When a big boy is talking to a little boy, what is to stop the big boy negotiating terms that are disadvantageous to the little boy? In Committee, the Minister for Small Firms, Trade and Industry hinted coyly that certain things could be done to redress the balance. I should very much like to hear what could be done if the terms were felt to be unfair or out of kilter, but I strongly suspect that no response will be forthcoming.

[Mr. Richard Page]

The Bill will undoubtedly regularise credit terms, which must be welcome. Despite the blandishments of my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst, I shall not run through the credit cycle process for the third time. I have done so twice. When I read the record of my performance I was overcome by my brilliance, but a third time would be going too often to the well. However, I envisage certain phrases appearing in the arrangements made between companies, such as that payments will be made by X number of days after the monthly statement has been delivered. I envisage X being not 30 or 40, but 50 or 60, because companies will want to ensure that they cannot be caught by the statutory right to interest. I can see that number of days becoming a very comfortable cushion—a real protection against any possible charge of statutory interest.

The amendment aims to

"avoid the risk that purchasers enjoying a dominant position in a market may seek to renegotiate payment terms to the disadvantage of suppliers in that market."

The Bill reveals the Government's lack of commercial knowledge; many credit arrangements are at odds with each other. How many suppliers supply goods on terms that do not match the purchasing orders? As my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst said, the Bill was introduced to protect small businesses, but I can see it being used to their disadvantage.

I should like the Minister to tell us what happens when a dominant supplier or purchaser draws up terms that are "considered unfair" for the smaller company. What will be done to protect the small business, which is what the Bill was designed to do? The explanations offered so far show that the Bill is flawed.

If I catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, among all those who no doubt will be clamouring to speak on Third Reading, I shall explain how all the aims of the Bill could be achieved by another means in a fraction of the time and at a fraction of the cost. I look forward to hearing what the Minister says about how the Bill will protect a small firm against a dominant supplier.

10.30 pm

The Minister for Small Firms, Trade and Industry (Mrs. Barbara Roche): First, I congratulate the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) on her move to the shadow Foreign Office. Tonight's debate is almost her swan song in the role of shadow small business Minister. I have very much enjoyed our exchanges across the Dispatch Box and I shall certainly miss them.

I am not surprised, however, that the hon. Lady has been moved. After all, during one of her first interviews as shadow spokesman, in *The Sunday Times* on 30 November 1997, she was reported as attacking

"her own party for losing the small-business vote at the general election. In an extraordinarily candid interview with the Federation of Small Businesses she admitted the Tory Government got its small business strategy wrong. 'Mea culpa,' she said. 'We did not get it right in all areas.'"

That was surely the understatement of the year. I understand the hon. Lady's embarrassment.

I appreciated the speeches of the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) and the hon. Member for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page). The hon. Member for South-West Hertfordshire has always opposed the introduction of a statutory right to interest, as does the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst. Had his party been brave or foolhardy enough to do so, he would have voted against the Bill on Second Reading—but the Opposition dared not vote against it on Second Reading as they would have appeared to be anti-small business as well as lost the vote.

The hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham is in a very embarrassing position because, when she was first elected, she signed an early-day motion supporting the right to statutory interest. Not merely was she a signatory to it; she was one of the first six names.

I was startled when the Opposition tabled amendment No.1. After all, it was an Opposition amendment in another place that introduced the very words that it seeks to amend. However, we have come to expect U-turns from the shadow Trade and Industry team, and the hon. Lady has not disappointed us with her parting shot.

In another place, the Government were convinced by the arguments of Lord Home. In amending the rate of interest we shall take account of all views, if practically possible. Within the Government, we shall certainly wish to consult and be guided by the Treasury on any interest rate.

In view of amendment No.1, I should not be surprised by amendment No.2, but I am puzzled. It would oblige the Secretary of State to consider, among other factors, whether the rate would lead to dominant firms renegotiating their payment terms to the disadvantage of suppliers. To meet the new criterion wholly, it would be necessary to set the rate at 0 per cent; otherwise, theoretically, there may be the possibility of a dominant firm renegotiating a contract to avoid the interest rate. That is why it is entirely sensible for the hon. Member for South–West Hertfordshire to urge his party not to vote for the amendment tabled by its Front-Bench team.

Mr. Forth: The Minister seems to be arguing in a black and white way. We are talking about judgment. There may be an appropriate rate that could be applied and would be broadly accepted as reasonable, but if the rate became penal, dominant suppliers might be driven to renegotiate, as we fear. Surely the Minister will concede that somewhere between those two is the possibility of a rate that would work in most cases without driving companies to renegotiation. Her argument about a rate of 0 per cent. is too absolute. Will she not at least admit a balance of probability?

Mrs. Roche: I understand the right hon. Gentleman's argument. That is why we consulted and listened to the Bank of England. In a recent survey conducted by the Midland bank to be published next month, 79 per cent. of those surveyed supported the statutory right to interest, and 77 per cent. said that they would use it. Those who responded knew our proposal for the rate.

Taken to its logical conclusion, the amendment would result in policy following the lead of those who wanted to avoid its intent, which would be ridiculous.

Mr. Page: One reason why I urged that the amendment should not be put to a vote is that I know that my right hon. and hon. Friends appreciate its impracticality. Our aim is to ask how the Government are going to protect

small firms against a dominant supplier or purchaser if it is felt that the terms are becoming unreasonable. The hon. Lady is running around the park without addressing that fundamental question.

Mrs. Roche: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point. I am addressing the amendment, which was tabled by the Conservatives. Having studied the Bill closely, the hon. Gentleman will know that we have drafted it to protect small firms and prevent companies from contracting out of the legislation. The Bill safeguards the position of small businesses.

As I have said, I am puzzled by the amendment. In the other place, the Opposition Front-Bench team sought to ensure that the criteria for setting the rate of interest were not set in stone. We were persuaded that we should insert the words, "among other things". The hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham has reversed that policy.

Amendment No. 3 is unnecessary and unhelpful. There is no need to provide an order-making power to amend an order. The order to be made under subsection (1) can be amended simply by making another order under the same subsection. The proposed subsection (4) would prevent the Secretary of State from amending the interest rate for six months after making an order, regardless of any advice that she may have received from business and other representatives. That is not helpful.

I understand the concerns that have been expressed. It is important that changes to the interest rate are made known effectively and speedily. The Government have worked with trade associations, business representative organisations and the business links network to publicise the Bill and the likely interest rate. As part of the Better Payment Practice Group's campaign to improve the payment culture, we shall highlight the proposals through a publicity campaign.

Mrs. Gillan: I am pleased that the Minister has dealt with some of my points on this group of probing amendments. How often does she envisage the rate may change? Does she intend to go to the expense of republishing the leaflet every time it changes? For the sake of businesses listening to the debate, she should clarify the mechanism.

Mrs. Roche: I understand the hon. Lady's points. If she will bear with me for just one moment, I shall deal with them.

Following—I hope—Royal Assent, I shall publish a user's guide to the Bill, which businesses will be able to obtain free of charge. Members of the Better Payment Practice Group are committed to promulgating that guide. The Department will also write to trade associations and business links to ensure that they are aware of the guide and can inform their members of how they may obtain their free copies. By those means, we can effectively bring to the attention of business the initial interest rate.

Should it be necessary to change the rate—I am not going to predict at this stage how frequently it will change—we will use similar routes to inform businesses of the change. Incidentally, that same commitment to providing information applies to other orders made under the Bill, such as the commencement orders for the phasing arrangements.

For the first time, all business representative organisations are sitting down together to do something about improving the culture of late payment—something which the previous Government failed to achieve. I urge the House to oppose the amendments if they are not withdrawn.

Mrs. Gillan: I thank the Minister for her kind remarks at the beginning of her response to the group of amendments.

Mr. Clive Betts (Sheffield, Attercliffe): It did not last long.

Mrs. Gillan: I, too, will miss the Minister. I have enjoyed our exchanges across the Dispatch Box, although I have not enjoyed her hackneyed comments. Like my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth), I wish that she would get some new material; this audience is certainly very tired of it.

When I signed the early-day motion, I naively thought that statutory interest on late payment of debt might solve the problem and change the culture. It was only when I went into the matter in detail with Ministers in the Department of Trade and Industry, and businesses and trade associations, that I realised that the proposal was not a panacea, but yet another burden on business.

The Minister ought to be embarrassed because, in an interview in *Network*, she admitted that almost 60 per cent. of lobby groups representing smaller businesses were opposed to a statutory right to interest on late payment of debts. I have nothing to be embarrassed about, but the Minister should be ashamed that she is proposing legislation which, she admits, is not popular among smaller businesses.

The Minister has not addressed the questions that my right hon. and hon. Friends and I have raised; I am certainly not satisfied with the answers. She has ducked the question of how often the interest rate will change. Indeed, it seems that it could change daily. She failed to address the fact that many businesses will be excluded from taking any meaningful part in the consultation process, which she keeps going on about. Such businesses will not be able to exercise the protection afforded by the Bill, particularly against the public sector, so they can hardly be consulted on it.

The Minister has not even given any indication of how much money will be set aside in the Department to promote the rate of statutory interest for businesses. She says that she will produce the leaflet free of charge; I hope that she has the budget to produce a leaflet as many as 365 times a year. If interest rate changes demand it, that is what she will have to do. She said that she is writing to trade associations and businesses links. I must tell her that not all small businesses are either members of trade associations or have contact with business links. In other words, she is quite prepared to leave a large swathe of small businesses in ignorance or put them to the time, trouble and expense—which can hurt a small business—of finding out what her large Department is proposing.

It is clear that the Minister has not, and will not, respond well to the amendments. They were tabled as probing amendments to try to elicit decent and healthy responses, which have not been forthcoming. In view of

[Mrs. Gillan]

the lack of information from the Government, it is not even worth pressing the amendment to a vote. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 11

TREATMENT OF ADVANCE PAYMENTS OF THE CONTRACT PRICE

Mrs. Roche: I beg to move amendment No. 8, in page 5, line 37, leave out from beginning of line to end of line 43 and insert—

'.—(1) A qualifying debt created by virtue of an obligation to make an advance payment shall be treated for the purposes of this Act as if it was created on the day mentioned in subsection (3), (4) or (5) (as the case may be).

(2) In this section "advance payment" means a payment falling due before the obligation of the supplier to which the whole contract price relates ("the supplier's obligation") is performed, other than a payment of a part of the contract price that is due in respect of any part performance of that obligation and payable on or after the day on which that part performance is completed.'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Government amendment No. 9.

Mrs. Roche: Following the Committee, we reviewed the Bill to ensure that none of the amendments agreed to had inadvertently caused things to fall outside the Bill that we would wish to be covered. Amendment No. 8 picks up the one issue we have identified. Its purpose is to ensure that the Bill operates on stage payments—that is, interim payments in respect of work actually done.

During discussions in the other place, the Government tabled an amendment to clarify the operation of clause 4 on the period for which statutory interest runs. Inadvertently, however, that amendment has put stage payments into a state of limbo as they are caught by the definition of an advance payment in clause 11, although the clause does not stipulate from when interest will run.

10.45 pm

Rather than invent a rule in clause 11 for genuine stage payments, we think the best approach is to take them out of clause 11 altogether. That is achieved through amendment No. 8. The effect of the amendment is that stage payments, where the payments are for work already done, are dealt with under clause 4(3) and (5) as appropriate.

Amendment No. 9 is consequential on amendment No. 8. The new wording requires a change in the word structure in clause 11(4). It also serves to remove an element of ambiguity, as the obligation to pay the price is, in one sense, always present in a supply contract. These are technical amendments which improve the scope of the Bill and I commend them to the House.

Mrs. Gillan: I do not know how long the Minister has been working on the Bill, but she has had at least a year in government. At this late stage, she is still proposing changes under the guise of technical amendments.

In the other place, the Government tabled no fewer than 52 amendments. In Committee, another five were tabled by the Minister. Tonight, we have two further amendments, making a grand total of 59 amendments to what she claims is a well-researched Bill. What is she up to? How can anyone have confidence in a measure that still requires modifications at this stage? I am sick to death of hearing from the Government that everything is under review. Surely by the time they propose legislation, the Government should have made up their mind about what they want to do without having to introduce remedial drafting at every stage in both Houses.

I understand what the Minister wishes to achieve with the amendments, but what guarantees do we have that she will not find further flaws after the Bill has received Royal Assent? Nothing would surprise me. This is amateurish behaviour. In Committee, I had the impression that the Minister had finished hacking the Bill around. Tonight's performance indicates that, once again, she has decided to move the goalposts, a situation that is much to be regretted and which places another burden on businesses, which are trying to follow the passage of a Bill that has changed almost daily.

The Minister has said that businesses need a stable environment and a degree of certainty in which to operate. She has made a real pig's ear of the Bill, while failing to listen to any constructive suggestions from the Opposition. I hope that she can tell the House whether, finally, she is satisfied with the Bill or whether there are more surprises in store.

Mrs. Roche: Oh dear, oh dear! In Committee, I suddenly felt overwhelming sympathy for the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan)—for whom I have a great deal of time—because she suddenly seemed to suffer a severe memory lapse about what happened under the previous Government, of which she was a member.

The hon. Lady rightly wants to ensure that we get the Bill right. We believe that small businesses deserve nothing but the best, which is why we listen and consider. I remind her of what happened during consideration of the Gas Act 1995; on Report, the then Minister for Energy tabled 20 amendments.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I understood that the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) was making a preliminary remark before coming to the point. However, now that she has finished her preliminary remarks, which were not particularly pertinent to the amendment, we do not need to have another debate outside the scope of the amendment.

Mrs. Roche: I absolutely agree with you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, which is why I did not mention in my opening remarks the fact that, during consideration of the Education Act 1997, the hon. Lady, as a Minister, tabled on Report the widely criticised amendment No. 65—I knew that you would reproach me if I did.

I have tabled Government amendment No. 8 to improve the Bill and I commend it to the House.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendment made: No. 9, in page 6, line 9, leave out

'the obligation to pay it arises'

and insert 'is payable'.—*[Mrs. Roche.]*

Clause 17

SHORT TITLE, COMMENCEMENT AND EXTENT

Mrs. Gillan: I beg to move amendment No. 5, in page 8, line 5, at beginning insert

'Subject to subsection (2A) below,'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 11, in page 8, line 5, after 'force', insert—

'(a) as respects contracts where both the purchaser and the supplier employ more than 50 persons, at the end of the period of three months beginning with the day on which this Act is passed; and

(b) as respects any other contract,'.

No. 6, in page 8, line 10, at end insert—

'(2A) The power to make orders under subsection (2) shall not be exercised so as to provide for this Act to come into force, as respects contracts where the purchaser is a government department or a local or public authority, on different dates according to whether the supplier employs more than a prescribed number of persons.'.

No. 7, in page 8, line 10, at end insert—

'(2A) Where the power under subsection (2) to make different provision for different purposes is exercised by reference to the number of persons employed by a supplier, the Secretary of State shall publish—

(a) the criteria used in specifying that number and,

(b) the steps taken to ascertain whether that number is regarded as appropriate for the purposes of this subsection by persons representing businesses and other commercial undertakings.'.

Mrs. Gillan: Once again, the amendments have been tabled to allow the Minister to clarify her thinking and to reveal her views on an extremely important part of the Bill's enabling powers—the phasing-in proposals. Sadly, the Minister proposes to prevent a significant proportion of businesses from using the Bill against Government Departments and agencies—the public sector. Businesses employing 50 or more employees will have to wait for four years before they can use the measure in their dealings with Government. In Committee, the Minister gave me the impression that she could change the proposals if she wanted to. However, she then bottled out and ducked the issue, which was of great regret to Conservative Members. I hope that, in tabling the amendments, we have given her a final opportunity to make amends.

In my discussions with the Forum of Private Business—an organisation with which I know the Minister is familiar—I discovered that it felt aggrieved that she had not responded to my proposals or to its requests. There is a strong case for making the public sector subject immediately after the measure's implementation to payment of interest on all contracts. That is important both because of the trickle-down effect of better payment and because the public sector will largely escape liability until the final phase, as it principally trades with those business that the Minister defines as large—those with 50 or more employees. That does not seem to fit well with the Government's objective of leading the change.

In Committee, I cited a case in which the company Davall Relays had suffered at the hands of the Meteorological Office—the Meteorological Office withdrew a contract when the company asked it to pay within 30 days. I suspect that the Minister will say that the Meteorological Office was operating under the same terms and conditions that applied under the previous Government, but she must realise that the case I mentioned happened under the Labour Government, at a time when she was saying that no one should pay debts late.

The Minister has done me the courtesy to reply to my letter, although I received her response only at 8.30 pm. I was wondering whether I would receive a response before our considerations tonight, but she replied just in time, which is better than what happens when one writes to some other Government Departments, which take three or four months to reply. I raise the matter as I have yet to be satisfied that the Minister is not, yet again, protecting Government to the disadvantage of smaller businesses—certainly those with 50 or more employees.

The letter that I received confirmed that the Meteorological Office, when asked for a written undertaking that a payment be made within 30 days, "technically" thought that that constituted a counter-offer to its order, and therefore cancelled the order. The Minister wrote:

"I understand that the contracts used to purchase items with an order value less than £500"—

that applied to the order that we are discussing—

"had been in use for many years. It seems, unfortunately, that the Meteorological Office were reluctant to make an isolated change to the long standing standard conditions of their contracts. They therefore withdrew their offer."

That was at a time when the Government were legislating for statutory interest on late payment of debt, with all the warm words being issued by the Minister and her Department.

There was light at the end of the tunnel, however. The Minister's letter continued:

"I am pleased to report that the Meteorological Office has now, in anticipation of enactment of the Late Payment of Commercial Debts (Interest) Bill, changed the terms of their orders to expressly reflect that they will pay all valid invoices on orders less than £500 within 30 days of receipt of an invoice."

What of those over £500? Will the Minister tell us now whether she will insist that the Meteorological Office change its terms and conditions to apply to all contracts? If not, I think that business will see that this is a sham. It is appalling that a letter from a Minister who is taking legislation through at this stage should say only that it will apply to another Department for "orders less than £500". I am astounded.

Mr. Forth: I hope that I am not pre-empting my hon. Friend. Should not the Minister also reassure us that she has reassured herself—in detail—that the Meteorological Office is capable of fulfilling the undertakings given in the letter? Given the expert analysis that our hon. Friend the Member for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page) has made repeatedly, I wonder—and I suspect that my hon. Friend may wonder—whether the office is capable of meeting the very tight undertaking that it has given. If not, is that undertaking worth the paper on which it is written?

Mrs. Gillan: My right hon. Friend makes a valid point, with which I think the Minister will have to deal when she responds. If she does not, serious question marks will remain over the Government.

[Mrs. Gillan]

Equally important is the danger that, unless the measure is applied to all public sector debts, small businesses—as the Minister has defined them—may face discrimination in public procurement, as purchasing bodies avoid suppliers against whom they could face statutory interest. That is particularly pertinent in the light of the health service's record. More than 2 million bills are paid late by the health service alone, and it would, therefore, be in the interest of another part of Government to adjust its purchasing patterns for the next four years to avoid more expenditure in an area of Government that has already been grossly let down by the present Labour Administration.

I hope that the Minister will set some targets according to which she can measure the success of the Bill, which in my view is otiose. It has long been feared that the legislation will lead to longer payment periods. I am not aware of anything that will prevent purchaser companies with a dominant position in the market from renegotiating payment terms to run into, for example, 120 days instead of 40 days. That means that the vendor will not get his money more quickly if too high an interest rate is set. Will the Minister now confirm that she expects no supplier to be worse off under the Bill, and will she now undertake to set and monitor the criteria by which her progress can be charted and her warm words can be judged by real commercial standards? I await her response with interest.

11 pm

Mr. Brian Cotter (Weston-super-Mare): I rise to speak to amendment No. 11, tabled in my name and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey). As hon. Members will be aware, the Liberal Democrats have long argued for a statutory right of interest on late payment of debts, and we welcome the legislation. However, as is often the case, the devil is in the detail, and our amendment would rectify a glaring error.

At all stages, the Government have argued that the Bill is for the benefit of small businesses, and is intended to improve the crippling late-payment culture and to begin to put an end to the commercial exploitation of small firms by large firms. The Minister has also argued that the Government should give an example. However, as the Bill stands, large businesses are exempt from the right to charge statutory interest on other large businesses at the initial phase. In fact, large business will not be able to charge large business until the final phase of introduction. Why? Clearly, there is no economic rationale for that aspect of the phasing arrangements. In fact, the arrangements clearly contradict the intentions of the Bill, which are to improve the late-payment culture, specifically for small businesses, and will not enhance those objectives.

The Government are sending out the wrong message to small businesses in that they are not prepared to make large firms part of the initial phase. A better payment practice between large companies would also have a desirable trickle-down effect on the economy, as the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) said. The late-payment culture would be improved, and firms would be encouraged to use better credit management procedures, as was discussed on Second Reading.

Our amendment would also ensure that government, at all levels, would be liable to pay statutory interest to firms with 50-plus employees—the public sector will largely escape liability until the final phase is introduced. That does not seem to accord with the Government's intention, which was to lead the change, and does not provide the example that the Government should be setting. The Minister will acknowledge that she accepted during Trade and Industry questions that the Government's record on payment was not good, so it seems hypocritical of them to put businesses in a position in which they are liable to pay, when they are not prepared to put themselves in a similar position.

Businesses have had and continue to have problems receiving payment from government at all levels. A colleague produced one example, and I have been assured that the legal aid fraternity is not good at settling bills. I am also greatly concerned about local government. We know that it is under some pressure with regard to financial settlements and that there will be the temptation for it to find all the ways it can in which to hold up payments, with the effect that I described.

The wait-and-see approach that the Minister seems to be adopting is unsatisfactory. There is a general consensus in support of the phasing arrangements, but there is also a clear feeling that the Government should give an example. Feedback from various business organisations suggests that the current large against large arrangement, particularly the public sector aspect, is inadequate. The Forum of Private Business has conducted discussions on the issue, and seems to be well informed on the Bill. In discussions with representative organisations on the Better Payment Practice Group, it has found strong support for idea that the Government should be brought into the first phase.

If the Government are not prepared to accept the amendment, the Liberal Democrats will certainly monitor Government payment practice.

Mrs. Gillan: Oh gosh.

Mr. Cotter: We will, indeed. We will name and shame when the opportunity arises, in line with the Government's argument.

Our significant amendment would weigh the Bill in favour of small businesses. I ask the Minister to consider it seriously.

Mrs. Roche: As regards amendments Nos. 5 and 6, there was extensive discussion in Committee of possible extension of phasing arrangements to include claims by all businesses against the public sector. As I have said, however, support for the Government's phasing proposals was considerable, as 87 per cent. of the business respondents to our Green Paper who expressed a view supported phasing. The hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare (Mr. Cotter) would surely agree that all small businesses will be able to claim against the public sector immediately the Bill becomes law. What is important about phasing is the opportunity that it gives to small businesses, which suffer most from late payment, to take advantage of the Bill straight away.

Mrs. Gillan: How many businesses employing fewer than 50 people have contracts with the Government, and how many businesses employing more than

50 people have such contracts? What percentage of businesses fall into the Minister's categorisations of small and large businesses?

Mrs. Roche: I can see why the hon. Lady is moving to sunnier climes. Her question exposes her ignorance of the way in which the sector is structured. We are talking about not only direct contracts with the Government, but the whole contractual supply chain. That is why it is important that the phasing arrangements give small businesses the right to take action straight away.

We shall monitor carefully the effect of the legislation, not least through the payment observatory of the credit management research group at Bradford university, the establishment of which the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare has welcomed. If there seems to be a need to extend the right to large businesses earlier than we intend at present, we can do so under clause 17(2), after consulting interested parties, including the Better Payment Practice Group. However, given the support for the Government's proposals, I do not feel bound to amend the Bill at this late stage. We shall keep the matter under review.

The same arguments apply to amendment No. 11, which seeks to extend phasing proposals to allow large businesses to claim against other large businesses from initial commencement. Should experience show that it is desirable to extend that right earlier than currently planned, the Government will do so. I made that clear in Committee, and I repeat it now.

Mr. Cotter *indicated assent.*

Mrs. Roche: I am pleased to see that the hon. Gentleman agrees.

As regards amendment No. 7, we fixed a threshold of 50 or fewer employees to define a small business, because a definition is needed for the initial transitional phases of the legislation, and it is important to small businesses that that definition should be transparent.

We have set the threshold at 50 employees, which catches all micro-businesses, because we believe that any company employing more than 50 should be able to employ someone to manage the payment of bills. In using 50, we have used one of the limbs of the definition of a small firm in the Companies Act.

The Government are pursuing other measures to ensure that small businesses, that is, those employing 50 or fewer staff, have the opportunity to develop the skills necessary to manage their payments. Reference has rightly been made to the Forum of Private Business. Its survey of its membership showed that only 29 per cent. of respondents opposed the size criteria.

I thank the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) for her kind remarks about my speedy response to her inquiry. I am delighted that, in anticipation of the Bill, we have been able to correct a payment practice that had existed in the office concerned for some years under the Government of which she was a member. That shows our commitment.

Mrs. Gillan: Will the Minister now get to the point and say whether she will insist that the Meteorological Office applies the same new criteria to all bills over £500?

Mrs. Roche *rose—[Interruption.]*

Mrs. Roche: Perhaps the hon. Lady would have the courtesy for one moment to let me answer; I know how impatient she is. She knows that all Departments are required to pay their bills within 30 days or as otherwise agreed. I am glad that she gave me the opportunity to point out, through the illustration provided by that case, that the thought of this legislation is biting already. It ill behoves someone who served in the Government of the former Deputy Prime Minister, who boasted about stringing along his creditors and set such a bad example to small business, to criticise this Government. If the amendments are pressed, I urge the House to reject them.

Mr. Cotter *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman cannot speak a second time. Only the mover of the lead amendment can do so.

Mrs. Gillan: I am shocked by the Minister's response. It is obvious that she is being blackmailed into her position by her colleagues. She says that she relies on the consultation, which showed that the phasing in was widely supported; but, of course, that consultation was deeply flawed. If she had asked all businesses, "Should all businesses be able to take the protection of this legislation from day one?" they would have replied with a resounding and overwhelming yes in dealing with the public sector. It is obvious that she is seeking to protect other Departments, particularly those with gross late payment records, which may incur large sums of interest by way of penalty. In particular, I am thinking of the Department of Health, which, by the Government's own admission, will pay some 2 million bills late.

I am very sad that the hon. Lady, who appeared to be cracking in Committee, has been forced back into this position. She is now introducing legislation that discriminates against all firms with more than 50 employees and cuts them off from the very lifeline that she has purported to extend to them. This is a gross abrogation of the duties that she took upon herself in taking on her ministerial duty. I am very disappointed. It is obvious that she cannot move her position, having been forced into it by other Departments—no doubt by Ministers in her Department as well as the Treasury. It seems pointless to ask the House to vote on the amendments, but it remains as my swan-song to this Bill that the Minister has proved to be a deep disappointment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is the hon. Lady asking leave to withdraw the amendment?

Mrs. Gillan *indicated assent.*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It would have been helpful if she had said so.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Order for Third Reading read.

11.14 pm

Mrs. Roche: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

It has given me great pleasure to have the honour to pilot the Bill through the House of Commons. As I have said all along, the Bill is a long-overdue measure—*[Interruption.]* I am sorry that the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope), who is to assume a position on

[Mrs. Roche]

the shadow Trade and Industry team, should laugh at the Bill, which has been warmly welcomed by small businesses. It does not bode well for his shadow ministerial career; however, I look forward to welcoming him to his new responsibilities at Trade and Industry questions, when he might be in a better frame of mind.

The Bill is a long-overdue measure to tackle late payment and the genuine harm that it does to small businesses. It is fair to say that small businesses are the lifeblood of the economy. I am happy to be able to provide to our small firms a statutory mechanism that they have wanted for a long time. Some in the House and elsewhere have wondered whether small businesses will be willing to use that mechanism and take up their new right when it becomes available. A recent survey by the Midland bank found that 79 per cent. of businesses support the legislation, and 77 per cent. of small businesses would use it. It is welcome that small businesses are looking forward to the legislation being passed.

The Bill will recompense creditors who are kept from their money through no fault of their own. It will move the uncertainty regarding cash flow that is usually faced by those who are paid late to those who pay late. The issue of uncertainty is important, and I share the view of the Forum of Private Business that the legislation provides uncertainty for the late payer of the debt. That uncertainty manifests itself in three ways. First, there is the possibility of late payers having to provide a contingent liability in their balance sheets. Secondly, late payers risk facing a demand for statutory interest from receivers of their former late-paid suppliers. Thirdly, those who are paid late will be able to claim statutory interest from notoriously late payers when they retire, or are no longer trading with them.

As a consequence, businesses will see that, should they pay late, they may be pursued by the creditor, a factoring company, or a debt collection agency that has been assigned that debt; and that that pursuit may take place at any point within the six-year statute of limitation, or other period in Scotland. That is a good reason to pay on time. I am sure that accountants in firms that habitually pay late would rather pay on time than carry such contingent liabilities financial year to financial year.

As I have stated all along, the Bill provides small businesses and, in the not-too-distant future, all businesses the opportunity to exercise a new right in the fight against late payment. However, the Bill in itself is only one plank of the Government's efforts in that respect. The Government are committed to continuing work in direct partnership with businesses and their representative organisations. We want to ensure, through the provision of quality information and support, that businesses can improve their credit management. We shall also ensure that Government Departments understand that they are to lead by example. That is why Departments will be required to pay within 30 days or as otherwise agreed and why we are committed to publishing payment timetables.

I pay tribute to my noble Friend Lord Clinton-Davis for his efforts in piloting the Bill through another place; and to all my right hon. and hon. Friends who on Second Reading and in Committee so ably assisted the passage of the legislation.

I take this opportunity also to thank all the business representative organisations that provided an input during the Bill's progress. I thank Stan Mendham of the Forum of Private Business, whose unflagging dedication has been evident to all, certainly to the House.

The Bill's time has come. It will be warmly welcomed by the business community, particularly small businesses, which are the backbone of our economy. I commend it to the House.

11.19 pm

Mr. Page: Despite the Minister's brave words just now, as the Bill made progress in Committee, we could see dawning on her face the appreciation that the Bill was slipping into the category of "It seemed a good idea at the time".

The weaknesses of the measure became more and more apparent and we could see why all but one of the small firms' organisations said no to the statutory right of interest. The one that said yes was the smallest and the noisiest. My right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) exposed on Second Reading why that organisation concluded that the Bill would be a good thing: the survey was carried out in such a way that the answer could only be yes, yes and yes. When those small firms realise that they will still have to go to court and plough through legislation, there will be a group of disillusioned small business men and women.

The Minister has behaved in a courteous and friendly fashion. Courtesy is not universally noted among the Ministers in the Department of Trade and Industry, but she is a pleasant exception. She has loyally plodded on, but she has dodged a number of questions. I do not blame her for doing so. If I were in her shoes and I were being asked those questions, I, too, would dodge them. However, even at this last stage, those questions should be put to her again.

Conservative Members asked about the methods for calculating the interest rate above the base rate. Having read clause 6, we were left with the image of the Secretary of State with a wet towel around her head, drinking black coffee and doing abstruse calculations to make sure that they picked the right figure. When we asked to see those calculations and the basis on which they were made, there was nothing—not a sausage. We discovered that the draft European Union directive being debated happened to use the figure of 8 per cent. above the base rate as the measure. That could well be a coincidence, and I would be prepared to accept that if we could see the calculations that led to that figure, which exactly matches that in the draft EU directive. That is a coincidence too far.

The Minister has dodged the request by my hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan), who has so ably led us in the proceedings on the Bill, for examples of how the Bill's success will be measured. Not a single idea has been put forward to explain how we will examine whether the measure has been a success. Of course, examples will be produced to show how company A took company B through the process and obtained a statutory right of interest. Apart from the fact that there will be a little more interest, that could, and would, have happened under the existing system.

I should be interested to see whether the Forum of Private Business, which has so valiantly championed the cause for a number of years, will be prepared in three or

four years to survey its members to discover whether they feel that the statutory right of interest has been of benefit to them. It should leave aside the fast-track procedures when they are eventually decided by the Lord Chancellor and the extra rate of interest and let them give an accurate answer to the question whether the statutory right of interest has been of advantage to them. I have a strong feeling that the boxes towards the insignificant end will be given most attention.

The Minister dodged the fact, which was covered in an amendment tabled in Committee by my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst, that the Scottish Parliament will be able to amend the legislation. It is worrying that, on each side of Hadrian's wall, legislation may be interpreted and operated differently. That is not the way to maintain a united kingdom. Does Labour want a united kingdom?

The Minister dodged the question why the Government should not give a lead. She gave some reasons for the Government's view, but they do not add up. The Government should lead by example. They should not cower behind and come in at the last possible stage. The Minister dodged two or three times the question of what the Government will do if perceived unfair terms and conditions are imposed by a dominant purchaser or supplier. There has not been a whisper from the Government about what they will do in such circumstances. The Minister will not have to dodge such questions for much longer, because the Bill is in its final stage.

The Minister used some fine words about the break point of 50 employees, but the reason for choosing 50 is peculiar, and the calculation that led to it is not clearly understood by all hon. Members, not least by me. Why will she not adopt the European draft directive which, in the case quoted, uses the sum of 20,000 euros as the basis for court action or for operating a statutory right to interest? That is a matter for the future.

We all agree that the Bill will regularise credit terms. However, even the Minister is starting to accept that it will not be surprising if credit terms for small businesses lengthen rather than shorten. All that the Bill tries to achieve could have been achieved by a better fast-track procedure in the small claims court, which is what has been promised. The Lord Chancellor is working on that, but he is rather like Dr. Who, because now and again he goes into the Tardis and comes out reborn and reinvigorated. The latest one popped out on 1 May and has promised that there will be a better fast-track procedure in the small claims court. That is the best way to help small firms to collect outstanding debts.

The Bill is unnecessary. Guidance could be given to a court on the amount to be charged over baseline interest, and the court could be told that it should be higher than the current 3 per cent. In time, small firms will realise that they still have to go through procedures and go to court and that the companies that they are pressing for late payment have a right of reply. The 77 per cent. of companies that say, "This is what we want, this is right and we support it," will rapidly dwindle to a much smaller percentage.

The Minister made an inaccurate statement, I am sure inadvertently, to my hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham. She chided my hon. Friend for a memory lapse, but I remind the Minister that the previous Government got all parties in the small business sector to sit down together. The previous Prime Minister launched at 10 Downing street "Your Business Matters". The list of attendees—I have been writing them down—is impressive. Apart from representatives of all the small firm organisations, the Governor of the Bank of England, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the President of the Board of Trade, representatives of the four clearing banks, several senior civil service officials and even the Minister for Small Business, Industry and Energy were there. After that, regional meetings were held throughout the country and a final meeting took place at the Queen Elizabeth II conference centre, where many measures to help small businesses in the payment sector were brought forward. I remind the Minister that this unity is not exclusive to her and to her Government. I was glad that all sectors of the business community combined to try to tackle the serious aspect of late payment.

What will go through today pales into insignificance against what has happened over the previous few years. What is being done to make Government set an example in payment on time is absolutely correct. Making large firms state payment policy and payment practice in their accounts is a positive move in the right direction. The endorsement of the prompt payment CBI code was again the right move. The British standard on payment policy has real teeth, the only real teeth that I can see. If a company that has signed up to the British standard does not pay on time, trading standards officers can go in. Apart from training through business links, on which I know the hon. Lady is working—I am glad that she is—the other matter on which the previous Government should be commended is the removal of the iniquitous pay-when-paid system. Many small businesses and subcontractors welcome the passing of such an iniquitous operation. That is a roll-call of honour of which every Conservative Member can be proud.

To sum up the Bill, I can do no better than quote one of the four clearing banks. When asked for its views, it said, "This won't work, but it might help to change the culture." Let us hope that it does, because this is a very expensive and tedious method of achieving very little.

11.32 pm

Mr. Cotter: I welcome the Bill and congratulate the Government on introducing it. Unlike my Opposition colleagues, I believe that, in the round, the uncertainty of late debt should be reversed following the Bill and that the culprits of the crippling problem of debt will find the boot on the other foot; so I congratulate the Government and, at the same time, hope that they have taken on board various points that have been made by me and colleagues nearby.

The American writer Dorothy Parker once said that the two most beautiful words in the English language were "cheque enclosed". We hope that that will be heard much more in future. The statement will have a powerful and, I hope, true meaning when the Bill is implemented. Many businesses will have the right to break free from the late payment millstone which has hung around their necks and, in many cases, ruined their businesses. Small businesses in particular depend on tight budgeting to realise investment and to advance their projects. The Bill will help to create a better payment culture, providing a stick as well as a carrot.

[Mr. Cotter]

Over the next few years, it will be exciting to see how the Bill progresses. In that connection, I welcome the Minister's commitment to monitoring and to accepting the need for the Government to produce annual reports on their record.

I am concerned about some local authorities. Many of them have clear guidelines and procedures for payment. Bradford council has a computer system that is programmed as a matter of policy to pay bills on time automatically. I hope that others will follow that example.

Concerns have been expressed by the Forum of Private Business. Discussions have been held in the past few days on the problem of parties sidestepping or avoiding paying interest as a result of subsequent actions. I understand that that has been considered carefully and that the Minister is satisfied that the issue will be covered. I hope so.

I should not like to conclude without referring to the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan), who has taken a strident part in the debate. I wish her much success in her new role. There was a worrying moment in Committee when she referred to fish being used for payment. I had an awful vision of fish being overdue and being dead and rather smelly. I was concerned about what state the fish would be in when it came to the two fish required to provide the interest.

Mrs. Gillan: Tinned fish.

Mr. Cotter: Tinned fish may be more acceptable. The hon. Lady threw fresh light on the expression COD—cash on delivery. I wish her well in the future. I also thank the Minister for ably conducting these proceedings and for courageously pushing ahead with the Bill, which I warmly welcome on behalf of the Liberal Democrats. I believe that it will provide a solution for small businesses, which has been long overdue.

11.36 pm

Mr. Forth: I am almost as worried about legislation by survey as I am about legislation by referendum. As my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page) said, it depends on the question that is asked. If people are asked, "Do you want a better life? Would you like life to be more pleasant? Would you like the Government or legislation to relieve you of your problems?" the odds are that they will say yes. According to the Minister, many bodies that claim to be representative have tended to say yes to these simplistic questions. I doubt whether their response would be the same if they were asked, "If penal rates of interest were to be introduced for late payments, would you like dominant purchasers to renegotiate their contract with you such that the payments would be even later than they already are?"

As ever, the answer depends on the question. Whether we are dealing with legislation by referendum or legislation as a result of a survey, the danger is that we may mislead innocent people into believing that a legislative wand can be waved over their problem to make it disappear. By asking the wrong question, we are likely to get the wrong answer and to legislate in the wrong way, resulting in disillusionment.

We have tried over and again to persuade the Minister of this danger, but she has not yet been persuaded. I suspect that we are unlikely to do so at this stage of the legislative process. I have this dream that she will rise at the end of Third Reading and seek to withdraw the Bill, but that is unlikely. The Government should take much more care, because they are increasingly resorting to the seductive technique of survey or referendum. They ask simplistic questions and receive, unsurprisingly, positive answers. They then cite that as proof positive that the legislation has widespread support and will therefore succeed.

I will not try to emulate the analysis offered by my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Hertfordshire of how this impractical legislation is supposed to take effect. We have already heard this evening undertakings to the effect that public bodies will make payments of invoices within 30 days. I doubt whether anyone, public or private, has the mechanisms to guarantee that. How many organisations of any size, public or private, have in place the procedures to enable them to pay at that speed? The danger, then, is that—without a renegotiation of terms of trade—nearly everyone will become liable to the penalties specified in the Bill.

Herein lies the danger: we are threatening to penalise people for acting in a perfectly normal and respectable way. That means running the risk that a number of businesses will seek to renegotiate their terms with their suppliers to avoid the penalties introduced by the Bill. That, in turn, will mean even later payments than are the norm now. I sincerely hope that that backlash will not follow enactment of the Bill; I fear that it may, however.

Mr. Page: My right hon. Friend is powerfully putting the point that no company can run a monthly credit system for each individual article purchased during the month. To do so would wipe out the whole purpose of a monthly account.

Mr. Forth: I agree, of course: my hon. Friend understands how business works. Regrettably, all too few of those involved in drawing up the Bill share his understanding. It is impossible to imagine businesses completing each and every invoice as an individual item, with no cut-off point, standard procedure, or mechanism of the kind that any efficient business must have.

My hon. Friend and I both know—it would seem that no one in the Government does—that the assumptions underlying the Bill are quite impractical and will ultimately lead to the destruction of its aims.

For reasons not yet satisfactorily explained—very little about the Bill has been—we are asked to accept that Government Departments will be treated much more leniently than the private sector; there is also an arbitrary cut-off point for numbers of employees. That, too, will lead to anomalies in the implementation of the legislation. We have made that point time and again and received but scant explanation in reply.

There has been little understanding—uncharacteristically—by the Minister. We are left at this late stage of the Bill's progress with a large number of unanswered questions which are germane to the purposes and effects of the measure. Because those questions have not been answered, doubts must have been sown in the minds of those involved in business—large or small, representative or practising—who must by now be extremely concerned lest the Bill prove to be counter-productive.

Far from protecting the interests of small businesses, this legislation could harm businesses in general, and possibly small businesses more than most. It would be tragic if that were to be the outcome of the Bill's passing into law.

I give these warnings not with a sense of joy but with a sense of foreboding. I hope that I am proved wrong, but I fear that if the Government persist in basing legislation on answers to fatuous questions asked in superficial surveys, this is the kind of legislation that will result. If, during the legislation's passage through this House and the other place, we do not receive satisfactory answers from Ministers, perhaps it is because we are failing in our purpose—perhaps we have not kept the Minister here long enough, grilling and questioning her, or perhaps we have not tabled sufficient amendments, probing and substantive. If that is the case, we may have learnt our lesson this time, and perhaps next time we shall be much more rigorous in our approach. In any event, there are lessons to be learned by all of us.

I hope that, even at this late stage, we may have got the Minister to think rather more carefully about the approach that she and her Department will take to legislation, and that the lessons learned from this Bill are not borne by the very businesses that it was designed to help.

11.45 pm

Mrs. Gillan: We have certainly had an interesting Third Reading debate, and I have no intention of repeating the excellent points made by right hon. and hon. Friends.

I make it clear at the outset that there is no difference between Conservatives and the Government in so far as we do not support the late payment of debt. However, the Minister has not justified the legislation or even thought it through sufficiently. I think that she latched on to what she thought was a good idea to validate her new business-friendly credentials and pursued legislation that she herself has admitted was not supported by 60 per cent. of the organisations representing small businesses. Indeed, just before the Government came to power, I believe that the current Prime Minister received a letter from the Confederation of British Industry, the Institute of Directors, the Association of British Chambers of Commerce and the Federation of Small Businesses outlining their opposition to the measure.

During the Bill's passage, the Minister has failed even to refer to the remedies introduced by the previous Government in an attempt to change the culture of late payment. Instead, she has sought to gain notoriety from legislating, rather than putting in a sustained effort. In short, she has manoeuvred the legislation to provide excess protection for her friends in other Departments.

I do not know whether you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, or the Minister are familiar with the Anglo-Irish poet Jonathan Swift who, in 1709, wrote:

"Laws are like cobwebs, which may catch small flies,

but let wasps and hornets break through."

However, during the Bill's passage, the Minister has certainly taken Swift to heart by allowing the Government, or the hornets and wasps, to remain a protected contractor for four years, while condemning the small flies—businesses with 50 or more employees—to the wilderness, without the protection of this legislation to fall back on when they deal with the public sector.

It was a Conservative Government who started the publication of Government Departments' payment records. Although the Minister tried to make cheap points in Committee, it was under a Conservative Government that improvements in the timeliness of payment by the Government were evidenced. Just as the minimum wage was not set during the passage of the National Minimum Wage Bill, thus hampering discussion on that Bill, the results of payment records under the present Government were not made available to the House to enable us to judge the progress that they have made. How much better it would have been if those records had been available and if the Minister could have persuaded her colleagues to guarantee timely payment to all suppliers, thus leading by example.

It does not surprise me that the records were not made available. The responsibility of the Government is to govern and, in those terms, we do not seem to have a Government at all. When they are not delegating to others—for example, decisions on interest rates or the level of the minimum wage—they are pretending to be sympathetic to everyone and saying that they will carry out a review. Many of those reviews have been outstanding for more than 12 months.

In this case, however, the Government decided to govern. They promised to establish interest on late payments. What do we find? They have tabled amendments to their own Bill at every stage. We have to be sceptical about the effects of this convoluted legislation, which is hardly likely to be understood by the small companies that are to benefit. So much was admitted by the Minister, who will be sending out explanatory leaflets, but we did not expect the Government to have second, third and fourth thoughts about their own measure.

We are not confident that the Bill will produce the benefits that the Minister claims, but of course we hope that it does not cause the damage that we have outlined and for which there is so much potential. The House will appreciate that if one payment period is extended, the Minister will have failed.

The Conservative party believes in supporting small businesses, so we shall not oppose the Bill at this stage. In summary, the Government make a lot of sympathetic noises towards businesses, but continue to heap greater burdens on them. Businesses already face a tax bill of more than £25 billion during the lifetime of the Government. In addition, they have to contend with the minimum wage, the working time directive, union recognition, paternity leave, works councils, the introduction of the euro and the fact that manufacturing industry is now officially in recession. Like a leopard, the Government never change their spots.

It is with great pleasure that I hand over the mantle for this brief to my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope). I am sure that he will continue to argue, as I do, that all Labour Governments are bad for business.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed, with amendments.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Thursday 4th June, the Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motions in the name of Mrs. Ann Taylor relating to Modernisation of the House of Commons not later than Ten o'clock and such Questions shall include the Questions on any Amendments selected by the Speaker which may then be moved.—*[Mr. Betts.]*

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 119(9) (European Standing Committees),

Fisheries Monitoring Under the Common Fisheries Policy

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 6123/98, a Commission Communication on Fisheries monitoring under the Common Fisheries Policy; also notes that the Communication builds on an undertaking given by the Commission to the Prime Minister at the Amsterdam European Council in June 1997; and endorses action being taken by the Government to secure more effective and consistent standards of enforcement across the Community.—*[Mr. Betts.]*

Question agreed to.

HUMAN RIGHTS BILL [*LORDS*] (PROGRAMME)

Resolved,

That the following provisions shall apply to proceedings on the Human Rights Bill *[Lords]*.

Committee of the whole House

1. (1) The remaining proceedings in Committee of the whole House shall be completed in four allotted days and shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion six and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Bill on the fourth of those days.

(2) On each such allotted day, paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 15 (Exempted business) shall apply to proceedings on the Bill for any part of the period of six and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Bill which falls after Ten o'clock.

Business Committee

2. Standing Order No. 82 (Business Committee) shall apply to proceedings on the Bill.

3. No Motion shall be made to alter the order in which proceedings on consideration of the Bill are taken, but the resolutions of the Business Committee may include alterations in that order.

Conclusion of proceedings

4. For the purpose of concluding any proceedings which are to be brought to a conclusion at a time appointed by or under this Order:—

(1) The Chairman shall forthwith put the following Questions (but no others):—

(a) any Question already proposed from the Chair;

(b) any Question necessary to bring to a decision a Question so proposed;

(c) the Question on any amendment moved or Motion made by a Minister of the Crown;

(d) any other Question necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded.

(2) Proceedings under sub-paragraph (1) shall not be interrupted under any Standing Order relating to sittings of the House and may be decided though opposed, at any hour.

(3) If two or more Questions would fall to be put under sub-paragraph (1)(c) on amendments moved on Motions made by a Minister of the Crown, or under sub-paragraph (1)(d) in relation to successive provisions of the Bill, the Chairman shall instead put a single question in relation to those amendments, Motions or provisions.

(4) On a Motion made for a new Clause or a new Schedule, the Chairman shall put only the Question that the Clause or Schedule be added to the Bill.

(5) If on an allotted day a Motion for the adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 24 (Adjournment on specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration) stands over from an earlier day or to Seven o'clock—

(a) the bringing to a conclusion of any proceedings on the Bill which under this Order are to be brought to a conclusion after that time shall be postponed for a period equal to the duration of the proceedings on the Motion, and

(b) paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 15 (Exempted business) shall apply to proceedings on the Bill for the period after Ten o'clock for which sub-paragraph (a) permits them to continue.

Supplementary

5. If a Motion is made by a Minister of the Crown to amend this Order and if an effect of the Motion would be to provide a greater amount of time for proceedings on the Bill, the Question on that Motion shall be put forthwith and may be decided, though opposed, at any hour.

6. If a Motion is made by a Minister of the Crown to supplement the provisions of this Order in respect of further proceedings on the Bill, the Motion may be proceeded with, though opposed, at any hour and proceedings on the Motion, if not previously concluded, shall be brought to a conclusion three-quarters of an hour after they have been commenced.

Interpretation

7. In this Order "allotted day" means any day on which the Bill is put down on the main business as first Government Order of the Day.—*[Mr. Betts.]*

Strathclyde Police (Racism)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Betts.]*

11.51 pm

Ms Sandra Osborne (Ayr): I welcome the opportunity to represent my constituent, Mr. Lawrence Ramadas. I also believe that the issues that I am about to raise have wider significance in relation to the race relations policy of Strathclyde police and the message that the general public can take from the case.

Thirteen years ago, Lawrence Ramadas joined Strathclyde police and was proud to be a police officer. He believed that he had a great future with the police. His ambition was to join the traffic department, but, despite passing sergeant and inspector promotion exams within four years of becoming a police constable, producing consistently good results in his annual appraisals and continually applying for positions, the extremely promising young officer was never transferred off the beat despite applying six times to the traffic department.

Lawrence Ramadas is a personable, intelligent and articulate young man who would be a credit to any force, but instead, 13 years after joining the police, he is homeless, jobless, virtually broke and his health has suffered. At one point, Mr. Ramadas lost his self-respect, but he has certainly gained my respect and that of many others in his tireless quest for justice.

On 11 February 1997, an industrial tribunal found that Lawrence Ramadas had been subjected to one of the worst forms of discrimination. He was discriminated against by Strathclyde police—and by Superintendent Gordon Macpherson in particular—because of the colour of his skin.

Many people may believe that if Strathclyde police were serious about their much-vaunted race relations policy and determined not to tolerate racism in the ranks, they would have apologised to Mr. Ramadas immediately and compensated him for his trauma and for the destruction of every facet of his life. Instead, Strathclyde police appealed and lost. Their lawyers applied almost immediately to overturn the ruling on the technicality that the claim was brought after the legal deadline.

Racism cannot be confined to individual acts. It is a process whioh leaves victims disabled, disempowered and vulnerable. That is not well understood in the tribunal or police procedures. I ask the Minister to consider the time bar. It is not easy to determine when an episode of racism began or ended.

A few weeks ago, the tribunal ruled

"with a considerable amount of regret"

that the time bar ruling applied and that no compensation could be awarded to Lawrence Ramadas. It added that the treatment meted out to Lawrence Ramadas was

"extremely serious with devastating effects"

and "an abuse of power". It concluded:

"It is frustrating for the tribunal to be unable to compensate him adequately."

Those on the tribunal could hardly have been more damning in their condemnation or have expressed their views more clearly. That there had been racism was established without doubt.

Alas, the almost gloating reaction of the chief constable of Strathclyde, as reported in *The Scotsman* on 10 April, was:

"By virtue of the tribunal's adjudication upholding the time bar argument, the force has averted any award of damages from the police budget impacting on front-line service to the public."

That statement constitutes blatant and institutional racism. It is an insulting response which almost beggars belief. Strathclyde police remain guilty of racism, but managed to avoid recompensing a man whose life they have ruined because of a technicality—and they believe that they should be congratulated for so doing.

The chief constable pontificates that he will not tolerate racism, while in the same breath condoning proven racism, the tackling of which figures low in his priorities given his comments about saving public money. I wonder how much public money the police have spent to date on defending the indefensible.

After the findings of the first tribunal, the deputy chief constable, Mr. Richardson, announced that he had commissioned an independent inquiry into a breach of police discipline regulations. On Wednesday 26 February, Mr. Ramadas was interviewed by the investigating officer of the inquiry—Assistant Chief Constable MacKay—in the presence of his solicitor. At the outset, he was informed by Assistant Chief Constable MacKay that his sole remit was to investigate breaches of the police discipline regulations and that it had nothing to do with the industrial tribunal. I concur with that view.

However, Mr. Richardson deferred making a decision on possible disciplinary proceedings until the outcome of the employment tribunal was known, in spite of the police inquiry's recommendation that there was a case to answer. Mr. Richardson seems to want to have it both ways.

Surely the police discipline code and industrial tribunal legislation are quite separate entities under the law. The fact that Lawrence Ramadas has sought recourse to justice from an industrial tribunal surely does not absolve Strathclyde police of their responsibility as employers. In this case, however, Strathclyde police appear to have shirked their responsibility to make a decision on the independent report that they commissioned, and it appears that the decision whether to proceed with a discipline case is dependent on the outcome of an employment appeals tribunal.

Such a course of action cannot be correct or justified, and, in practice, means that the progress or otherwise of a discipline case is, de facto, being decided by an employment appeals tribunal. What if the employment appeals tribunal had decided that racist discrimination had not occurred? After some considerable time, would Strathclyde police have also decided that there was no case to answer? It is not surprising that Lawrence Ramadas believes that, by continually deferring a decision on the independent report, Strathclyde police were hoping that the whole sad episode would simply go away or be quietly forgotten, and that the perpetrator of the abuse would remain in a highly paid job and retire on a substantial pension, while the victim of his abuse is jobless, homeless and almost penniless, and cannot get another job the moment that he explains why he left the police service.

After various false starts, a date has been set for a disciplinary hearing. Apparently, the hearing was set for 4 February 1998, but was delayed until April at the

[Ms Sandra Osborne]

request of the perpetrator's solicitor, who has sought a judicial review, challenging the competence of the chief constable to raise disciplinary proceedings. That has meant, of course, that the whole process has again ground to a halt, and it may be September before a disciplinary hearing is heard—depending on the result of the judicial review. The Tayside report recommending action was published in May 1997.

I have here a copy of Strathclyde police race relations policy. According to the chief constable, it is written with a view to dealing with racially motivated incidents that breach the criminal, not the civil, law. In other words, if the racially motivated incident is in-house, it will not be brought to public attention. If that is so, can any officer subject a colleague to racism with impunity because it is a civil and not a criminal offence?

The Lawrence Ramadas case is a clear example that the system is not working. It neither reflects an understanding of the structural causes of racism nor demonstrates a coherent practice based on sound equal opportunities policies for dealing with it. Nor is it equitable in giving access to witnesses and documentation—both of which were denied my constituent's solicitor. I therefore call on the Minister to initiate an investigation, outwith the police authorities, on the handling of the case, to consider where procedures can be improved and to ensure that justice prevails for Lawrence Ramadas. He seeks an acknowledgement of guilt, an apology and compensation for loss of earnings after 12 years' service in the police, damage to health, homelessness and the hurt, distress and trauma caused by the horrendous process.

I am not alone in my belief that the outcome to date has been unsatisfactory. I shall quote Mr. James Wylie, who was until recently office manager of the Scottish Police Federation in Glasgow and formerly a police officer for 30 years:

"I have worked for the Police for the last 39 years and generally thought highly of the service and the way in which it was run. This case has almost completely destroyed my faith in the service (at least at a senior level) and I would earnestly reiterate that some form of independent inquiry should be set up to examine the actions of Strathclyde Police senior management in this case. Surely someone, somewhere must be able to make Mr. Orr and his force accountable and responsible for the racism perpetrated against Lawrence Ramadas or does justice grind to a halt at the entry doors of Police Headquarters in Pitt Street?"

A petition is circulating in Scotland calling for compensation and a resolution to this case.

Lawrence Ramadas was a model police officer and an example to others. It may interest the House to know that there is still an appalling lack of representation from the ethnic minority community as far as police recruitment is concerned. In 1996, Scotland's eight forces had 40 ethnic minority recruits, only two of whom have been promoted to sergeant. Of 9,187 workers in the Strathclyde force, 33 officers and 17 support staff come from ethnic minority communities.

The race relations policy of the force states:

"Recruitment of police and force support personnel from black and ethnic minority communities will continue to be a priority of Strathclyde Police, which, as an employer, seeks to create a harmonious and productive working environment by adhering to a well-established and continuously reviewed equal opportunities policy."

This did not work for Mr. Ramadas.

Mr. Ramadas was a model police officer and an example to others. On numerous occasions, he was paraded for the cameras and the press as an example of the positive measures Strathclyde police were taking to tackle racism and to recruit more officers from ethnic minority communities. However, Lawrence Ramadas now has no job. He had no equity and he had no justice. Strathclyde police have won an Investors in People award. Mr. Ramadas is not impressed by that award.

Strathclyde police, as a public service, represent the state and, in particular, the upholding of the law as part of the criminal justice process. They also have a duty to uphold a moral and civil message that racism is not acceptable. I look forward to my hon. Friend the Minister's comments, and I urge him to look at the situation as a matter of urgency.

12.6 am

The Minister for Home Affairs and Devolution, Scottish Office (Mr. Henry McLeish): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ayr (Ms Osborne) on her success in securing this debate and on the manner in which she has outlined her case. The House will, I am sure, agree that racism should have no place in the Scotland of today, least of all in the police. We must value the unique contribution made to our society by each individual, regardless of background, race or creed. Any incident with a racist element—wherever or whenever it happens—is a matter for deep regret, and we must do everything in our power to prevent such incidents from occurring. When they do occur, any alleged wrong must be confronted and firm action taken.

The incident concerning my hon. Friend's constituent, Mr. Lawrence Ramadas, took place almost six years ago. The industrial tribunal that considered his case did not suggest that the force as a whole was racist; its conclusion related to the actions of one officer, Superintendent Gordon Macpherson, for whom the force was held responsible.

As soon as the tribunal announced its decision in February 1997, the deputy chief constable commissioned an independent inquiry by Mr. James MacKay, assistant chief constable of Tayside police. I hope that my hon. Friend will agree that such prompt action does not suggest any complacency on behalf of the force.

Strathclyde police also decided to appeal against the tribunal's decision, on legal advice, on the basis that given the complexity and length of the evidence presented over 12 days, the industrial tribunal's reasoning did not, in the force's view, support its conclusions. Mr. MacKay's report was completed in May 1997, but no action was taken pending the appeal.

The appeal was rejected in December 1997. Following the outcome of the appeal—and in the light of the recommendations in Mr. MacKay's report—Strathclyde police initiated disciplinary proceedings against Superintendent Macpherson in December 1997, with a hearing being scheduled for February 1998. At that point, however, Superintendent Macpherson began legal proceedings in the Court of Session to prevent the hearing. A judicial review of the deputy chief constable's decision to pursue disciplinary proceedings against Superintendent Macpherson is to be heard in July.

Subject to the outcome of the judicial review, Strathclyde police have made a provisional arrangement for the disciplinary hearing to take place in September. The deputy chief constable of Strathclyde police has arranged for Queen's Counsel to present the case against Superintendent Macpherson, and the chairman of the disciplinary hearing will be the chief constable of Lothian and Borders police, Mr. Roy Cameron.

As the incident took place several years ago, the discipline case will be taken under the Police (Discipline) (Scotland) Regulations 1967, as amended—the procedure which was current at the time. It will be for the disciplinary hearing under Mr. Cameron to determine whether Superintendent Macpherson was guilty of an offence under the 1967 Regulations. A variety of punishments, ranging from caution to dismissal from the force, may be imposed. The procedure includes a right of appeal to the Secretary of State against the finding and against any punishment imposed as a result of the outcome of the disciplinary hearing. I regret that, in the circumstances, I cannot comment further on the case—to do so could prejudice the role of the Secretary of State in any appeal.

Although I understand my hon. Friend's frustration, I do not think that it would be fair to blame Strathclyde police for the fact that the case has been so protracted. It is important that the proper procedures are followed. I am satisfied that current police disciplinary and conduct arrangements in Scotland are working. A major review of the complaints and discipline system in Scotland was conducted in 1996, resulting in new conduct regulations. The new regulations provide more flexibility in the way in which misconduct by officers can be dealt with and increase the range of disposals available. I am, of course, aware of the recent Home Affairs Committee report on police disciplinary and complaints procedures in England and Wales. I shall consider, in consultation with the police, whether any of its recommendations that we have not already covered need to be introduced in Scotland. My hon. Friend makes a valid point in saying that we should carefully consider any ways in which we can improve procedures.

Having referred to the case of Mr. Ramadas and explained why I cannot comment more fully in the light of the proposed disciplinary hearing, I shall set out in more general terms the approach of the Scottish police service to ensure fair treatment and opportunities for all its officers. I hope that I shall be able to demonstrate to my hon. Friend's satisfaction that significant strides have been taken in the past five years.

I assure my hon. Friend that the police in Scotland are very conscious of their responsibility to avoid racism within the service and to promote equal opportunities. In 1993, Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary carried out an inspection of equal opportunities in the Scottish police. The report of the inspection concluded that all forces were taking the issue of equal opportunities very seriously. The inspectorate continues to examine equal opportunities during its regular inspections of police forces. The most recent report on Strathclyde police, which was published only last year, found that the force upheld its commitment to promote equal opportunities throughout its internal procedures.

In 1987, Strathclyde police launched their race relations policy, which was aimed at enhancing the already good relations between black and ethnic communities and the force. In July of last year, the chief constable of Strathclyde police published an updated race relations policy. Work on the revised policy took nearly a year to complete; it took account of a number of points of good practice that had been raised by local black and ethnic community representatives, and included consultation with police forces south of the border.

The policy mainly concerned the force's relations with the public. However, it also confirmed the force's commitment to equal opportunities for all its staff. That makes it clear that Strathclyde police are committed to equality in employment and service. Freedom from harassment or victimisation on racial grounds is an important part of the policy. All officers in Strathclyde police are expected to demonstrate their commitment to those equal opportunity principles in their relations with their colleagues at every level. In addition to that strengthened commitment, the force re-emphasised the importance of its programme of racial awareness training for its officers.

Strathclyde police's race relations policy states clearly that the force is opposed to racism. As my hon. Friend said, that is right, and I reinforce her comments. It goes on to say that the force will prepare its officers to provide a quality service to ethnic minority communities. The force records and monitors reports of racially motivated attacks to ensure that they are investigated thoroughly. Strathclyde police are committed to working with ethnic minorities to develop a mutual understanding of concerns. The force seeks to inform minority communities of its commitment to equality of service and encourages them to seek the assistance of the police with confidence. The police also undertake to enhance community safety. Progress in ensuring equality of service is monitored at the highest level in the force, and action will be taken to resolve any difficulties that emerge.

In 1996–97, 206 racial incidents were reported to Strathclyde police; in 1997–98, the number rose alarmingly to 481, an increase of 233 per cent. I believe that, in large part, that reflects the public's increased confidence in the reinforced procedures that the force has adopted.

I do not think that those figures reflect a force that is prepared to tolerate racism in its ranks. To do so would hardly be consistent with the force's overall aim of delivering the highest possible standards of service to the people of Strathclyde. More generally, the force places great emphasis on the quality of its personnel policies. As my hon. Friend said, Strathclyde police force received the prestigious Investors in People award, and was the first police force in Britain to do so.

Strathclyde, like all Scottish forces, is keen for its officers to be drawn from all sections of society and has taken steps to encourage applications to join the force from members of ethnic minorities. In 1994, it was one of the first forces in Britain to develop and implement a strategic framework for action aimed at increasing the number of black and ethnic minority recruits. Specifically, the framework for action provided a target to increase the number of officers from black and ethnic backgrounds from 0.2 to 0.5 per cent. of its strength over a five-year period. By the end of 1996–97, the number of ethnic minority officers in Strathclyde stood at just under 0.5 per cent., with another two years to achieve its five-year target.

[Mr. Henry McLeish]

All applicants from ethnic minorities are allowed to sit the entrance test for appointment to the force. Access courses are provided at further education colleges to help ethnic minority candidates to prepare for their application to sit the standard entrance test. The innovative policy implemented by Strathclyde police was recognised by the Commission for Racial Equality and was commented on in the 1996 report on race and equal opportunities in the police service.

Overall, the Scottish police service has a good record in policy and practice on equal opportunities, although, as my hon. Friend says, that is never a matter for complacency. If there can be an improvement in the quality of service given to the community—and, indeed, in internal procedures in the service—that must always be a high priority for the chief constable.

In the Scottish police service, training in racial awareness is provided for all new recruits at the Scottish police college at Tulliallan. It continues both at the college and in forces as officers progress to the senior ranks. Race relations policies are increasingly being developed in consultation with local racial equality councils. Forces also cover race relations policy in their community safety strategies, and throughout Scotland there are various examples of good practice.

I reiterate my and the Government's view that racism cannot be tolerated in the police or elsewhere in society. Strathclyde's chief constable and his seven colleagues in Scotland share that view. While it is impossible to be sure that isolated incidents will never take place, I believe that the Scottish police have made substantial efforts to develop a culture that minimises racial discrimination.

The Government believe that Scotland benefits from being a multicultural society and that we should cherish our ethnic diversity. The Government have a clear commitment to racial equality and to taking steps to ensure that it is at the heart of Government policy.

We do not underestimate for one minute the problems that racism poses for society, and we are taking steps to address it. One of those steps is the action that we are taking to combat racist crime. The Crime and Disorder Bill, which is in Committee in this House, will introduce a new offence of racially aggravated harassment. It will also require the courts, when sentencing an offender who has committed a racially aggravated crime, to treat that racial aggravation as an aggravating factor when deciding on sentence.

Those measures were decided on following consultation involving many organisations representing victims and possible victims of racist crimes. The measures will improve the protection of the public and reinforce the right of all people in Scotland to live a life free from crime. They will address all levels of racist crimes. In every case where a racist element is proved, the courts must take that into consideration when sentencing. It is important that everyone—victim, police, public and offender—is left in no doubt that racist crimes are wholly unacceptable in Scotland and that perpetrators will be dealt with accordingly.

The Government have given their firm commitment to a fair and just society in which all individuals, whatever their race or ethnic origin, have equal rights. Racial discrimination is manifestly harmful and unjust to its victims and to Britain as a whole. The Government are fully committed to eliminating racial discrimination, whether in the police service or anywhere else.

My hon. Friend will understand my inability to go into further detail about the personal case she has raised, but I wanted to extend my discourse to show that we deplore racism, which is an abhorrence in our society and I repeat that, whether it be in the police or in society, this Government want to stamp it out.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty minutes past Twelve midnight.

House of Commons

Tuesday 2 June 1998

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

HEALTH

The Secretary of State was asked—

Health Services (Worcestershire)

1. **Mr. Peter Luff** (Mid-Worcestershire): What representations he has received from community health councils in Worcestershire about the provision of health services in the county; and if he will make a statement. [42174]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. Alan Milburn): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has received letters from Kidderminster and district and Worcester community health councils on the subject of Worcestershire health authority's strategic review. The health authority has now agreed an extension for the consideration of responses to the consultation. I know that negotiations are progressing and given the spirit of co-operation that we are seeking to encourage in the NHS and the progress made so far, I hope that a local agreement can now be reached about the future of local health services.

Mr. Luff: I sincerely hope that the Minister's optimism is borne out by experience. If a decision falls to the Secretary of State on this matter, will the Minister ensure that he is reminded that the proposals have the full support of the larger community health council in Worcestershire, the Worcester and district health council, Bromsgrove community health council, the Worcester Royal Infirmary trust, Wychavon district council, Malvern Hills district council, the ambulance trust and—perhaps most significantly—the community trust, which recognises that only proposals such as these can safeguard the community hospitals of Worcestershire and enable a fine hospital such as Evesham to develop its services in a cost-effective manner to serve the people of South Worcestershire into the next millennium?

Mr. Milburn: I understand the hon. Gentleman's concerns, and the concerns of the local community about the future of community hospitals. I hope that the decision does not come to Ministers. It would be far better if the situation could be resolved locally and amicably. Given the progress that has been made so far, I am optimistic that a local consensus will be achieved.

Mr. David Lock (Wyre Forest): My hon. Friend will appreciate the anger of my constituents, who are the net losers in these proposals, as they see their hospital—which received a charter mark last year—decimated by the proposals of the health authority. Does he accept that that anger was aggravated when the 12,000 local people who took to the streets were dismissed out of hand by the health authority? Will he ensure that the health authority knows that the Government think that local opinion is important in making health care decisions?

I am grateful that my hon. Friend referred to the negotiations in which, as he knows, I have been involved. Will he ask the health authority to go the extra mile, to improve its offer and—most of all—to clarify its proposals so that the volunteers on the community health council, who all do valuable work for nothing, know precisely what is, and what is not, on offer to the people they represent?

Mr. Milburn: I pay tribute to all those who have been engaged in the negotiations locally, including my hon. Friend and other hon. Members from both sides of the House. There are difficult decisions confronting the health authority in Worcestershire. I understand that progress is being made and that further meetings have been held this week. It is important that everyone concerned does everything in their power to reach local agreement so that patient services in Worcestershire are protected and we get the best health care for the county's people.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): There are some important decisions to be taken about the future of Worcestershire's hospitals, but, in the meantime, their waiting lists are growing. The royal infirmary's list is longer; Kidderminster's list is longer; the Alexandra's list is longer. The people of Worcestershire are learning fast about the people's waiting lists. Will the Minister offer this House a simple guarantee—that, in his panic to put right the waiting list betrayal we have seen from the Government, we will not see any other NHS performance indicator pushed in the wrong direction instead?

Mr. Milburn: I welcome the hon. Gentleman to his new responsibilities. I hope that he has more success in his new role than in his last one, when he was charged with the responsibility for shoring up the Conservative party's fortunes following its election defeat on 1 May. Given his track record on that issue, I am sure that my hon. Friends will wish him a long tenure as Opposition health spokesman.

I will not—no Labour Member will—take any lectures from the hon. Gentleman on waiting lists. Under the previous Government, waiting lists rose year after year. Under this Government, waiting lists will come down—not only for one year, but year after year.

I tell the hon. Gentleman that the Government have made a good start. Now—for the first time since hospital records have been collected—no one is waiting more than 18 months for hospital treatment. We have also decreased—for the first time in two years—the number of people waiting 12 months. I guarantee him that, in one year, waiting lists will be lower than the record level we inherited from the previous Government.

Mr. Michael J. Foster (Worcester): The Minister will be aware that the six options under consideration in the health review conducted in Worcestershire all include

provision of a new district general hospital. Will he reassure both me and the people of Worcestershire—who, after all, have now been on a promise for 40 years—that he will do his utmost to deliver a new hospital? May I also express to him the gratitude of the people of Worcestershire for the extra £2.8 million recently announced to deal with waiting lists in the county?

Mr. Milburn: I hope that we will not keep the people of Worcestershire waiting for too much longer, if it has been 40 years. I also pay tribute to my hon. Friend for the role that he has played in assiduously campaigning for a new hospital in Worcester. As he knows, progress has been made on the private finance initiative.

I urge all those concerned, including the private sector consortium, to meet the very tough deadline that the Government have imposed. It is important that that deadline is met, and I am sure that it will be. Worcester is a very important part of the new hospital building programme that the Government have announced, and has the biggest new hospital building programme that the national health service has ever seen. The programme also symbolises our commitment not only to investing in the national health service, but to modernising it.

Cancer Deaths

2. **Mrs. Marion Roe** (Broxbourne): If he will make a statement on the Government's target to reduce the death rates from cancer, as set out in the Green Paper on public health. [42175]

The Minister for Public Health (Ms Tessa Jowell): There are three ways of reducing deaths from cancer, the first of which is by better prevention and reduction of preventable deaths. The Green Paper sets a target of reducing the death rate from cancer among people under 65 by at least a further fifth by 2010. If achieved, the target would annually save approximately 6,000 lives in England.

The second way is by improving early detection and by better treatment—for example, through the national service frameworks, and implementation of the Calman-Hine approach.

Finally, we will make an impact on reducing death from cancer by implementing the Government's commitment that, by 2000, anyone with suspected cancer will be able to see a specialist within two weeks of referral for any cancer.

Mrs. Roe: As waiting lists are a major concern to patients, will the Minister confirm that the Secretary of State promised a two-week wait to see a cancer consultant, and immediate surgery? We have not heard very much about that pledge. Has it been forgotten? If it has not, what action has been taken to fulfil that pledge?

Ms Jowell: The fact is that, in dealing with breast cancer, £10 million was allocated to implement the pledge. By April 1999, any woman who has suspected breast cancer and whose general practitioner thinks that it should be investigated urgently will be seen by a consultant within two weeks of referral. By 2000, that pledge will apply to all patients with suspected cancer. We promised that that was what we would do, and that is what we will do.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): I welcome my hon. Friend's comments, and her team's commitment to ensuring that we really tackle the problem of cancer. In 1997 alone, more than 70,000 men died of cancer. Many of them died of lung cancer, but many others died of prostrate cancer. I therefore welcome the concentration on early detection, particularly among men. For whatever reasons, men neglect their health and the early signs of cancer, and try to avoid tackling the problem.

Will my hon. Friend ensure that, once treatment is decided, those who have signs of cancer are guaranteed high-quality treatment, regardless of where they live in the United Kingdom—rather than having to play some sort of lottery, based on where they live, that determines the quality of their consultant and treatment?

Ms Jowell: My hon. Friend is right. Rebuilding the certainty that a patient will be treated by cancer specialists with the competence to provide the highest-quality treatment regardless of where they live is what we mean in practice by discharging our pledge to patients to rebuild a modern national health service.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): Is the Minister aware of the increasing concern about the incidence of bowel cancer? How are the Government responding to the representations of the Cancer Research Campaign to give greater priority to the problem?

Ms Jowell: We have invested a further £10 million to investigate screening for bowel cancer. The pledge that patients will be seen within two weeks of referral will be effective from April 2000. Bowel cancer is a major cause of preventable death. We believe that lives can be saved, and we are investing to save lives.

Suicide (Young People)

3. **Mr. David Hanson** (Delyn): What steps he intends to take to reduce suicide rates among young people. [42177]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Paul Boateng): The Green Paper "Our Healthier Nation" sets out the Government's proposed mental health target to reduce the death rate from suicide by at least a further sixth by 2010 and proposals for concerted action to achieve that target, including a reduction in the suicide rates among young people.

Mr. Hanson: Will my hon. Friend confirm that suicide is one of the biggest causes of death among men under 24? I welcome the targets that have been set in the White Paper. What practical steps do the Government intend to take to ensure that suicides are prevented, so that families such as that in my constituency who had a young boy who committed suicide can be secure in the knowledge that it will not happen again?

Mr. Boateng: My hon. Friend is right to highlight a particular problem among young men. Suicide is the second highest killer of young men between 16 and 25, after road traffic accidents. That damning statistic requires concerted action. My hon. Friend the Minister for Public Health has addressed that in her Green Paper. A White Paper will follow in the autumn. In the meantime, we are taking practical action, such as considering the size of packets containing drugs and the warnings on them; piloting projects such as the Manchester campaign against

living miserably, to work out how best to communicate with that hard-to-reach target group; and, importantly, ensuring that general practitioners are equipped to intervene early when the signs of stress and depression and the early stages of schizophrenia first appear. Those alarming figures can be brought down by such practical measures and by increasing public awareness.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): The Minister will know that, for a long time, the mental health authorities in Weymouth and South Dorset have been getting people back into the community by using landlords and landladies who have a supporting role for the mentally ill and those who are suicide risks. He will also know that, like their predecessors, the Government are examining how the project should be funded. It has not been properly funded for some years. People are falling through the net between health services and housing benefit. When will the Minister announce changes so that the excellent schemes that have been piloted in my area can continue?

Mr. Boateng: Only last month I attended a seminar on adult placements. We are working with the Local Government Association and the health authorities to ensure that such schemes are given the priority they deserve, because they have proved effective and need to be backed up by resources. We are giving urgent attention to the matter.

Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe (Bradford, South): Many of the young men who commit suicide are in prison. The Home Office is investigating the problem. What can the Department of Health do to help reduce the number of suicides in prison?

Mr. Boateng: My hon. Friend raises an important question. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is leading a group on that. We have identified a particular role for health authorities in the youth justice teams. So, for the first time, NHS representatives will be sitting alongside those from social services, the Probation Service, the police and others in order that we can work together in a concerted, multi-agency way to address the problems faced by that group of young people.

Health Trust Boards

4. **Mr. Stephen Day** (Cheadle): If he will make a statement on the composition of health trust boards. [42178]

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Frank Dobson): At the general election, we promised to make health trust boards more representative of the communities that they serve. We have kept that promise. I am proud to tell the House that, of the 1,000 people whom I have appointed to boards since 1 May last year, half have been women—for the first time in the history of the NHS—and the proportion of black and Asian board members has almost doubled.

Mr. Day: Given that the Secretary of State has appointed so many Labour councillors to trust boards, why has he threatened to sack them but not offered to resign himself, if his waiting list promises are not met?

Mr. Dobson: The hon. Gentleman, like every Tory and Liberal Democrat Member, as well as every Labour Member, was invited to nominate people to serve on boards in his area. He was either too idle or too careless to respond.

Audrey Wise (Preston): Will my right hon. Friend consider appointing to each trust board someone with special knowledge and understanding of the importance of carers to the NHS? Will he also study the 1990 Social Services Committee report on carers, which was unanimous and cross-party, except for the vote of the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe), who rejected and opposed the report on the grounds that she recognised no such thing as a carer?

Mr. Dobson: I share my hon. Friend's views. Of the various criteria laid down when judging who should be appointed to trust boards, involvement in caring is one of them. A substantial number of people are so involved. I should have thought that, generally speaking, most people would think that sensible.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): Has the Secretary of State any plans for marking the 50th anniversary of the NHS by extending democracy on NHS boards? Is not the problem the fact that, if people were chosen to sit on boards, from the people, by the people, rather than being dependent on the Secretary of State's patronage, the demand for more funding for the health service might become so loud, and Ministers so embarrassed, that they would be forced to recognise what everybody else knows: the NHS needs more money? The Government are the only ones who have not agreed with that.

Mr. Dobson: I am not entirely sure that either history or the future would bear out the hon. Gentleman's suggestion. My impression is that, generally speaking, the NHS does rather better from central Government funding than from local government, despite the fact that people deciding things in local government are elected. No party, as far as I know, has ever been committed to the idea of elected health authorities or trusts. The NHS is a national health service, and we must keep it that way.

Mr. Ivan Lewis (Bury, South): Is my right hon. Friend aware that he recently appointed—or reappointed—a certain Vera Stringer to serve for a further two years on Bury Healthcare NHS trust board? Not only does she frequently attack Government policy in the local media: she also happens to be chairman of the North-West Conservative party. I would have thought that the hon. Member for Cheadle (Mr. Day) would have been aware of that. Does not that show that the Government are serious about objectivity in appointments and reappointments to health trust boards?

Mr. Dobson: Yes, indeed.

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone and The Weald): Will the right hon. Gentleman answer the question so clearly asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Cheadle (Mr. Day)? Given that he has filled trust boards with his own choices, and that he has threatened to sack all of them if they do not implement some of his rasher promises, how much further must waiting lists rise,

and how much farther back must he put Labour's so-called pledges before he will consider it appropriate to sack himself?

Mr. Dobson: I welcome the right hon. Lady to her new post. She is the third shadow health spokesman that I have faced in just 13 months, and she and I are matching accessories in the sense that neither of us counts as being at the fashionable end of politics.

As my hon. Friend the Minister of State pointed out, our pledge is that, by this time next year, waiting lists will be down to the level that we inherited. We will then reduce them by another 100,000 before the next general election. In doing that, we will achieve something that the Tory party did not manage during its 18 years in office, and we will be proud of that achievement.

Miss Widdecombe: My question was terribly simple, but the right hon. Gentleman has failed to answer it. He gave us another raft of promises that will not go down well in the corridors of hospitals that have already been carpeted with the broken pledges of the Labour party. The question is not what he will keep on promising, but how much further the pledges must be broken before he will take responsibility. Last month, there was another rise in waiting lists. How much further must they rise, and how much farther back must he put implementation of a so-called early pledge before he will take responsibility and resign? Three times the question has been asked: how much worse must it get before he will resign?

Mr. Dobson: To set the record straight—*[Interruption.]* The parliamentary Tory party was so concerned about waiting lists that it did not manage to table a single question on the subject for this Question Time.

We will get waiting lists down, and by doing so, we will keep our promise. To those who ask me to take responsibility, let me say that this time last year I said that we would help the health authorities to get through the winter and would find extra funds to enable them to do so. I asked them to concentrate on dealing with emergencies, and I accepted that, if they did so, waiting lists would rise. I take responsibility for that, and for everything that I do. I do not blame the people who work in the health service, as all my Tory predecessors seem to do.

Dr. Phyllis Starkey (Milton Keynes, South-West): In making appointments to hospital trust boards, has my right hon. Friend ever knowingly appointed anyone who advocates chaining women prisoners to their beds as an aid to childbirth?

Mr. Dobson: No, but I work on the supposition that no one is perfect.

Tobacco Products

5. **Mr. William Cash** (Stone): If *(a)* the legal service to the European Council and *(b)* the legal advisers in his Department have provided written opinions on the EC draft directive on the advertising and sponsorship of tobacco products on which the Council has adopted a common position. [42179]

The Minister for Public Health (Ms Tessa Jowell): Legal advice to the United Kingdom Government and the Council must remain internal to those institutions. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that all advice was carefully considered by the Government in advance of the decision to support the common position. We remain content that the legal base is appropriate for this measure.

Mr. Cash: Will the Minister put the written advice in the Library of the House, and if not, why not? Is she aware that, only a few days ago, Commissioner Padraig Flynn admitted in the European Parliament that no economic impact study had been done by the European Union in devising the directive? It follows that there is no base on which the directive could legitimately have been made.

Ms Jowell: That was a nice try. No, I will not place the advice in the Library. As the hon. Gentleman well knows, the regulatory appraisal process operates once a directive has completed its parliamentary stages. I have a wonderful sense of nostalgia at today's Health questions. We have the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) back on the Front Bench, and we have Tory Cash for questions.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): Does my hon. Friend recognise that the real concern about the European directive on tobacco advertising is not its legal status, which has been agreed, but the need to assist in saving the lives of hundreds of thousands of people who die prematurely throughout the European Union from the use of tobacco products?

Ms Jowell: My hon. Friend is right about the importance of ending the 500,000 preventable deaths every year in the European Union from tobacco and smoking-related causes. The legal base is important. We are clear that it is secure and that this measure to harmonise the market in tobacco advertising is appropriately based on the relevant article, which carries with it an obligation to offer a high level of health protection.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Is it not ethically unjustifiable, when the European Union is rightly trying to ban tobacco advertising to save life, that it should subsidise the production of tobacco in Greece and other Mediterranean countries?

Ms Jowell: Yes, but the sort of amendment that we want to the common agricultural policy must be sought through negotiation and consent. We will continue to argue the case for reform.

6. **Dr. Nick Palmer** (Broxtowe): What progress has been made towards implementing the proposed European directive on tobacco advertising. [42180]

The Minister for Public Health (Ms Tessa Jowell): On 13 May, the European Parliament voted through unamended the common position agreed by EU Health Ministers last December. We hope that it can now be adopted during the UK presidency. The time scale for implementation of the directive in UK law will be set out in the tobacco control White Paper to be published later this year. This major achievement shows that we are

serious about co-operation with our European partners and about tackling smoking, and ends an eight-year stalemate on the issue.

Dr. Palmer: We spend so much time on trivial political points that we sometimes overlook major achievements. Will the Minister for Public Health accept my congratulations, and I think the congratulations of most hon. Members, on breaking the logjam and achieving this important step forward? Will she also accept, perhaps in contrast to the previous questioner, that we now need further advance on other fronts with our European partners to combat the scourge of tobacco, to harmonise tariffs on tobacco, and to work together to eliminate the deaths and illnesses that have plagued the continent for so long?

Ms Jowell: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that there is further scope for European action, especially on the labelling of cigarettes, tar content and combating smuggling. He is also right to say that, if we in this country are to deal with the previous Government's legacy of increasing numbers of children taking up smoking, we have to do many things; but what is absolutely clear is that we will not reduce the rate at which children smoke unless we ban tobacco advertising.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I join in welcoming the advertising ban, but does the Minister agree that the common agricultural policy needs to be reformed speedily, given that millions of pounds have been spent on producing tobacco and given how quick the European Union was to damage our beef industry when fewer deaths had resulted?

Ms Jowell: I agree that the common agricultural policy is in need of reform in that respect. I should like to place on record the Government's support for the worldwide initiative against tobacco started by Gro Brundtland, the new director of the World Health Organisation. It is by countries working together that we can begin to make a real impact on one of the major causes of preventable death affecting nations today.

Health Information (Men Over 40)

7. **Mr. Jim Dobbin** (Heywood and Middleton): What action his Department is taking to provide improved health information to men aged over 40 years. [42181]

The Minister for Public Health (Ms Tessa Jowell): On 11 May 1998, I launched a new men's health leaflet, "Life Begins at Forty". The leaflet provides health tips and general health information designed specifically for men over 40, and is aimed particularly at men who are less well off. A million leaflets have been printed and are available through working men's clubs, GPs' surgeries, public libraries and so on.

Mr. Dobbin: I should declare an interest, being quite near 40 myself—perhaps towards the upper limit. Does my hon. Friend agree that, in our efforts to spread information on improving and maintaining the health of men over 40, we have a responsibility to provide for those men and their families decent wages, decent housing, a decent environment and decent leisure facilities? Does she also agree that driving up standards in public health is the responsibility not only of her Department and herself, as Minister for Public Health, but of every Government Department?

Ms Jowell: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Only by working across Government and through partnership at local level can we begin, first, to achieve improvements in the health of older men—that is, men over 40—[HON. MEMBERS: "What about women?"] Women tend to look after themselves rather better. Secondly, only by such action can we start to tackle some of the awful inequalities in health that mean that a man in social class 5—an unskilled man—is six times more likely to die of lung cancer and seven times more likely to be injured in an accident than a man in social class 1. It is those inequalities that we have to tackle, and we shall tackle them by working across Government, as one Government.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley (South-West Surrey): As the Secretary of State is a man over 40, will the Minister consider having a task force to re-examine the health information that he receives? The right hon. Gentleman said that he would cut waiting lists; they have risen to record levels. He said that he would stop hospital closures; he has found that changing health care requires hospital changes. He abused health managers, only to find that they deliver the necessary changes. He said that he would abolish the internal market; he has re-badged it. Will the hon. Lady also ensure that her task force informs that gentleman over 40 that the NHS needs an average 3 per cent. real-terms increase a year to deliver quality care?

Ms Jowell: We shall take no lectures from the right hon. Lady on that subject. However, I am absolutely delighted that she rose to her feet on a question about the Government's new public health strategy. I draw her attention to a recent publication, "New Dynamics in Public Health", which concludes, about our new public health policy:

> "A healthier nation paves the way for much more effective application of core national targets and a much greater scope for multidisciplinary work in pursuit of targets at a local level."

That is very important in improving health for men over 40. That is an important new strategy and the evidence that we have suggests that it should succeed. The author is Tony Hockley, who was the right hon. Lady's special adviser.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): It is possible that I come into the category referred to in the question. What would be the position of such men, and indeed women, if, 50 years ago, the Conservative campaign to stop the national health service coming into being had succeeded? Is not the NHS one of the great blessings of our country? The last people to criticise it should be Conservative Members, whose party was against it in the first place.

Ms Jowell: My hon. Friend is, as usual, entirely right, and we shall take no lectures from the Conservative party on this matter. A Labour Government created the national health service; we will rebuild and modernise it and, in doing so, we will save thousands of lives. The action that we have announced today will result in a substantial reduction in preventable deaths in men over 40.

Multiple Sclerosis

8. **Mrs. Theresa May** (Maidenhead): If he will make a statement on the provision of services within the NHS for people with multiple sclerosis. [42182]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. Alan Milburn): The national health service provides a wide range of services to which people with MS have access, and such patients are seen within a wide range of hospital specialties. Patients can discuss the options available to them with their GP and appropriate hospital specialists. They may also request an assessment of their needs by local authority social services departments.

Mrs. May: The Minister's response skates over the reality of NHS provision of services for people with MS across the country. Is he aware of the Patients Association survey of neurological units throughout the country which showed that more than 90 per cent. did not have specialist MS clinics while one third said that their neurologists had no specific interest in MS, and 50 per cent. did not provide nurse-led clinics? How does that square with the Government's White Paper commitment to provide fair access to services across the country?

Mr. Milburn: It squares extremely well, because the White Paper was designed to deal with the problems—which the hon. Lady adequately outlined—that we have inherited from the previous Administration. The hon. Lady's party was in government for 18 years; we have been in government for one year. We are determined to set in place new mechanisms to ensure fairer access to services for people with MS and other debilitating conditions. That is why we shall have national service frameworks to outline to patients and professionals the range and quality of services that they can expect. We shall have a national institute for clinical excellence and, for the first time in the NHS, a watchdog body—a commission for health improvement. I hope that the hon. Lady welcomes those initiatives.

Mr. Robin Corbett (Birmingham, Erdington): I welcome what the Minister has said about aiming to achieve fair access for all users of our national health service. Will he tell the House the time scale to which he is working to try to achieve equal access to equal services for people suffering from MS?

Mr. Milburn: The national institute for clinical excellence will come into being next year; my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has announced a programme of national service frameworks; and, subject to legislation, the commission for health improvement will come into being during the 1999–2000 financial year.

Glaucoma

9. **Mr. David Heath** (Somerton and Frome): How many cases of glaucoma were recorded as having been treated through the NHS in 1997. [42183]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Paul Boateng): The information is not available in the form requested. In 1995–96, however—the latest year for which information is available—there were 25,274 finished consultant episodes involving the in-patient treatment of patients with glaucoma.

We are unable to say if any of those episodes were for separate patients or whether some patients accounted for more than one completed episode.

Mr. Heath: I am grateful for that limited information. Does the Minister agree that it is far better if glaucoma is diagnosed early, and preferably pre-operatively? Taking into account, in addition to cases of glaucoma, cases of the other retinopathies—diabetes and vascular disease—is there not an overwhelming case, which makes economic sense as well as good health sense, for reintroducing the free eye test?

Mr. Boateng: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says; he brings a special knowledge to this subject from his previous occupation. Of course early diagnosis is important, and we are ensuring that existing free NHS eye tests are taken up by those with glaucoma, their parents, their siblings and children aged over 40, because all the evidence shows that there is insufficient take-up among that group. As for extending free eye tests, that is a matter for the comprehensive spending review, but we must ensure that the existing free eye tests are taken up—at the moment, they are not.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): I am sure that my hon. Friend agrees that treatment of eye diseases, especially cataracts, is extremely good value for the national health service, and can transform the quality of people's lives. I hope that he will make that an immediate priority. While we are on the subject, may we do away with the absurd business of talking about "completed episodes" and start talking about the number of people who are treated, so that people can find out what is going on?

Mr. Boateng: My hon. Friend is a bit hard—I have just learnt to talk about completed episodes, but I shall do my best. I recognise the good sense that my hon. Friend always displays in this regard, but we must act on the recent advice of the British College of Optometrists, which has argued that visual field assessment in the examination of patients at risk from primary open-angle glaucoma is of enormous importance; the energies of the Department are, and will be, thus directed.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): Is the Minister aware, however, that for glaucoma, as for other illnesses, people in my constituency and throughout Leicestershire will have to wait on waiting lists that are 15 per cent. longer now than they were a year ago? That is a record. Will the Minister give those people some reassurance by telling them that waiting lists will be shortened more quickly than he says? In a year's time, waiting lists in Leicestershire will have shortened to what they were a year ago—no shorter.

Mr. Boateng: The hon. Gentleman ought to know that the public, with good cause, trust our Government with the NHS; they could never trust the Conservatives with it. The Conservatives sold the NHS down the river; we are saving it.

Health and Social Services (Co-operation)

10. **Ms Tess Kingham** (Gloucester): What action he is taking to promote close co-operation between health and social services. [42185]

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Frank Dobson): We have made a good start in breaking down the Berlin wall between the national health service and local social services. Last winter, the national health service coped better with emergencies than in any recent year, because of the close working relationship between health and social services, which we promoted, and funded by the extra £300 million that we provided. In Gloucestershire, that included more than £1 million—one fifth of which went on social services to provide, for example, improved out-of-hours service, respite care and holiday cover.

Ms Kingham: My right hon. Friend correctly alluded to Gloucestershire, where, last winter, health and social services teams worked closely together to avoid a winter crisis and to prevent patients from having to lie on trolleys in pain, waiting for treatment. However, in my surgeries I receive many representations from carers in the county—especially carers for sick children seeking respite care—who have been frustrated by the previous Government's introduction of fragmentation and competition within the NHS. Can my right hon. Friend reassure those carers in Gloucestershire that the Government will promote co-operation between the NHS and social services throughout the year, so that they can get the vital services they need for sick family members?

Mr. Dobson: I can certainly give my hon. Friend that guarantee. It is not that we will be promoting co-operation; we will not tolerate a lack of co-operation.

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone and The Weald): The right hon. Gentleman has lauded the state of communication and co-operation between the health service and the social services. He will be aware that one of the biggest problems facing social services and the health service is bed blocking. It is impossible to discharge certain patients, because the proper sums of money are not available to social services to care for them. As the right hon. Gentleman is so concerned with proper and constructive co-operation, what will he do to ensure that social services have adequate, identifiable funds to care for those who should not be in NHS beds, and who are thus contributing to the waiting lists which he says he is so concerned to bring down?

Mr. Dobson: The fact is that, as a result of the initiatives we took and the extra money that we found, there was greater co-operation last winter between the health service and local social services than at any other time in the past. In the right hon. Lady's own area, as a result of the money that we found, more than 450 extra residential places were provided to get people out of hospital, and more than 400 care packages, as they are called, were provided for people in their homes. That is what happens when people work together. It did not work everywhere, but it did work in the right hon. Lady's area—although she did nothing towards it and has not praised the people who delivered it.

Miss Widdecombe: The right hon. Gentleman ought to talk to people in my area. This was a matter of considerable concern to them, and I made representations about it to the trust involved—so he is wrong to say that I took no action, and I hope that he will now apologise for saying it.

I speak not just on behalf of my own area; I have asked the right hon. Gentleman once again a specific question that he will not answer. Can he guarantee that social services—not just last winter, next winter or the winter after that—will have as a matter of course enough identifiable funding to care for people who need not be in NHS beds but who are in them in my area at the moment?

Mr. Dobson: The right hon. Lady should know that there was so much successful co-operation between social services and the national health service precisely because I had supplied the funds to the NHS locally; the NHS, in turn, made it a condition of local social services getting the money that they spent it on what we wanted it spent on—in contrast to the traditional Tory system, which was to give local authorities money with no guarantee that it would be spent on the services for which it was intended. That is what we put in place last year. I have freely admitted to our budging our way through the chaos that we inherited. We intend to have in place an altogether better system for the coming winter and future winters—but we will take no lessons from the Tories.

Schools (Health Programme)

11. **Mrs. Helen Brinton** (Peterborough): What action he is taking to promote the Government programme of health in schools. [42186]

The Minister for Public Health (Ms Tessa Jowell): The Minister for School Standards and I launched the cross-Government healthy schools initiative on 14 May 1998. We are providing £2 million in this financial year—£1 million from health and £1 million from education.

The aim of the healthy schools initiative is to recognise the vital role played by schools in improving the health of pupils and teachers alike. A key element in achieving that objective will be fostering joint working between health and education authorities. Accordingly, I can announce today the setting up of eight health education partnerships which will each receive £150,000 from the initiative. They are in Cornwall, Doncaster, Durham, Hounslow, Manchester, Norfolk, North Staffordshire and West Sussex.

These pilots reflect a range of existing practice. They also reflect a range of areas. The lessons learned will be used to inform the development of a national healthy school award. It is our intention that every school should become a healthy school. Deprivation exists in both rural and urban areas, and is the prime cause of inequality in the health of our children. [Hon. Members: "Come on!"] Opposition Members—

Madam Speaker: Order. Questions and answers have been inordinately long today. I am very disappointed that we are only at question 11; we should be at question 17. I hope that Back Benchers and Front Benchers will put their questions speedily and that Ministers will reply

speedily. There is a great deal of frustration on the Back Benches, and it is most unfair on Back Benchers whose questions are not called.

Ms Jowell: The programme will be a major step in tackling inequality in childhood.

Mrs. Brinton: I look forward to schools in my constituency taking part in the initiative that my hon. Friend described. Can she give me more details about how schools are to be healthy not only for children but for caretakers, dinner ladies, ancillary staff and teachers? Do we not want whole healthy schools? Will she show us how the Government will get stuck in, unlike the Opposition?

Ms Jowell: As I made clear, the initiative is an essential step in tackling health inequality in childhood, which so often affects children's ability to learn. However, healthy children also need to be taught by healthy teachers—and other members of the school staff. Investment in school staff is the best way of driving up children's educational achievement.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher and Walton): Given that the Minister said that she was to issue a pamphlet stating that life begins at 40, what message does that give to schools about health? Does she propose to use modern technology in the initiative? Is she co-operating with the information technology industry, which offers excellent facilities such as video conferencing and other means of bringing health education into schools?

Ms Jowell: The answer is yes. Later this year we shall announce a new website to allow schools and children to access information about health.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): Will the programme deal with pollution from industry as it affects children in schools? In my constituency, Sarp UK Ltd. caused acid clouds to escape over the Killimarsh junior school on 14 and 20 May. The school was not occupied at the time, but that could have been disastrous, as teachers and children could have been trapped in the school. We must deal with the question whether schools or the processors that create the problem should be moved.

Ms Jowell: As part of the healthy schools initiative, we recognise that local circumstances such as those in the case cited by my hon. Friend should be taken into account. That is another illustration of my contention that we will drive up health standards only by co-operation across Government and between local education authorities and local authorities.

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): Will the new health education partnerships consider the issue of healthy school diets? Does the Minister accept that additives in food are often a factor in disruptive behaviour? Will she take the matter seriously?

Ms Jowell: Schools will certainly be encouraged to attend to healthy eating and diet.

Regional Inequalities

13. **Mr. Roger Casale** (Wimbledon): What research he has commissioned into health inequalities by region. [42189]

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Frank Dobson): The Department of Health has already published the results of an analysis of regional inequalities in health. On coming to office, we established the independent inquiry into inequalities in health, which should report by this autumn, and I recently announced a £1.7 million research programme into health inequalities.

Mr. Casale: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth health authority, which serves my constituents, is currently engaged in difficult negotiations with the South Thames NHS executive to secure a bridging loan to help it make ends meet and balance the budget by 2001? Is it not time to put an end to the need for such transitional finance by changing the national capitation formula so that it more truly reflects the real health needs of Londoners?

Mr. Dobson: We are reviewing the allocation of funds to health authorities, and I hope that, following the outcome of the comprehensive spending review, there will be more funds to allocate in the first place. We are determined not simply to research but to reduce health inequalities. That is why we have established health action zones; why we are getting people back to work; why we are introducing a national minimum wage; and why we are investing the takings from the sale of council houses in order to provide better homes for people who have nowhere decent to live. Those measures will improve the health of the worst off in this country.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. Time is up.

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone and The Weald): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. This is a direct point of order for you. You will be aware that during Question Time it is not possible for hon. Members to respond if other hon. Members make personal statements about them. The statements by the hon. Members for Preston (Audrey Wise) and for Milton Keynes, South-West (Dr. Starkey) were inaccurate. I do not seek to rehearse that point with you, but I seek to rehearse whether it is within the conventions of the House that hon. Members should have statements made against them when it is not possible for them to respond.

Madam Speaker: We have many great privileges in the House and I have always said that we should exercise those privileges with great responsibility, and heed the wise words of "Erskine May" in the language that we use across the Chamber. Let us discuss policies in the House, not personalities.

Audrey Wise (Preston): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: I cannot take a further point of order. I have dealt with the matter.

Cities (Process and Criteria for Designation)

3.31 pm

Jane Griffiths (Reading, East): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to establish a process and criteria for places to be designated as cities; and for connected purposes.

I thank the House for giving me this opportunity. The granting of city status to a town is a rare mark of honour, which is bestowed by the sovereign, and has not been granted often. This century, city status has been granted to Cambridge, Lancaster, Plymouth, Salford, Derby, Leicester, Portsmouth, Southampton, Swansea, Stoke-on-Trent and Sunderland. Other towns, including Wolverhampton, Croydon, Northampton and Stockport, have expressed interest.

The importance of city status derives at least partly from the fact that it is granted by the monarch. However, there are many misconceptions about what is required in order for a town to become a city. Many people believe that a city must have a cathedral. Not so. Many believe that a city must have a university. Not so; with the proliferation of universities in recent years, that is a less meaningful criterion. For example, Winchester is a city and believes that it was ideally suited for the granting of such status in view of its long history. I suggest that all towns and places have long histories. I suggest also that the concept of a city is deep-rooted both in our collective psyche and in our understanding of democracy in the truest sense of the word.

The city state originated in ancient Greece. In modern Greece, the word "polis"—for city—is officially accorded to significant municipalities. Almost every country has a clear process and criteria for identifying a city.

In China, centuries of bureaucracy and civil service practice have arrived at highly detailed and inflexible criteria, including, for example, that the non-agricultural population of the town must exceed 120,000, of whom no fewer than 80,000 must be engaged in non-agricultural industries. By contrast, in the United States the situation is different in each state, and a state may label an area a city regardless of population size. Thus, Spring City, Tennessee, with an approximate population of 2,000, and New York, with an approximate population of 8 million, are legally cities.

I was especially impressed by how matters are conducted in Peru, where detailed criteria include population growth and the existence of educational institutions and hospitals. In Japan, rather differently, a city must have a population of 50,000 or more, and its inhabitants must be engaged in commercial or industrial pursuits. Thus, Tokyo contains several cities.

Many other countries have also considered the matter publicly, and have established criteria and processes for a town to become a city—I am indebted to their embassies for the information that they have supplied.

All that is educational, and should give us pause for thought. The Government are committed to openness and clarity of decision making, and to inclusiveness and a sense of pride in, and belonging to, our communities, but the process by which a place may be designated a city remains shrouded in mystery.

City status confers a tremendous sense of pride on a community and is attractive to business and to investment, but it should not be conferred willy-nilly. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary would determine clear criteria and a transparent process by which a town would become a city. I shall not prejudge what those criteria and that process should be, but I shall suggest what some of the criteria might be: a place to which people travel to work, to shop, to be educated and to receive medical treatment and which is rich in history and culture—in short, a place very much like Reading, which I have the honour to represent.

Reading was settled in Saxon times because it was on the confluence of two great rivers, the Thames and the Kennet. The railways and then the roads came. More people commute into Reading than out of it, despite its closeness to London, and it is surpassed only by London and by Birmingham as a place where major companies locate their headquarters. Reading has a great university and a great abbey, where Parliament sat in former times when this place was plague-ridden or otherwise unattractive. King Henry I is buried in Reading. Next to Reading abbey is Reading gaol, which was made famous in verse by one of its most famous, but least willing, inhabitants, the great genius, Oscar Wilde. Musical notation was invented and photography pioneered in Reading, and I should mention the Reading rock and Womad festivals.

To become a city, a town should attract people, investment and institutions on economic, cultural and geographical grounds. If those criteria were known to all and if a clear process were established by which any place could apply to the Government to be judged against the criteria, with a recommendation made to Her Majesty accordingly, we as a nation could approach the new millennium with a sense of pride in, and belonging to, the places in which we live.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Jane Griffiths, Ms Jenny Jones, Mr. Peter Bradley, Mr. Michael Wills and Mr. Martin Salter.

CITIES (PROCESS AND CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATION)

Jane Griffiths accordingly presented a Bill to establish a process and criteria for places to be designated as cities; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 3 July, and to be printed [Bill 194].

Opposition Day

[12TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Electoral System

Madam Speaker: Before we commence the main business, I must tell the House that I shall limit speeches to 10 minutes between 7 pm and 9 pm. I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

3.39 pm

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): I beg to move,

That this House affirms the strength and fairness of Britain's current electoral system; recognises that it meets the criteria laid down for the Independent Commission on the Voting System better than any alternative; believes that the current terms of reference of the Commission prevent a fair and balanced assessment being made; urges the Government to change the remit of the Commission to allow it to examine equally all systems of voting; and believes that, in these circumstances, the Commission would recommend the status quo.

We have chosen to debate Britain's electoral system because we believe that it is being deliberately and systematically attacked and undermined. What makes this debate all the more urgent is the fact that this demolition is happening right now, under the guise of an independent review, which will report in the autumn. We face a process that is clearly aimed at changing the present system not on the balance of any argument that it is right to do so, but because wider political motives are motivating such change. It is a cynical attempt to play politics with people's votes dressed up as an intellectual and even-handed exercise, which it simply is not.

The so-called independent commission on voting systems, under the leadership of that well-known advocate of electoral reform, the noble Lord Jenkins of Hillhead, was established at the end of last year by the Government. Its members were selected by the Government, not in consultation with other political parties but, in most cases at least, according to each individual's known interest in and support for electoral reform. Its remit is not to examine all possible electoral systems and to evaluate them on the basis of what will be best for this country, but coldly and openly to find an alternative to the present system. Its intent is to create an electoral environment that will permanently favour one brand of politics over another.

Far from being independent, the whole exercise is pointing firmly in one direction—away from the first-past-the-post system, which has served this country so well and for so long.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Does the right hon. Gentleman recall that, in last year's election, 20 per cent. of the population of Wales voted Conservative, yet not one of the 40 Welsh Members of Parliament is a Conservative? Is that a system that is strong and fair?

Mr. Ancram: If the hon. Gentleman waits to hear the rest of my speech, he will discover why I believe that the present system is strong and fair. His point is often put to us, but I do not believe that our consideration of the way in which we elect this House of Commons should be governed by political expediency. It is very easy to say that proportional representation would help the Conservatives in Wales and Scotland, but we are talking not about parties' votes or politicians' votes, but about people's votes. That is why we must examine closely the work of the Jenkins commission.

Mr. Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield): The right hon. Gentleman said that people's votes are more important than politicians' votes. Is he in favour of a referendum?

Mr. Ancram: I shall also ask the hon. Gentleman to listen to my speech. If he reads our motion, he will see that we are asking for changes to be made in the remit of the Jenkins commission, which, as we understand it, will be followed by a referendum.

Despite the protestations that the outcome of this exercise will be put to the people in a referendum alongside the current system—that is reflected in the Government's amendment—the whole dynamic and momentum of the Jenkins commission is clearly designed to persuade people that, in this era of constitutional reform, it is smart to change the way in which we vote and stuffy to resist it. That is a dangerous and cynical argument. It is playing politics with the very foundations of our democratic system, and the way in which people elect their representatives and their Governments. More dangerously, it threatens to play party politics with this central constitutional issue, which, ahead of all others, should be above party politics.

Mr. Dale Campbell-Savours (Workington): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ancram: I shall give way once more, and then I want to make some progress.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: The right hon. Gentleman has been slinging a few insults across the Dispatch Box. He will know that a number of Conservative Members of Parliament belong to organisations that are in favour of electoral reform, including direct proportional representation. Does he cast the same aspersions on them? Is he challenging their integrity on these questions?

Mr. Ancram: It is obvious that the hon. Gentleman has not been listening to what I have been saying, and has not read the motion. I am arguing not that one system alone should be considered, but that the Jenkins commission should consider all potential systems, including first past the post.

I pay tribute to the courageous article by the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) which was published in yesterday's edition of *The Times*. In that article, the hon. Gentleman advanced a cogent argument for retaining the current system. He is, I suspect, by no means alone in the Labour party in holding that view. Indeed, looking at the few Labour Front Benchers who are present for today's important debate, I suspect that he might even find tacit support for his opinions there—although we may not hear it enunciated today.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his excellent article which appeared in a Sunday newspaper about 10 days ago. May I request that

Conservative Members never again be asked to vote, on a three-line Whip, for a list system? That has happened several times in the past few months, and is clearly contrary not only to the Opposition motion, but to my right hon. Friend's extremely good newspaper article.

Mr. Ancram: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his comments. As I am sure he realises, we had argued firmly for a first-past-the-post system in the context of those elections; only when we failed to achieve that did we try to mitigate the results of what we considered a very bad alternative by arguing for an open list.

My central thesis is that it is time to open the windows on what is actually happening—to get away from the soundbites and slogans that we heard this morning, and to begin a genuine public debate on what is in the best interests of our democratic system and the rights of people within it. Our motion sets out our confidence in the current system of electing this House of Commons. We believe it to be both strong and fair, in ways that I shall outline shortly. It is because of our confidence in that system that our motion does not seek to bring down the Jenkins commission. In any event, we are realistic enough to know that, were we to try to do so, given the Government's current majority we would be unlikely to succeed.

What we are doing is challenging the Government to broaden the commission's remit to allow it to evaluate the first-past-the-post system alongside the others. We believe that, were it to do so honestly and strictly in terms of the criteria given to it by the Government, it would be bound ultimately to recommend no change. We have the confidence to issue that challenge to the Government today. We want to know whether they will have the integrity to accept it, and we shall find that out later this afternoon.

Let me make it clear that Conservative Members do not blindly oppose constitutional change. We do, however, oppose it when the case for it has not been made—when it is for short-term party advantage, or simply change for change's sake. Tried and tested arrangements should be discarded only when they have clearly failed. Moreover, any reform should have the national interest, rather than partisan interests, at heart, and should proceed on the basis of the broadest possible political consensus.

I have to say that the Jenkins commission is the antithesis of consensus. It stems from the Government's decision—agreed as part of their cosying up with the Liberal Democrats—to proceed unilaterally on electoral reform. Conservative Members were not approached about it; the commission was packed, its remit was rigged, and the British voting system is now in danger of being dragged into the party political arena.

We seek today to introduce some balance, some fairness and some independence into the exercise before it is too late. The present picture is of a commission the outcome of whose deliberations is a foregone conclusion. That outcome will be a voting system designed to produce perpetual coalitions, and tailor-made to allow the core message of the popular vote to be ignored and an enduring political hegemony to be achieved. The fact that such an hegemony is openly envisaged as left of centre makes it even less palatable to Conservative Members.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Jack Straw): Did the right Gentleman say Gramsci?

Mr. Ancram: I have been reading something very different, as the Home Secretary will discover.

Before the general election, the Labour campaign news letter stated:

"So what are the realpolitik reasons for electoral reform?"

The answer was:

"We can abolish right wing Tory Governments forever."

The Minister nods, but that is hardly the language of consensus or of reaching across parties. It is the language of raw political ambition, and its echoes permeate the Jenkins commission.

If our electoral system needs to be reviewed—and I have yet to hear a rational rather than a political case for doing so—the basis of the review should be even-handed and should have no predetermined outcome. On an even playing field, the case for the present system would prevail, even using the carefully selected criteria that were given to the Jenkins commission.

Our argument is simple. It is, first, that the current system of first past the post produces clear results which, by and large, reflect the most favoured choice of the electorate. To borrow a phrase, election day is, in a very real way, judgment day. Only on the rarest occasions, such as we almost reached in February 1974, are we left with a result that depends on the machinations of politicians behind closed doors rather than on the electorate.

The opposite would be the case under any proportional system. That is great for politicians, but bad for voters. At the moment, the voters know whom to blame and how to get rid of them. Last year, we discovered the truth of that in spades. Although we may not have enjoyed that experience, we accept that that is what accountable democracy should be about. Under any so-called proportionate system, that ability of the electorate would be seriously, if not fatally, undermined.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): In that context, or later in his speech, will my right hon. Friend draw attention to the New Zealand experience? The people of New Zealand were conned into changing their electoral system and they have bitterly regretted it, not least because the outcome of the first election under the new system was the opposite of what they expected, and was the result of back-room deals between political parties.

Mr. Ancram: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for making that important point. I shall address it later, because it flags up the inherent dangers of the Government's proposals in the context of the Jenkins commission.

The second part of our argument is that, under the terms of reference for the Jenkins commission as a whole, first past the post still wins. It is worth repeating those terms of reference. They are the requirement for broad proportionality; the need for stable government; an extension of voter choice; and a link between MPs and geographical constituencies. Those who gave the commission those criteria may have thought that they were first-past-the-post-proof and that the argument had been won before it had begun. They were wrong. In our submission to the Jenkins commission last month, we argued that the British voting system beat the alternatives,

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

3.31 pm

The Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. John Prescott): With permission, Madam Speaker, I wish to make a statement on the channel tunnel rail link. Mindful of your recent request, I shall keep my remarks as short as is possible for such a complicated subject of such importance to the House. To assist hon. Members, I will make arrangements for a memorandum to be placed in the Library.

In March 1996, the development agreement to build the channel tunnel rail link was awarded to London and Continental Railways, known as LCR. LCR also took control of the Eurostar service. Its plan was to commence construction in late 1997. The agreement provided for a taxpayer contribution worth £1.8 billion.

When I had the chance to examine the details of the deal put in place by the previous Government, I was appalled. They took the cheapest bid based on over-optimistic forecasts of Eurostar revenue, without even commissioning their own independent forecasts—a failing we have now put right.

The Government were seriously exposed because of the small financial commitment made by the private sector. Furthermore, as a consequence of the previous Government's intention to conceal public subsidy of the channel tunnel financing, Eurostar was hampered by the requirement to pay Eurotunnel for train paths that it was not using. Even this week I was asked to find £100 million to pay for specially designed sleeper trains which do not work, have never been used, and are now lying idle in a field.

The kindest thing that I can say about this whole agreement is that it was flawed from the start. In January of this year, it almost collapsed; the company could not fulfil its contract. At that point, I was faced with a clear choice. I could have abandoned the present contract with LCR and invited new tenders—but that would have meant two years or more of delay, with all the blight and uncertainty that that would have caused. The equivalent of two thirds of the grant would have been spent on Eurostar's debts and continuing losses, with nothing to show for it. Eurostar is losing £150 million a year. If we multiply that by four or five years compensation, it is clear that I would have had to pay an amount almost equivalent to the grant for the project, but would have got nothing in return. Alternatively, I could ask the company to reconsider the financing of the project and come forward with proposals to meet all its original obligations. That was the path I chose.

I explained that LCR had requested an additional £1.2 billion of taxpayers' money, on top of the £1.8 billion already committed. That was unacceptable. I gave LCR one month to come up with new proposals, and subsequently extended that period ultimately to this week. At the end of March, LCR made an improved proposal, but still failed to meet the Government's requirements.

I am aware of the importance that hon. Members on both sides of the House attach to this project, which was approved by the House. I have always believed that Britain should have a high-speed passenger and freight link to Europe that is the equal of those on the other side of the channel. This an important project, comparable to any that the Government are promoting. It is a key part of our integrated transport policy, and a national asset that will bring benefits not just to the south-east, but to all parts of Britain.

All parties supported the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Act 1996, which was unopposed on its Second and Third Readings. The project offers immense economic, transport, and environmental benefits, and improved speed, reliability and capacity for international and domestic services for passengers and freight. It will also play a major part in regenerating north Kent and the east Thames corridor, including Stratford and King's Cross. The Government want to see this project proceed, but, as I have made clear, not at any price.

My firm view was that LCR could carry on only if it were able to deliver the whole project from the tunnel to St. Pancras according to the contract. I made it clear that the Government also required a further reduction in the proposed additional cost to the taxpayer; a robust financing plan based on realistic forecasts for Eurostar; a balance of incentives that would ensure construction of the whole rail link; and increased risk transfer to the private sector.

For the past four months we have been involved in intensive negotiations, and I can inform the House of their outcome. The call on public finances represents good value for the taxpayer. There is a robust financing plan, which is based on a proper assessment of future Eurostar revenue. Incentives to complete the whole link are in place, and the private sector will take a greater share of risk. In short, there will be a high-speed channel tunnel rail link.

Today, I signed with LCR and Railtrack a statement of principles which meets all our requirements and which fulfils the contract agreed by the previous Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young), who I see is in his place. Under this public-private partnership, LCR has been strengthened. A new management team is in place, and LCR has agreed to raise more equity to support the project. Railtrack has agreed to take a key role in building the link. It will manage construction for the railway to north Kent, and will commit to purchase it upon completion. Railtrack will have an option to build and buy the remainder of the link.

LCR has secured a strong partner to operate Eurostar. Two very strong bids were considered—one from Virgin, the other from a consortium comprising British Airways, National Express and the national railways of France and Belgium. LCR today agreed to award the contract to the consortium. LCR has an obligation to build the entire 68 miles of railway from the channel tunnel to St. Pancras in London, via Ebbsfleet and Stratford, in accordance with the 1996 Act endorsed by the House.

The link will be built to the same route, the same specification and the same high standards as before. There will be the same environmental and heritage safeguards, and the undertakings and assurances given during the passage of the 1996 Act remain.

Construction will begin towards the end of this year. The stretch from the channel tunnel to the turn-off in Kent to Waterloo is due to be completed by 2003, and services from Waterloo will then benefit from the new high-speed line. Construction beyond that point is expected to commence in 2001, with the line through Ebbsfleet and Stratford to St. Pancras finished by 2007. That will

include the proposed new Thameslink station at St. Pancras. The Eurostar consortium will operate trains from Waterloo to Paris and Brussels, and, in due course, services from St. Pancras. There will be no change of route under this agreement; it will be exactly as in the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Act.

I realise that many hon. Members want an early start to regional services. I can assure the House that LCR remains under an obligation to provide the infrastructure for regional Eurostar services. The trains for those services are currently lying idle. I have therefore asked the consortium to review urgently the feasibility of such services, and to put proposals to me before the end of the year. I shall inform the House of the outcome of that review in due course.

I know that the consortium has a vision of Heathrow as a gateway to Europe for services from across the country. The consortium proposes to establish, from as early as 2001, a service from Heathrow airport to Paris. Heathrow is the world's busiest international airport. It is already one of Britain's biggest bus stations; it is connected to the largest underground network in the world; and the Heathrow Express provides the fastest connection from any airport to a central urban area. That new service should, in time, establish Heathrow airport as an integrated transport interchange of international importance, connecting long-haul air services directly to the European high-speed rail network. It will be beneficial to the growth in passengers using the high-speed train.

I have always made it clear that the Government required a significant degree of risk transfer to the private sector, and this deal achieves that. If construction costs overrun, Railtrack will carry the full cost. If Eurostar revenues are less than forecast, Railtrack and the consortium will share the burden along with the Government. I have made it clear that there must be a strong incentive to complete the whole link from the tunnel to St. Pancras, and this deal achieves that. The Act requires the whole link to be built; the contract obliges LCR to build the entire link.

I have always made it clear that the Government required a fair deal for the taxpayer, consistent with the Government's existing obligations under the contract, and this deal most certainly achieves that. The basic grant remains at £1.8 billion. There will be no requirement for additional Government support before 2010. Moreover, following intensive negotiations, the extent of the Government's additional contribution will not be the £1.2 billion requested in January, nor the £700 million about which hon. Members may have read in the press this week. It will be £140 million. After 2020, our share in the benefits will probably more than compensate for the extra money that we are asked to provide in 2010.

All the parties have contributed to that improvement: LCR, Railtrack, the consortium and the Government. Recognising the unique features of the project and our commitment to strengthen international rail transport links, we have agreed that the Government's credit will stand behind £3.7 billion of bonds issued by LCR privately in the City to fund the project. [HON. MEMBERS: "Who will pay?"] Hang on. That debt will be repaid out of the proceeds of the sale of the completed link. The risk of the Government incurring liability under the guarantees is therefore remote. The Government will support the financing package, which will allow this project to proceed now and at the minimum financing cost. It is a unique financing deal, and I should like to express my appreciation to the Chancellor and the Treasury for having arrived at that agreement. The alternative would have been considerable delay and increased costs.

The Government do not intend to offer taxpayers' support without asking for something in return—unlike the previous Administration.

Mr. Alan Clark (Kensington and Chelsea): Free tickets?

Mr. Prescott: If the right hon. Member would listen to what was being said, he would not be so contemptuous of the rewards that we have gained for the taxpayer.

The Government believe that, in a real public-private partnership, not only costs but benefits are shared. The Government are sharing the risk, so it is only right that the taxpayer should share the benefits. I have therefore agreed with the parties that the Government will take a public stakeholder share in LCR, yielding a 35 per cent. share of the company's pre-tax surplus after 2020. The Government will also have a 5 per cent. stake in the Eurostar management company. That will be a public-private partnership with strong public accountability. Moreover, if LCR decides to sell the business—it cannot do so without the Government's agreement, as we shall hold a golden share in the company—the taxpayer will share at least 35 per cent. of the proceeds.

As I said earlier, those extra benefits should not simply balance the additional £140 million of public subsidy. This deal should provide that, taken over the long term, LCR pays a premium to the Government. Under the original plan, the concession for that agreement was 999 years. Eurostar was privatised for ever. The parties have now agreed to reduce the concession to 90 years. In 2086, the railway and the Eurostar service will revert to public ownership, along with the channel tunnel. I look forward to appearing before the House on that occasion to announce the event—my zimmer frame will be outside.

There is one more point. I have negotiated a share for the Government in any savings in the construction cost. I have also negotiated a mechanism to prevent any of the parties involved from enjoying excessive windfall gains at the taxpayer's expense. In that way we aim to avoid any repeat of the fiascos that have marked railway privatisation, not least the sale of the rolling stock companies.

There is still much work to be done. Regulatory bodies must be satisfied, and there will be many more months of detailed negotiation.

This is an agreement snatched from the ashes of the LCR's collapse. The channel tunnel rail link will be built all the way to St. Pancras. Construction will begin this year and we shall join the fast track to Europe. This deal is good for integrated transport, good for the environment and good for the taxpayer, and it is good enough for me to commend to the House.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard (South-West Norfolk): I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his statement and for making it, and additional information, available to me in advance. The copy of the statement which I received bears only a limited resemblance to the one he made, but one should be grateful for small mercies.

[Mrs. Gillian Shephard]

I must begin with this complaint: the right hon. Gentleman has mentioned advance press coverage of this statement and, even for his Government, the amount of detailed press briefing has been disgraceful. Last night, some 14 hours before the House was even told that there would be a statement, the BBC was in possession of detailed facts, as were today's newspapers and sound media. I have written to you, Madam Speaker, on the matter, and it is a cause for sadness that the Deputy Prime Minister should treat the House with such contempt.

The right hon. Gentleman began his statement with fighting words. One can only assume from the late arrival of the text that he was engaged in last-ditch battles with the Treasury and spin doctors at No. 10. Indeed, he has almost admitted as much. Eventually he got round to admitting that the project is important for the country, that there is all-party support for the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Act 1996, and that the link offers immense benefits to the whole nation.

The right hon. Gentleman has described the scheme as a public-private sector partnership. Last January, when the Secretary of State made his previous statement to the House on this matter, the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner)—who is, as always, in his place—claimed that this was the first taste of nationalisation. Leaving that aside, will the Secretary of State tell the House whether the Government guarantee should and will be classified by the Treasury as public expenditure, and if not, why not?

Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that the Government are supporting the scheme to the tune not of £140 million, £700 million or £1.2 billion, but £5.64 billion? Would he call that nationalisation by the back door? If it is, will it be a comfort for the hon. Member for Bolsover? Does the £140 million which the Secretary of State mentioned refer to phase 1 or phase 2?

What will be the contractual obligation for London and Continental Railways if Railtrack does not wish to go ahead, and under what circumstances might that occur? What will happen if the costs overrun the estimates that the right hon. Gentleman has given the House today? On what basis have the passenger projections been calculated? As this matter will interest the taxpayer, will the right hon. Gentleman undertake to make public the outcome of the independent review that his Department has commissioned?

The right hon. Gentleman has described the two phases of the scheme. When is the Ebbsfleet station to be built, and what will be the arrangements for passengers and trains before it is built? Phase 2 of the project will not only regenerate east London but make the huge benefits of the channel tunnel rail link available to the rest of the country. What guarantees can the right hon. Gentleman give the House that phase 2 will be completed, and can he give us a timetable?

How much of Eurostar UK's new management company will be controlled by the state-owned French and Belgian railways, and what control do they already have in the Eurostar trilateral partnership?

It is welcome news that the Thameslink 2000 proposals for the St. Pancras station will go ahead as planned. Can the right hon. Gentleman tell the House when?

The right hon. Gentleman began his statement with fighting words. Conservative Members note with interest that, in order to make progress, the right hon. Gentleman is calling on the expertise and success of private industries such as Railtrack, National Express and British Airways. Does he agree that life sometimes has its ironies?

Mr. Prescott: I welcome the right hon. Member for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard) to her new job. I tried to assist her by providing technical advice, which I hoped would be helpful. Her tone was extremely churlish, to say the least. Many of the questions that she asked showed that she had not read the statement: it contains a number of the answers.

There were some last-minute negotiations about the final details of the percentage. I pushed right up to the last minute to ensure that the taxpayer had the best deal. If the previous Government had had that attitude, we would not have had to raise this kind of money to achieve a deal. Does the right hon. Lady not realise that the private enterprise company that was talked of by the Secretary of State for Transport in the Conservative Administration collapsed and asked for a further £1.2 billion on top of the £1.8 billion given by the previous Government, without any guarantees and with no comeback for the taxpayer? She should have begun her contribution with an apology to the House before she spoke such drivel about the statement.

I was not involved in any leaks to newspapers. I am always concerned to ensure that information is provided to the House first. It gave me great pleasure to note that the leaks to the press and to the radio this morning were wrong. The figure of £700 million additional public contribution was incorrect: it is £140 million. That information was in the statement, and if the right hon. Lady had read it she would have known that. The leaks certainly did not come from us. The House should be delighted that, wherever they came from, they were wrong. People were wrong to follow the *Financial Times*. It is always difficult, because various parties are involved in such negotiations and it is inevitable that they will talk to the press.

I assure the House that I said absolutely nothing to the press about this matter. I strongly believe that I should always report to the House first. After the collapse of the agreement, I even made a statement to the House at 10 o'clock at night to ensure that hon. Members did not read about it in the morning papers first. If I look offended, it is because I am a little offended. I played the issue absolutely right. I hope that the right hon. Lady and I can have a better relationship on these matters in future.

The right hon. Lady asked about guarantees. Any moneys that are guaranteed under Government-guaranteed bonds—although they are in the name of LCR—must be assessed by the independent Office for National Statistics. It has agreed with the Treasury that, because the risk is very low, the bonds do not count as a public expenditure liability. That practice is followed by all Governments. I am surprised that there is some doubt about that. The only qualification that has changed over the years is that now the European Statistical Office must endorse that judgment. Governments have always used that practice to judge whether such moneys are part of the public sector borrowing requirement.

In respect of incentives and whether we should complete the link, major incentives have been given for the part between Ebbsfleet and Stratford. Most of the grant has been retained for that, and hon. Members should

look at the memorandum to see precisely what proportion is involved. The previous Administration made the requirement that Government money would come in only after two thirds had been expended by the private sector. The trouble with that was that they could not even raise 10 per cent. of the money, never mind two thirds of it.

In this case, we have reserved the same principle: at each stage, the Government will still require that two thirds has been spent before the additional third comes in from our side. It is a guarantee that construction will take place. We have made sure that the second part, through Stratford into King's Cross, is heavily loaded in the grants with a huge incentive to complete the deal. We have every reason to believe that we have geared and balanced the risks and the rewards, and have made sure of the completion of the deal as the House agreed.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): I thank the Deputy Prime Minister for the reassurance about the second link, although, not unreasonably, I want to study his complicated statement. What hope can he hold out to people with blighted properties, and especially to people in the second stage who are losing their small and medium-sized businesses through the inaction of the old company in response to their reasonable request to purchase their properties and facilitate transfer to new locations?

Mr. Prescott: This is a matter of great concern. My hon. Friend has expressed it from time to time, both in the House and to me. We have inherited the obligations that were entered into in the original agreement. What is most helpful to those people is the certainty of the date—we will start this year. If we had re-advertised and gone out to competitive tender, a wait of two or three years would have added to all the concerns of blight. We have an agreement that means that we can start immediately, which is reassuring, and we have confirmed the completion of the route from Folkestone and Dover up to St. Pancras. That is the commitment we have entered into, and we have arranged the finances to achieve it.

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro and St. Austell): There is no doubt that the Deputy Prime Minister has had an extremely difficult job in sorting out an appalling mess left by the previous Government. I congratulate him on many aspects of this complex and clever agreement, albeit that it could leave larger liabilities on the public sector. I hope, with him, that that will not occur.

However, the agreement has not secured a guarantee of the completion of phase 2. It is hard to understand why—perhaps the Deputy Prime Minister will explain—given the incentives to which he referred and the assurance he felt able to give the House that phase 2 would be built. Did any of the consortiums at any stage offer such a guarantee and did he seek to obtain one? Given the long gap between the completion of phases 1 and 2, what will happen on the commuter lines into Waterloo, which already operate at capacity, and into other London stations? Will Eurostar not operate during rush-hour periods, or will commuter services have to be cut to accommodate the Eurostar service?

Mr. Prescott: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his remarks. The negotiations have, indeed, been complex, and I offer my congratulations to all those on the private side, in the public sector and in the Government who have been involved: difficult situations have arisen, and they have done well. All of us can be satisfied with the result, and I am therefore pleased to accept the hon. Gentleman's congratulations on behalf of everyone involved in the detailed negotiations.

Train services will be no different from those under the original agreement.

Mr. Taylor: And that collapsed.

Mr. Prescott: There is a problem, but it is not changed by this agreement. Inevitably, we must start at one end and proceed to the conclusion, St. Pancras in this case. As different sections are built, we shall begin to use the track, which will relieve some of the pressure. For example, going for the route near Ebbsfleet will mean that we provide more space, but that is not the most congested area—as the hon. Gentleman said, that is the Waterloo area.

The only concern over any differences must be that construction may not be completed. That was the hon. Gentleman's first point.

We have a contract with LCR, under which it will complete the work. Railtrack is building the section up to near Ebbsfleet. One of the problems is that, as a private company, Railtrack has certain obligations. The fact that its access charges will probably have to be reassessed twice by the regulator, if matters remain as they are now, causes great uncertainty. If Railtrack were publicly owned, we would not have those difficulties, but I have to live with companies as they are. Certain commercial problems have been created, especially for companies with share prices and equity, which must take such obligations into account.

What we have done is ensure that two thirds of the amount necessary to complete the work is available in Government funds and grants. That is a considerable incentive for any company, and I believe that, under the contractual obligation agreed with LCR, it will complete the work.

Mr. Chris Pond (Gravesham): I welcome the Deputy Prime Minister's statement, and congratulate him and his team on their difficult negotiations.

The Ebbsfleet development, which is in my constituency, is essential to the economic regeneration of north Kent. The statement has lifted the uncertainty, and that means that we can get on with not just the development of Ebbsfleet, but the economic regeneration that is so important in other areas.

The uncertainty that the collapse of the original LCR proposal caused so many people has now been removed. Many of our constituents were very anxious about the likely outcome, and there was also much anger about the fact that the last Government had provided the consortium with such a generous wodge of public money—some £6 billion in cash and other resources. As someone said at the time, it was a case of, "Buy the train set and we will throw in the toyshop as well." However, everything collapsed because of unrealistic assumptions about Eurostar traffic. My constituents, and many others—

Madam Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman, but a great many Members want to ask

[Madam Speaker]

questions. We must have direct questions to the Deputy Prime Minister, rather than long statements. I understand how welcome the news is in some parts of the country, but the hon. Gentleman must now ask a direct question. I want to call as many hon. Members as possible.

Mr. Pond: I apologise, Madam Speaker. I will now ask a direct question.

Will the Deputy Prime Minister give us a clear assurance that the second stage will also proceed as quickly as possible? That, too, is important, not only for the regeneration of east London, but to ensure that the whole project in north Kent is effective in terms of economic regeneration.

Mr. Prescott: Yes, I can give that assurance. As I said in my statement, the second stage will start in 2001.

Sir Brian Mawhinney (North-West Cambridgeshire): We shall want to read the right hon. Gentleman's statement, but I compliment him on finding a solution to a complex and difficult problem. I am one of the few Members who know how difficult were the issues that he had to address.

As the Secretary of State who insisted that Stratford should be part of the line because of the regenerative benefit that would be experienced by the east end of London, may I also compliment the right hon. Gentleman on ensuring that the whole line will be completed? I hope that he will forgive me, however, if I take with a pinch of salt his comment that he was appalled that the last Government had accepted the lowest tender at the time. I can imagine what he would have said if we had not done so.

Can the right hon. Gentleman give us some estimate of when the policy that he has again confirmed this afternoon will come into effect? There are to be non-stop services from Peterborough down the east coast to Paris and Brussels, and from Milton Keynes down the west coast to the same destinations. Can the right hon. Gentleman give us any idea when those services are likely to start?

Mr. Prescott: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his kind remarks. I understand why he should say that he took what I said about the lowest tender with a pinch of salt, but my point was that the last Government's acceptance of the lowest tender had been based on a very optimistic estimate of the likely flow of passengers—some 11 million. So far, the figure has reached only 6 million. The previous Government should have carried out an independent assessment, which is what we did, to determine proper traffic flow. If they had done that before the negotiations, perhaps they would not have accepted the lowest bid, because they would have realised that it was unrealistic, as other bidders for the contract said at the time. I think that it was also said in the House.

I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his remarks. I have asked for an urgent report on regional services, and I should like shortly to report to the House on the matter. The right hon. Gentleman was right in what he said about regions and regeneration. When we continue and complete the phases of the contract, there will be the equivalent of about £1 billion of regeneration. There is a connection to Stratford, and we want to get benefits from the investment.

Mr. Stephen Timms (East Ham): I warmly welcome my right hon. Friend's determination throughout the process to secure the whole link, to ensure that Britain is properly connected to the European high-speed rail network early in the new millennium. He spoke about services to Heathrow airport. That is a new element, and presumably those services will run through south London. Can he confirm that the developments and the processes that will be required to put those services in place will not be at the expense of services along the new line that are envisaged in the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Act 1996?

Mr. Prescott: I think that I can confirm that they will not be at the expense of those services. The Heathrow proposal provides not only an opportunity for more people to engage in intercontinental travel, perhaps flying here from America and going by train to Paris, but will ease congestion on, for example, European slots at Heathrow. It is a true example of integration, and it will be useful not only to the south-east but to the United Kingdom economy. As my hon. Friend will know, increased services have been announced for the northern regions as well. Transport is growing at a considerable rate, and our White Paper is about how to integrate these developments, which have a great future.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Faversham and Mid-Kent): Does the Deputy Prime Minister accept that nothing in the history of Eurostar or the former British Rail's estimation of traffic flows gives me any confidence whatever that the generation of traffic will enable the company to raise the additional equity that it is expected to raise? What happens to the project if it does not raise that equity?

Secondly, will the right hon. Gentleman define freight? Hitherto the only freight that has been considered for that line was the kind that could travel in passenger-type trains. Does he mean that the kind of freight that will now be carried will be much more diverse?

Mr. Prescott: There has always been great difficulty about the projection of those figures. I can remember the hon. Gentleman being critical of statements by British Rail or by the private company that took over. I think that we have made a more realistic assessment, and there is a memorandum in the Library for those who wish to make judgments. A proper assessment is critical, and there is much agreement between us and the consortium, even on our independent assessment, on the judgment of how many people will travel and at what time. I refer the hon. Gentleman to the memorandum from which he can judge that.

The hon. Gentleman asked about raising equity. That was one of the essential points in the previous Government's deal. We are involved not in raising equity but in a guarantee in the way that I have explained. Of course we have asked the original shareholders to pay more. They were committed to only about £60 million, and we are asking them to pay more towards the LCR equity. It is right for us to do that.

The hon. Gentleman also asked about freight. English, Welsh and Scottish Railways and Freightliner are already taking considerable traffic growth through the tunnel.

We want to encourage that, and our White Paper is about how we might encourage more rail freight. One of my first discoveries on coming to office was that the transfer of the three rail companies to EWS was not a sale. It was given £250 million to take them off our hands. That was another example of a sale of public assets at the direct expense of the taxpayer.

Mr. Paul Clark (Gillingham): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on saving an essential national asset, and on drawing something from the jaws of disaster. I should like to ask about north Kent. Obviously, I have not had an opportunity to read the memorandum, and the answer may be there.

My right hon. Friend made it clear that work on the second part would start in 2001, and that it would be completed by 2007 or 2008. What I am particularly concerned about—it was alluded to earlier—is the in-between period and the effect on commuters and on traffic trying to get into London; we should try to minimise that as far as possible. Will the Deputy Prime Minister say whether 2007–08 is the latest or the earliest date that that second phase will be completed?

Mr. Prescott: They are the dates that we have come to an agreement about, and, as soon as we have gone through all the details, I shall give a further statement to the House and place it in the Library at the appropriate time, so that the final details and contracts can be seen; but I believe that date to be a realistic one.

As my hon. Friend will notice, that phase will start before the completion of the one that goes through Ebbsfleet, so I believe that it is a realistic date. We have an agreement completed. The line is going through to St. Pancras. There will be problems, particularly with available services. One can see that those problems were obviously going to arise. I shall give my attention to those now that we know that we do have a proper financial arrangement to provide us with the channel tunnel rail link.

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford): I thank the Deputy Prime Minister on behalf all of those businesses and households in Ashford that have suffered the uncertainty caused by blight, which will be relieved to know that at least that end of the line will be going ahead relatively quickly, but may I ask him for two assurances?

First, the right hon. Gentleman said that the environmental protection measures would be exactly the same as those agreed in the original Bill. Given that the Government will now take a direct financial and managerial interest in this project, will he accept from now on responsibility for ensuring that those environmental conditions are met? Many of my constituents are concerned that Rail Link Engineering and London and Continental Railways have been trying to bend the rules, if you like, to try to avoid some of the environmental considerations.

Secondly, my biggest regret about the statement was that it was made as though there were simply one station on the line this side of the channel tunnel—at Waterloo. Part of the problem of London and Continental's management is that it has consistently undervalued Ashford station's potential. I hope that, with the new management in place, London and Continental will recognise the importance of Ashford station not just for my constituency, but for environmental reasons. Having people travelling into central London via a relatively under-used station, rather than travelling on the M25 and M20, would be extremely helpful for the whole of south-east England.

Mr. Prescott: I understand the importance of Ashford station. Indeed, in order to emphasise that it is an important stopping point, I invited Environment Ministers at the recent G8 summit, who had their conference at Leeds castle, to get off the train at Ashford.

We have to sell more of Eurostar's services. The restructured management is an important step in that direction. Having new people on the board who have had other transport experience will play an important part in increasing the amount of traffic and exploiting the full potential of Eurostar services.

I made the point that the obligations that we entered into with the previous contracts still remain. Government will have a responsibility with regard to environmental matters, but we do that as Government rather than as a 5 per cent. shareholder on some board. The proper way is for Government to address Government responsibilities, and private companies to address their responsibilities.

Ms Margaret Hodge (Barking): I congratulate the Deputy Prime Minister on what appears to be an imaginative deal, and congratulate him in particular on his success in ensuring that the guarantee will not be counted against public spending for future years, which is particularly welcome.

My constituents have been the innocent victims of the previous Government's botched plans. They now require real certainty. In part of his statement, the Deputy Prime Minister said that Railtrack would have an option to build the remainder of the track. He later said that the second phase would start in 2001. My constituents need certainty. Will that phase start in 2001, or could Railtrack talk itself out of that option?

Mr. Prescott: No.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: Yes.

Mr. Prescott: Well, the hon. Gentleman was on the programme, without having seen this, giving us all the judgments, and then congratulates me on delivering something different.

With regard to the Railtrack application, it is attractive for Railtrack to go into that second phase. Railtrack's income is based on access charges, which are being reviewed by the regulator. Two reviews may be involved, and it is very difficult to take a long-term view—that is one of the difficulties of the private sector. That is why Governments get involved in such long-term infrastructure programmes. If the company chooses not to complete the work—although it certainly wants to do so—it would be easy to find another contractor to complete it. LCR has a contractual obligation to complete the link, and I intend to see that it does.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): I welcome the commitment of the Government to seek an extension to St. Pancras, which I am sure my constituents in

[Mr. John Wilkinson]

north-west London and people in the north of England welcome. Regarding Heathrow, the high-speed rail link is especially imaginative—for all the reasons the Deputy Prime Minister described—but will its commercial viability be contingent upon the construction of the fifth terminal at the airport?

Mr. Prescott: No, it is in no way contingent on that at all.

Mr. John Heppell (Nottingham, East): I congratulate the Deputy Prime Minister on rescuing the project. I spent a year of my life on the Channel Tunnel Select Committee, and I would hate to have wasted all that time with nothing at the end of it.

One of the things we realised in the Committee was that for real benefits to go to the regions—especially my region of the east midlands and my city of Nottingham—it was essential that we had the full link right through to St. Pancras station. Can my right hon. Friend guarantee that that will happen? I want to go back to the city and tell people not to worry, and that we have promised that the link will be built as far as St. Pancras station.

Mr. Prescott: Yes, the contractual arrangements are to complete the link to St. Pancras. As to whether the link will run any further to other cities in the north, I have that under review, and I hope to have a report by December. Following an experiment which found that only 10 people were travelling on the regional services, the services were discontinued. Whether that was an excuse because the company did not want to continue the regional services, I do not know. Given this House's interest in regional services and the completion to King's Cross and St. Pancras, I am sure that the matter will be constantly debated. I will be constantly accountable to the House—that is the commitment I give, and that is the contract I have with LCR.

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon): Following the Deputy Prime Minister's reply to the hon. Member for Barking (Ms Hodge), am I right in concluding that he can give no absolute guarantee that the second phase of the project will be built, but that he is building incentives into the financing in the hope that the company wishes to build it, and that if it does not, he hopes that somebody else will replace it to do so?

Mr. Prescott: The contract is not with the constructors. It is with the company that entered into the contract with me—the same company that the previous Government were prepared to accept—LCR. We have strengthened the contract and the company has given a commitment. The company will complete what it is contracted to do, to St. Pancras. The company was acceptable for the previous Government to negotiate with. We have strengthened the deal and changed the financial arrangements. We have every reason to believe that, with a proper balance of incentives, we can complete that work. I believe that the company has entered into the contract in good faith, and that it will be able to complete it.

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Rothwell): Bearing in mind the news two months ago that Eurostar was cancelling its orders for trains which would have enabled the company to have direct links to the north of England, will my right hon. Friend—when he reports back to the House on regional services—ensure that he has raised with those responsible the question of the direct link to the north of England, so that we can be assured that such a link will be in place in due course, using the completed route to St. Pancras?

Mr. Prescott: I have made it clear that I want to see a feasibility report from the company on regional services. I can do no more than that. As soon as I have that report—I have said that it should be ready by the end of the year—I shall report back to the House.

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): Further to the point raised by the hon. Member for Barking (Ms Hodge), I am very surprised that the right hon. Gentleman is suggesting that we will be able to find other contractors to build phase 2 if Railtrack cannot do it, as phase 2 is the most difficult part of the project. Moreover, for the economy, it is the crucial part. Although I understand the need for incentives, does the £140 million relate specifically to phase 1 or to phase 2? Furthermore, did the right hon. Gentleman say that building the Heathrow link was an option for Railtrack and not part of the contract?

Mr. Prescott: Railtrack is not under an obligation to build a link to Heathrow. The consortium would like services to be increased, but current links allow connection from Heathrow to the railway system. Although there will be subsequent reports on the link, it is not part of Railtrack's agreement with LCR.

The £140 million is for the whole contract and is not payable until 2010—assuming that there is not an even greater surplus, in which case the consortium will be paying us, rather than the other way round.

On Eurostar services—I am sorry; I have lost the point of the other question.

Madam Speaker: It would be good if hon. Members asked only one question.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): I congratulate the Deputy Prime Minister on today's statement to the House—after the shambles that we were left with in January—and find hon. Members' carping on it very objectionable. After many years, the west coast main line will be upgraded. I am also pleased to hear that we will have a link to St. Pancras. We are talking about regeneration not only of parts of Kent and London but of the west coast of Britain—which includes England, Wales, Scotland and, to some extent, Northern Ireland.

Mr. Prescott: I very much agree with my hon. Friend's comments, which have re-emphasised the fact that regeneration comes from moving not only passengers but freight. Moving freight and moving passengers is equally important. We are doing all we can—we have renegotiated a number of contracts—to improve passage of freight through the tunnel. Although the rail link has a special regeneration value for the east London area, it will bring regeneration also to the rest of the United Kingdom. Transport infrastructure brings regeneration, which is why the Government think that it is so important.

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Beckenham): Will the right hon. Gentleman tell us what are the other elements in

Railtrack's options, as well as access charges? On the related issue of the Thameslink project, will he say when he expects the work at Blackfriars station to commence?

Mr. Prescott: I am not sure of the answer to the hon. Lady's second question, but I will write to her on it.

The difficulty is that, although Railtrack is a private company, it is bound by laws passed by the House, and the regulator will review its track access charges in the next two years. The review is an essential part of the agreement, which makes it difficult to obtain from Railtrack a longer-term commitment on phase 2. However, there are so many incentives in the project—about three quarters of the cost is available—that I do not accept for a moment that LCR cannot find another contractor to complete phase 2. Nevertheless, I believe that Railtrack not only wants to build it, but can build it. However, at this stage, properly, it must take account of the regulator's judgments, which will not be made for some time yet.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): In response to my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, East (Mr. Heppell) and the right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire (Sir B. Mawhinney), the Deputy Prime Minister referred to a report on the regions. Forgive us a little impatience, but are we really going to say to people in Glasgow or Nottingham, "We will tell you next year when you may expect a rail link"? Why do we have to wait until December, after all that has gone under the bridges? What can we sensibly say to people who are becoming pretty impatient about business decisions?

Mr. Prescott: I thank my hon. Friend for that helpful remark. Like him, I want regional railway services to be connected to international railway services. However, I have had to turn my attention to saving the one currently available deal that is essential for regional services—essentially to complete the link to St. Pancras. I have now completed the deal, which is good news for Scotland, Wales and every other part of the United Kingdom that will use the new international route into the Community.

However, I should say that advertised experimental services from Glasgow took about 10 or 11 hours. There is some doubt whether one can fill trains of whatever length at whatever time if people want to fly to Paris or Brussels instead of taking a 10-hour train journey. Those are legitimate concerns, which must be given proper consideration without committing a great deal of money.

I have asked—I think that it is the best way—whether, if there are spare sets there now, we can do something about starting some useful services right away. It is possible to get on to the network coming from the north—we do not have to wait for the completion of St. Pancras—and that is why I have asked them to look the possibility of getting a quicker start without waiting for the completion of St. Pancras. That is what I hope to report to the House in December.

Mr. Alan Clark: The Deputy Prime Minister did not give an intelligible answer to the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham and Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe). One of the provisions in his statement was that LCR should seek to raise additional equity in the financial markets; but what happens if it cannot do so?

Mr. Prescott: We have made a judgment about the guarantees involved in raising money, and that is what the market will look at in the circumstances. Those guarantees, we have been assured, are sufficient to guarantee the borrowing requirements and the stability and credibility of this company. It is a unique financial deal, and when the right hon. Gentleman looks at the memorandum, he will see that using bonds and having them supported by Government is probably the strongest credibility possible in these matters.

I am bound to say that it is a lot cheaper than the way in which it was done under the previous Administration. What the company was telling us when I reported back to the House was that, in order to be able to raise the equity on the market to which it was committed—about £1 billion—it wanted another £1.2 billion sweetener as to attract the market to put in equity. I am not doing that, because it is too expensive. I have found a better way, which is better for the taxpayer.

Mr. Hugh Bayley (City of York): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on looking at the regional dimension of the link. Is it not important that that committee looks at regional services before the new line is completed? On Friday last week, I received a letter from the managing director of Eurostar, which told me that, although the track infrastructure safety case for the east coast main line has now been completed, they have not even started to do the safety case for the rolling stock, and the problems with electrical interference are being studied only on the west coast main line. Will my right hon. Friend make sure that equal weight and urgency is given to developing the case for the east coast main line?

Mr. Prescott: My hon. Friend is absolutely right about that. Perhaps I should have told the House that one of the difficulties with the rolling stock is that it has not yet got its safety case, which is important to operation, because the electronics cause difficulties with the existing signalling system, which clearly creates problems from a safety point of view. I have asked them to look urgently at that matter.

I have been looking at the sort of stock provided for the channel tunnel service, and at the sleeper stock, for which the taxpayers now have to fork out £100 million because it cannot be used. The way in which the engineers designed it meant that the power demands were greater than could be provided for the train, and that has now cost us £100 million in compensation. It is important to try to get the rolling stock working. I am doing all I can, and perhaps I shall be able by the end of the year to give a more appropriate and informed answer than I can give today.

Mr. Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington): Can the Deputy Prime Minister say whether any of the original consortiums provided a guarantee that they would build the complete link?

Mr. Prescott: It not the consortiums that are giving the guarantee—they run the Eurostar; it is LCR that has entered into the contract and signed up, and, yes, the contract is for the completion of the link.

Mr. Jim Fitzpatrick (Poplar and Canning Town): I start by apologising to my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister for being one of those fooled by yesterday's *Financial Times* article, which said that he

[Mr. Jim Fitzpatrick]

had secured £700 million from the Chancellor. Perhaps we should have known better, given the Chancellor's recent pronouncements. Having said that, the obvious negotiating skills of the Deputy Prime Minister and his team ensured that they did not need that amount of money.

The fact that the whole link is to be built, given the disastrous deal struck by the Conservatives, is welcome. However, given the length of time needed for the construction of the whole link, does my right hon. Friend believe that the regeneration of east London will begin before commencement of construction of the second half of the link, in 2001; and will the blight that has affected so many homes and businesses in east London also be dealt with by his statement today?

Mr. Prescott: Yes, today's statement will add to the certainty of these matters. Regeneration effects can begin now. We have given a commitment on the matter. Following the blight and uncertainty that people have suffered over the past few years—certainly before the previous contract—we now have a much more robust financial position. I suggest that my hon. Friend looks at the statement in the Library. At last we can begin to reap the regeneration effects from the investment and provide fast connections to Europe, so that we can meet the standards that have been enjoyed in Europe for a while, and enjoy them here in the United Kingdom, too.

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine): Although we will have to study the details of the memorandum, will the Deputy Prime Minister say what penalty will be imposed on LCR in 2001 if construction has not started? Given that LCR will not have much of an asset base or an income stream, what penalties can he impose on it if it fails to honour its side of the contract?

Mr. Prescott: I think that I have shown that I am quite prepared to act robustly if anyone is in breach of contract. The hon. Gentleman can expect me to ensure that LCR fulfils its obligations.

Mr. Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): May I also congratulate the Deputy Prime Minister? I am not clear on one point from his statement. When Railtrack exercises its option of whether to go ahead with buying the second phase of the link, will sufficient notice be given at the time so that, if it chooses not to do so, the project will not be delayed further, which could cause further uncertainty in east London?

Mr. Prescott: As I said to the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Sir R. Smith), there is an issue of contract obligations. If a company goes bust, as has happened in this case, it is fair for it to say, "We are not going to do it." That is one of the difficulties with a private company. We have international agreements and obligations to complete services in these matters. I am trying to do that by working through an obligation with a company. Some of the details are yet to be worked out. We have the general framework, which I have communicated to the House. I will want to ensure that we do not have to wait until the specified date for the full benefits. There is the completion to St. Pancras; there are things that we can get on with now.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. Thank you, Mr. Prescott. We must move on.

Drinks Containers (Redemption)

4.31 pm

Mr. Christopher Leslie (Shipley): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to provide for the redemption of certain drinks containers; and for connected purposes.

Every year in Britain, more than 5 billion drinks cans are thrown away. They usually end up in waste dumps, filling holes in the ground and causing pollution. Hon. Members may be interested to know that, if those drink cans were laid end to end, they would circle the earth 15 times. That shows the sheer waste involved in drinks containers and packaging in this country.

Not only is the practice an environmental hazard: it is an expensive business, particularly as landfill sites become more scarce. Barely a third of aluminium drinks containers are recycled in this country—largely because recycling is wholly voluntary, and we rely on the altruism and good will of the public to recycle. The Bill proposes to give a great incentive to people so that recycling pays.

I am proposing that all glass, metal and plastic drinks containers—except glass milk bottles, which are already re-used fairly efficiently—should each have a 5p deposit or redemption value. That deposit would be returnable to consumers when they take their empty bottles and cans back to the shop. The scheme is free from Government intervention, and there is no cost to the taxpayer. Retailers would not lose, because they would gain a handling fee of 0.5p a container for storing consumers' returned cans, as well as being paid the 5p redemption value by distributors when they collect the empty containers for recycling.

Manufacturers and distributors would also gain by keeping not only the greater scrap metal and glass value of the recycled containers but the unclaimed deposits on the few unredeemed containers that will never be returned. Above all, consumers would have a financial motivation to save each empty can, bottle and container, and take them to retailers in order to redeem the value.

Under the proposal, retailers would be obliged to accept containers and pay the redemption value on returned products if they sell the same brand in their shop. However, shopkeepers could refuse excessively dirty containers, and would be obliged to accept only 100 cans or bottles from any individual in any given 24 hours, in order to ease problems of storage.

Deposit schemes are successful worldwide, and the practicalities of my Bill have already been widely tested. The deposit and redemption scheme that I propose for drinks containers has already been an outstanding success elsewhere. For example, container recycling rates are 91 per cent. in Sweden and more than 90 per cent. in Denmark, because of those countries' deposit schemes. The many states in America with "bottle deposit Bills" have recycling rates of between 70 and 90 per cent. The Netherlands also runs a successful deposit and refund system.

I understand that a British Government study commissioned in 1992 by the Department of Trade and Industry and what was then the Department of the Environment, carried out by a company called Environmental Resources Ltd., concluded that up to 95 per cent. of containers could be recycled if we had a deposit-refund system in this country.

Recycling is vital, and we must recycle more bottles and cans. There are limited resources of the minerals used in the production of many drinks containers, especially metal cans. Resource conservation is needed, and recycling helps to reduce the environmental impact of some of the mining techniques used all over the world to extract the raw materials for the metals.

Recycling also requires less energy and electricity consumption than the costly, intensive and more polluting production of a new container from raw materials each time one is needed. For example, bauxite refinement takes two and a half times as much energy and ore as the equivalent cost and weight of recycled aluminium.

The current system of recycling in Britain is effective to a certain degree. Much excellent work is undertaken by supermarkets, local authorities and other local organisations, such as the Aluminium Can Recycling Association. However, voluntary comprehensive recycling programmes organised by local councils and others are costly to administer and difficult to get off the ground. I do not believe that we can rely solely on those schemes, good though they are, to achieve really radical recycling rates in Britain.

Another benefit of the deposit-refund system is that it would help to cut the demand for landfill. Drinks containers currently represent 8 to 10 per cent. of landfill waste. Landfill sites are scarce and filling up fast, and new sites are often unpopular. Given the dramatic reduction in landfill that would occur in the United Kingdom if most bottles and cans could be recycled, I estimate that, nationally, about £50 million of taxpayers' money could be saved each year on landfill and transport costs. For example, Bradford metropolitan district council, my local authority, estimates that it could save about £500,000 in waste disposal and handling costs if the Bill became law.

Another environmental benefit of the scheme is that it would reduce litter. The litter of discarded bottles and cans is a safety hazard, a public nuisance and an aesthetic blight. The consequences of the throwaway culture are significant. Certainly my constituents are fed up with the mountains of litter that constantly accumulate in the parks and streets of Shipley.

Bottle and can deposit schemes help to make streets cleaner and reduce litter in public places, because, in countries where the system operates, sharp-eyed members of the public often retrieve and redeem containers discarded by the litter bugs. That in turn helps to reduce the costs of litter collection for local authorities, which now face large cleansing bills each year.

Container redemption systems help to foster an anti-litter ethic in the community. In Oregon, in the United States, where the scheme operates, a widespread public ethos against dropping litter has been created, partly as a result of its long-standing deposit-refund scheme. I understand that, two years after the scheme was introduced, roadside litter in Oregon had been halved.

The deposit idea is nothing new. Indeed, many hon. Members may recall that, until a few years ago, deposit schemes used to operate for many of the larger bottles in this country. Most have now disappeared, except for a few products such as Barr's Irn Bru in Scotland.

A further spin-off of deposit schemes is that voluntary groups and charities have ready access to an easy source of fund-raising activity. The collection of empty containers would be encouraged by such organisations, which are eager to generate resources in a simple and understandable way.

[Mr. Christopher Leslie]

Businesses as well as individuals would be able to take part in the container redemption system. In particular, pubs, clubs and restaurants—which, according to the organisation British Glass Recycling, currently throw away about 95 per cent. of their glass bottles—would have a monetary incentive to recycle rather than to contribute to more and more landfill.

Recycling is a habit, and the public support it. In countries where the deposit scheme operates, the public have become more enthused about recycling, which has led to a greater popular awareness of the scarcity of natural resources and an increase in other recycling activities.

The drinks container redemption scheme has many environmental benefits and an excellent track record. Next time that you are walking down the street, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I urge you to cast your eyes to the ground to see how many empty vessels litter the streets; I urge you to consider how the drinks container redemption system would clear up the parks, open spaces and roadsides throughout the community. I sincerely hope that such a system will come into operation in this country, and that the House will support the idea.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Christopher Leslie, Mr. Andrew F. Bennett, Ms Helen Southworth, Maria Eagle, Mr. Paul Truswell, Mr. Andrew Reed, Mr. Andrew Love, Mr. Fabian Hamilton, Angela Smith and Mr. Norman Baker.

DRINKS CONTAINERS (REDEMPTION)

Mr. Leslie accordingly presented a Bill to provide for the redemption of certain drinks containers; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 3 July, and to be printed [Bill 195].

HUMAN RIGHTS BILL *[LORDS]* (PROGRAMME)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 82 (Business Committee),

That the Report [2nd June] from the Business Committee be now considered.—[*Jane Kennedy.*]

Question agreed to.

Report considered accordingly.

Resolved,

That this House doth agree with the Committee in its Resolution.—[*Jane Kennedy.*]

Following is the report of the Business Committee [2 June]:

That the days which under the Order [1st June] are allotted to remaining proceedings in Committee of the whole House shall be allotted in the manner shown in the Table set out below:—

TABLE

Allotted day	*Proceedings*
First day	Clauses 2 to 4
Second day	Clauses 5 and 6
Third day	Clauses 7 to 12
Fourth day	Remaining proceedings.

Orders of the Day

Human Rights Bill *[Lords]*

[1ST ALLOTTED DAY]

Considered in Committee [Progress, 20 May].

[MR. MICHAEL J. MARTIN *in the Chair*]

Clause 2

INTERPRETATION OF CONVENTION RIGHTS

4.42 pm

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): I beg to move amendment No. 4, in page 2, line 2, leave out 'must' and insert 'may'.

The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Michael J. Martin): With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 5, in page 2, line 2, leave out 'take into account' and insert 'have regard to'.

No. 6, in page 2, leave out lines 5 to 10.

No. 7, in page 2, line 11, leave out 'whenever made or given'.

Mr. Clappison: The amendments raise important issues concerning the relationship between the jurisprudence of the European Court and the way in which United Kingdom courts will apply the convention after incorporation. Clause 2 deals with the way in which UK courts determine questions relating to convention rights and take account of the relevant jurisprudence from the commission, the European Court of Human Rights and the Committee of Ministers.

Under clause 2, a United Kingdom court or tribunal, in determining a question that has arisen in connection with a right under the European convention,

"must take into account"—

I use the words of the Bill, as it is important to be precise—

"any . . . judgment, decision, declaration or advisory opinion of the European Court"

as well as opinions and decisions of the commission and the Committee of Ministers. To be absolutely clear, I should say that when I refer to the commission, I mean not the Commission of the European Union, but the European Commission of Human Rights, which is the body that individuals alleging a breach of convention rights first approach. The commission plays an important role in the operation of the convention and is a quite separate body from the Commission of the European Union.

We wish to explore, through the amendments, the use of the phrase "must take into account". In particular, we wonder whether it is best suited to the purpose of defining the way in which United Kingdom courts should approach the jurisprudence emanating from the European Court of Human Rights and the commission. We are also concerned that the course that the Government are taking has the potential to cause problems in future.

Talking about potential problems is no reflection of our confidence in our United Kingdom courts; we have great faith in the quality of our United Kingdom judiciary, and we do not want to make life any more difficult than it need be. We feel that the phrase "may have regard to" in amendment Nos. 4 and 5 is more suited to the circumstances in guiding the relationship between United Kingdom and European law. To put it in broad terms, it more appropriately fits the bill.

In earlier debates on the Bill, we were rightly warned about the dangers of attempting to dance on the head of a pin. I shall not undertake to do that today. Let me spell out the difference between our amendment and the Bill as drafted. It is more than the width of the head of a pin, and we believe that, potentially, it could make the difference between putting our courts in an unnecessary straitjacket and giving them the flexibility to do what is right in the circumstances in which the convention is to be applied in the United Kingdom, if it is incorporated.

We believe that the phrase "may have regard to" would be better than what is in the clause—"must take into account". It is a matter of what is better suited to the circumstances. I must make it clear that, in tabling the amendments and making these comments, we are not seeking to rebel against the European Court, to cast ourselves adrift from its jurisprudence or, still less, to raise other matters to do with the European Court or any other European issues—far from it.

I should like to refer back to what the shadow Attorney-General, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Sir N. Lyell), said in an earlier debate, when he identified three important points of principle. He said that we do not want the United Kingdom judiciary creating a separate body of law for the United Kingdom, which might go further than would the commission or the European Court at Strasbourg. We want our approach to be within the general framework of the jurisprudence of the European Court, but not to be too tightly bound by it. That is what our amendment seeks to achieve.

Against that background, let me make two further points. First, the European Court has adopted the margin of appreciation that has been for some time an established part of its jurisprudence and thinking. We acknowledge the importance of that feature, and we believe that it has played a valuable part in decision making by the European Court in the past. Implicit within the doctrine of the margin of appreciation is the proposition that the decisions of national authorities should be treated with a certain respect. National authorities are considered by the court to be in the best position to look at the requirements of public interest within their nations. Therefore, the court is prepared to give national authorities a certain amount of latitude in their national affairs. Of course the court must look objectively at the convention rights from state to state, but it does so against the background of some latitude for individual states in their own affairs.

The margin of appreciation is an established doctrine, but we shall hear more about it if the convention is incorporated, which is the will of the Government. We want the spirit of the doctrine of the margin of appreciation to be in evidence in United Kingdom courts. In the past, the European Court of Human Rights has shown some caution and conservatism. It has not always got it right, and I know that my hon. Friends and, perhaps, other hon. Members could easily think of decisions on some high-profile cases with which they disagree. That is bound to be the case, given the nature of the matters with which the court has to deal. However, it has always been right to approach matters with some caution. That general frame of reference is appropriate.

If the convention is to be incorporated, a degree of prudence and caution, together with respect for national values, will not be inappropriate for the UK courts when they apply the convention to the circumstances of our own country. No doubt our courts will, in the fulness of time, arrive at that view. We want the UK courts to follow the general approach of the European Court in those important respects. However, we want the European Court's decisions on the judgments of UK courts to be persuasive rather than prescriptive.

Clause 2 requires

"any . . . judgment, decision, declaration or advisory opinion of the European Court of Human Rights . . . whenever made or given"

to be taken into account.

As the Minister knows, we have tabled an amendment relating to the words "whenever made or given". We presume that the Government intend that to include judgments, decisions, declarations or opinions of the European Court in which the United Kingdom was not a party. We note the use of the word "any", so we make the straightforward assumption that the Government intend that all that jurisprudence should be taken into account in the way required in the Bill. I look to the Minister for confirmation of that, as he was looking slightly puzzled a moment ago. We believe it to be a straightforward assumption to make from the wording in the Bill.

That being so, it means that, in any cases involving any of the 40 countries across the length and breadth of Europe that are party to the convention, the judgments, decisions, declarations or opinions of the European Court or the commission would have to be taken into account by UK courts. It must follow from that that cases involving other parties to the European convention will not reflect a margin of appreciation for the United Kingdom. They may reflect a margin of appreciation for the country concerned, but not for us. The Bill says that our courts must take those decisions into account, so we must ask whether that is entirely appropriate. What may be right for other countries may not necessarily be right for the United Kingdom.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): Such cases form part of the jurisprudence of the European convention, as the hon. Gentleman will know. I remind him that, when these matters were debated in another place, the Opposition argued that the Strasbourg jurisprudence should be binding on United Kingdom courts. Have the Opposition changed their view?

Mr. Clappison: The Minister makes a mistake by taking too partisan an approach to these matters. We are seeking to explore the margin of appreciation. I hope that he paid close attention when I made it clear that we commended the generally cautious, conservative approach of the European Court, and he will know that that has been widely recognised by commentators. We do not seek to rebel against that, but we need to explore how the Bill will require the margin of appreciation that may be taken into account in decisions by the European Court on other

[Mr. Clappison]

countries to be dealt with in our courts when they consider the decisions and judgments of the European Court. That is an entirely legitimate concern, and we were right to explore it in the other place and here.

I shall come shortly to some important remarks made by the Lord Chancellor. The Minister is the Lord Chancellor's spokesman, and may be able to intervene on those. We are trying to explore important arguments for being within the reach of the European Court, but not being bound too tightly by its decisions. As the Minister has fallen into the habit of drawing on what was said in the other place, let me tell him what his noble Friend said. Having given him a sneak preview of my intention to mention those remarks, let me give him a slight surprise: I rather agree with the Lord Chancellor's sentiments, although not perhaps with his oft-expressed enthusiasm for the terms in which the Bill is drafted and in which he has taken some pride.

Perhaps the Lord Chancellor's spokesman would like to pay close attention to the Lord Chancellor's words. He said:

"There may also be occasions when it would be right for the United Kingdom courts to depart from Strasbourg decisions. We must remember that the interpretation of the convention rights develops over the years. Circumstances may therefore arise in which a judgment given by the European Court of Human Rights decades ago contains pronouncements which it would not be appropriate to apply to the letter in the circumstances of today in a particular set of circumstances affecting this country . . . The United Kingdom is not, of course, bound in international law to follow the court's judgments in cases to which it has not been a party and it would be strange to require courts in the United Kingdom to be bound by such decisions."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 19 January 1998; Vol. 584, c. 1271.]

We agree with those sentiments, but must question how well the drafting of the Bill reflects them. Juxtaposed with those sentiments, the drafting of the Bill, which we seek legitimately to explore, looks a little rum.

First, we need to explore what our courts are intended to understand by the phrase "must take into account". It was said in another place that those words would permit UK courts to depart from existing Strasbourg decisions and that, on occasion, it might be appropriate to do so and the courts might give a successful lead to Strasbourg. Those words were spoken by another Minister in the other place. We are happy with that. Indeed, it may be recalled that, in our earlier debates, my right hon. and learned Friend the shadow Attorney-General made it clear that, whatever other reservations we might have, one of the benefits of incorporation is that British judges would have an opportunity to have an input into the fashioning of convention law. That is all well and good, but the Government have not yet been sufficiently clear on what they intend by the phrase "must take into account".

5 pm

If those words are not binding—we take it that they are not—the Government must spell out more clearly the nature and extent of the circumstances in which United Kingdom courts may choose not to follow Strasbourg decisions. The Government apparently contemplate that UK courts would be permitted to depart from Strasbourg decisions when there had been no precise ruling on the matter in question. Such an example was given by the Lord Chancellor in the debate on this clause in the other place. What about cases in which there has been a precise ruling by Strasbourg? Do the words "must take into account" mean that UK courts must follow to the letter rulings in cases in which the court or the commission has made a judgment, decision, declaration or opinion in the relevant circumstances? Do our courts have to follow them at all?

Will the Minister say whether UK courts may depart from such decisions when there has been a precise ruling by Strasbourg? The matter was left unclear when it was debated in another place. It is important for the future and for our courts that we know the Government's position. It is all very well to say that our courts can feel free to go their own way when there is no precise ruling from Strasbourg, but what about cases when there is?

Mr. Hoon: The hon. Gentleman knows the answer to his question. The answer is clear: it is for the independent judgment of a court to resolve the issue before it. Nothing that can be said here will affect that independence. I am surprised to hear him pursue that argument, because, by doing so, he seeks to fetter that independence. If a court arrives at an apparently incorrect decision, there is the prospect of an appeal, which ultimately could end up in the court in Strasbourg. Those matters are routinely resolved before the courts every day of the year. The hon. Gentleman seeks to go into a logical cul de sac from which there is no exit.

Mr. Clappison: The Minister is making too much of the matter. I simply wish to explore what was left unclear in another place. I hope that he will give a more considered response later in view of the way in which the matter was left in the House of Lords, because it will not do as it stands. The Minister must deal with the question: what is the effect on United Kingdom courts if there is a precise ruling from Strasbourg on a matter that a UK court seeks to determine in this country?

The Minister must give a better answer than he has given so far. It is no use trying to remit the issue to the courts in a general way, by saying that we shall leave it to the courts' good judgment. The Government have already gone so far as to say that our courts need not feel bound when there is no precise ruling from Strasbourg—they went that far in another place, in a more considered response than the Minister has just given—but what about cases when there is a precise ruling? What do the words "must take into account" import in those circumstances?

I realise that the Minister is impatient to get on with the Bill, but he must give the matter a little more consideration. It is an important issue for the future. We want to guide our courts appropriately, as much as we can.

I hope that the Minister will not take my remarks as an implied attack on the European Court. As I have made clear, we welcome the cautious approach that it has often taken. However, we note a word of warning given in another place by the noble Law Lord, Lord Browne-Wilkinson, who, while praising the record to date of the European Court, said:

"a major change is taking place. We are now seeing a wider range of judges adjudicating such matters, a number of them drawn from jurisdictions 10 years ago not famous for their observance of human rights. It might be dangerous to tie ourselves to that".—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 18 November 1997; Vol. 583, c. 513.]

As that warning comes from such a source, we should be wise to take it on board.

I move on now to amendment No. 6. Clause 2 requires United Kingdom courts in certain circumstances to take into account decisions of the commission and the Committee of Ministers. I want to explore two points. First, is it the Government's intention to require the courts to give the same weight to decisions of those bodies as to those of the European Court? Again, I make it clear that I mean no disrespect to the commission, which I appreciate is of a high calibre and carries out valuable work. However, we need to consider whether it is right in effect to give the commission parity of esteem with the European Court, as the Bill apparently does. Clause 2 puts the commission on the same footing as the court. Is that the signal that the Government mean to send out?

My second point concerns the potential problem when the European Court arrives at a different view from the commission. Under article 31, which is mentioned in clause 2(1)(b), the commission will, in a matter where it has been unable to bring the parties to a friendly settlement, draw up a report and give its opinion as to whether there has been a breach. That, of course, is standard procedure. I apprehend that subsection (1)(b) requires a United Kingdom court to take into account such an opinion even though the European Court has yet to give a view. No doubt the Minister will correct me if I am wrong.

On that basis, what will happen if the United Kingdom court takes the commission's opinion into account and the European Court, also having taken into account that opinion, comes to a different conclusion, which is not altogether unknown? That would appear to be a possibility. I assume that the Government have thought that through. Will the Minister tell us what will happen in those circumstances?

There are a number of potential dangers, and our amendments reflect our concerns. We seek a constructive and considered response from the Government. They know that the courts will in future consider carefully what is said about the Bill, and the Government owe it to the courts to get it right. If the convention is to be incorporated, we want a genuine partnership between Parliament and the courts. I shall say more about that later. If we are to do our job right by the courts, we must not leave them in a difficult and uncertain position on the relationship between European jurisprudence and the decisions that our courts must make in considering cases involving breaches of convention rights. Those are serious issues, and we look to the Government for a considered response.

Mrs. Theresa May (Maidenhead): Unlike, I suspect, the majority of hon. Members present, I am no lawyer, so terms such as "margin of appreciation" and legal terms will not trip easily off my tongue.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) made clear, this is an important issue, concerning the relationship between the jurisprudence of the court in Strasbourg and the position of the courts in the UK, and the extent to which our courts have flexibility in interpreting that jurisprudence in applying decisions in the UK. That is obviously relevant to us all.

I suspect that the Minister, in his response, will refer to the fact that we have approached the matter from two different angles in the debate in the other place and in this debate. Our approach is entirely reasonable, because we are trying to tease out from the Government the degree of flexibility that they intend UK courts to have. In response to the amendment moved by the shadow Lord Chancellor in the other place, the Lord Chancellor made statements about the Government's intentions. His remarks suggest that the Government's position is perhaps closer to our amendments than the Minister's intervention implied. It will be interesting to see whether the Government are willing to accept these amendments, because they put into effect the intention of the Lord Chancellor's words.

The Lord Chancellor said in the debate in the other place:

> "There may also be occasions when it would be right for the United Kingdom courts to depart from Strasbourg decisions. We must remember that the interpretation of the convention rights develops over the years. Circumstances may therefore arise in which a judgment given by the European Court of Human Rights decades ago contains pronouncements which it would not be appropriate to apply to the letter in the circumstances of today in a particular set of circumstances affecting this country . . . The United Kingdom is not, of course, bound in international law to follow the court's judgments in cases to which it has not been a party and it would be strange to require courts in the United Kingdom to be bound by such decisions."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 19 January 1998; Vol. 584, c. 1271.]

Those remarks reflect the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere and suggest that the Government intend to provide the flexibility proposed in amendments Nos. 4, 5, 6 and 7.

Amendment No. 7 is particularly relevant, because it deals with clause 2, which provides that the courts must take into account any judgment or decision "whenever made or given". The Lord Chancellor's remarks make it clear that it would be inappropriate to suggest that decisions taken a considerable time ago are of relevance today. Amendment No. 7, which would remove the phrase "whenever made or given", would put his remarks into effect so that courts would not have to take account of past decisions regardless of their relevance.

Mr. Hoon: Is not that precisely what the straightforward English expression "take into account" means?

Mrs. May: We have tabled these amendments to find out what the Government mean by the phrase "take into account". By providing that these issues should be taken into account, the Government are placing a greater emphasis on the courts following those rules and judgments than they intend. I seek from the Minister a clearer definition of "take into account".

We should consider amendment No. 7, especially in the light of the Lord Chancellor's comments. It would give his remarks and the Government's intentions immediate effect. If the Government accept any of the amendments, I hope that they will accept amendment No. 7.

Other provisions of clause 2(1) are also of concern. Amendment No. 6 deals with the opinions and decisions of the commission and the Committee of Ministers. If there is to be flexibility, the courts should not be required to take into account or to have regard to opinions. They are merely opinions of the commission and have not yet become judgments or decisions. Our amendments are about the extent of the flexibility and independence of courts in this country to be able to interpret the convention. The courts should not be required to take into account matters that have not yet been decided.

5.15 pm

My hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere dealt most ably with amendments No. 4 and 5. We look forward to hearing the Government's interpretation of those issues. Notwithstanding the Lord Chancellor's comments, the requirement that these matters "must" be taken into account rather than "may" be taken into account, regardless of whether a decision has been made or whether an opinion has become a decision, implies a degree of inflexibility. The Government's pronouncements on the issue suggest that that is not their intention.

I hope that the Minister will consider our amendments as sympathetic to the Government's stated intentions. They try to improve the wording of the Bill, to give greater effect to the Government's intentions. The purpose of these important amendments is to tease from the Government clarification of their intentions with regard to the flexibility of the courts. I support the amendments, because they would provide the flexibility that the Government intend.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): I support the amendments. It is entirely right that the courts should have flexibility when taking into account or having regard to the judgments and opinions described in clause 2. It is important that we should make it plain that the courts are not bound—that is to say, not obliged—to implement decisions made in other jurisdictions, previous decisions of the court or the opinions of the commission. I believe that it is the Minister's intention that clause 2 should not impose on the courts of the United Kingdom an obligation to be bound by such judgment, decision or opinion. It would be extremely helpful if he would make that wholly plain. The purpose of the amendments ably moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) is to give the Minister an opportunity to do that.

I have no objection to the word "must", but I do not particularly wish to see the word "may" incorporated in the legislation. In this context, it is right that the courts of the United Kingdom should take into account the stated decisions and opinions, although it is for the courts to determine their relevance and appropriate weight.

I dissent from the Government's proposal to give equality of weight to the judgment of the European Court and the opinion or decision of the commission and the decision of the Committee of Ministers. A difference of weight should be given to the judgment of the European Court on the one hand and to the opinions and decisions of the commission and the Committee of Ministers on the other. The problem with the drafting is that no distinction is made in the Bill, and I regret that. The Bill gives all decisions equal weight, and I fancy that that is a mistake.

This has been a useful probing debate, because the Government can make wholly plain what I believe to be their intention: that the courts are not bound by the decisions and opinions referred to in the Bill. I hope that the Minister will say just that.

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): I am happy to participate, I hope reasonably briefly, in the debate.

Having read clause 2 a number of times reasonably carefully, I have little to disagree with. The difficulty, and the reason why my hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) has properly proposed probing amendments, is that there is bound to be anxiety about the way in which the courts will operate in practice.

My understanding of what is intended—the Minister will doubtless disagree with me if I have got it wrong—is that the wording in clause 2 is designed to give a court or a tribunal discretion in applying the various areas of the decision making—the jurisprudence—of the European Court of Human Rights, or of other bodies similar to that of an English court applying the decision making of other common law jurisdictions. That is how I interpret it. Therefore, there would be wide discretion, and, I would also infer, the operation of the margin of appreciation as to whether such decisions are relevant to the particular circumstances, which the European Court has to determine in so far as they relate to the United Kingdom.

Clearly, the anxiety is whether the wording is correct and will provide that measure of discretion. I share the view of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) that the use of the word "must" as opposed to the word "may" is perfectly appropriate in particular circumstances to enable the court to do that.

I have further anxiety about two points. I do not want to exaggerate their effects, but I shall probe the Minister about the intention behind the inclusion of two specific references. First, the words "whenever made or given" appear in clause 2(1)(d). I infer that that is surplusage: the words are unnecessary because, by their very nature, decisions by bodies referred to in clause 2(1)(a), (b), (c) and (d) will be relevant, irrespective of when they were made or given, but the Minister may be able to persuade me otherwise.

Applying sensible English common law principles, less weight will be attached to a decision that is old, pertains to matters that have been passed by the march of events and has been doubted somewhere else than to a more recent decision. Will the Minister clarify why those words were specifically included? There may have been a desire that people should not think that only decisions made subsequent to the passage of the Bill would be affected. That may be the answer, and I should be interested to hear from him on that point.

The other issue that puzzles me a little is the way in which different decision-making bodies are lumped together in clause 2(1)(a), (b), (c) and (d). The oddest is subsection (1)(d), which states:

"decision of the Committee of Ministers taken under Article 46 of the Convention".

As I understand it, article 46 provides a mechanism by which extra structures can be added to the convention. It states:

"Any of the High Contracting Parties may at any time declare that it recognises as compulsory *ipso facto* and without special agreement, the jurisdiction of the Court in all matters concerning the interpretation and application of the present Convention.

The declarations referred to above may be made unconditionally or on condition of reciprocity".

That does not have much to do with the development of jurisprudence. Has it not rather more to do with the extent to which the international obligations of the parties may be extended? Therefore, I find it odd that that should appear amid what otherwise appear to be matters of jurisprudence. The Minister may be able to answer that point.

Having thought about the different weight being given to a judgment or an opinion or a decision of the commission, I am not as concerned as some of my hon. Friends. The key issue in clause 2 is the meaning of the words "must take into account". The clause revolves around that. It has been suggested that the words "have regard to" might be better, and, as a term of art bandied around in the courts, they would trip off the tongues of lawyers rather more easily than "taking into account". Having thought about it carefully, I consider that there is no difference between them.

It is worth bearing in mind, however, that Law Lords continually say that they or the court should "have regard to" something, so a wise draftsman might have regard to those words. I simply invite the Minister to say whether that point has been considered. Save for that, clause 2 should enable the courts to have the necessary discretion to apply the convention while not being fettered slavishly by it. I hope that he will confirm the generality of what I have said. Provided that that can be achieved, clause 2 as drafted, or even if the amendments were accepted, would still do the same job.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): At first sight, the debate may seem to involve lawyers dancing on the head of a pin and talking about whether we "may" or "must" take account of the jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights or whether we should be bound by it. Anyone listening to our debate would wonder what on earth we are going on about and why it is so important. Before the Minister nods too vigorously, I shall explain why the debate is important.

We had a lengthy debate a couple of weeks ago on the impact of the Bill on religious liberties, Church schools and the rest. The constant refrain of the Secretary of State for Scotland, who summed up for the Government and replied to the points made by me and other hon. Members, was, "I don't know what hon. Members are going on about. The convention has been around since 1951, and if it was such a threat to religious liberties or to Church schools, and if people were going to take organisations to court, that would have happened a long time ago." The problem is that the jurisprudence of the European Court is limited. I have the figures: of the 45 applications to Strasbourg on article 9, only five have been allowed to proceed to the European Court. The article 9 point is important, because the Government have constantly argued that it will protect conventions. The point that I have made all along is that the jurisprudence is weak.

The Minister has had a bit of fun today, because he has obviously read the debate in the other place, as I have. He maintains that Conservatives there argued that we should be bound by the jurisprudence of the Strasbourg court, while we are saying the opposite. Leaving aside the fact that we are perfectly entitled to probe the Government, the reason for that is that many of us are fundamentally unhappy about incorporating the convention and are unhappy about the Bill. We believe that it is virtually impossible for the Government to resolve the dilemma.

Let us assume that we go down the route advocated by my noble Friend Lord Kingsland, the shadow Lord Chancellor. He made the sensible point, with which I agree, that, if we are to protect our religious liberties, we should give more cognisance and more authority to the jurisprudence of the European Court, because it has been conservative in moral, social and religious matters.

I think that Lord Kingsland's argument was entirely justifiable. The Lord Chancellor disagreed, and said that our judges would be bound too closely. However, Lord Kingsland's argument—and my argument—is that we are in danger of not simply incorporating the convention in our law, but going much further. What we are creating is an entirely new Bill of Rights. We are giving our judges—who, under clause 2, must "take into account" the matters specified—considerable flexibility in how they interpret the convention.

5.30 pm

My hon. Friends and I have referred to religious liberties, and the threat that the convention might pose to Church schools and other religious charities. The European Court has been very conservative, and, for that reason, the jurisprudence is very limited. The European Court has constantly applied the margin of appreciation, telling people that the cases that they have brought to it are really matters for the national courts.

Our judges, however, will not be bound by the European jurisprudence, and we anticipate a rash of cases of the kind that we were discussing a couple of weeks ago. An example is a Catholic school being taken to court because it has dismissed a head teacher following her divorce. We feel that our judges, rather than being in the conservative mould of the European judges, might go much further, and that there could be a real threat to religious freedoms.

That is why I consider Lord Kingsland's argument perfectly logical. The problem is that anyone wishing to advance such an argument must be pretty pro-Europe. The Lord Chancellor teased his shadow, accusing him of being "Janus-like". Another Law Lord who has already been mentioned—I think it was Lord Browne-Wilkinson—disagreed with the amendments that we were pressing in the other place. His point, which I think has already been referred to, was that the European Court had been much expanded, and now contained judges not just from western Europe but from central and eastern Europe. Some of those countries do not have our long traditions of freedom.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): I think Lord Kingsland's point was one that he made on Second Reading last November. He feared that the jurisprudence of the European convention, and of the Court in Strasbourg, would not be exactly replicated in the decision making of British judges. I think he said that it would not be "an exact photograph".

Mr. Leigh: I am grateful to my hon. and learned Friend. The visual image conveyed by the phrase "an exact photograph" is very powerful.

Mr. Hogg: I have listened to my hon. Friend with great interest and some surprise. As I understand it, he is saying that he feels safer with the interpretation of the convention by the European Court than with the prospect of its interpretation's being at the discretion of our judges. That is a most unusual position for my hon. Friend to adopt, and I am anxious to confirm that I have not misunderstood him.

Mr. Leigh: My right hon. and learned Friend, with his piercing intellect and acute mind, has gone to the heart of

[Mr. Leigh]

the difficulty that I face. He is, of course, absolutely right. I am afraid that there is no easy way out of the dilemma, except to reject the Bill entirely, which we are not going to do—or, rather, the House of Commons is not going to do. We must try to argue our way out of the problem.

As my right hon. and learned Friend implied, given the track record of the European Court's jurisprudence over the past 50 years, I have more confidence in it than in the jurisprudence that may develop in our own courts.

Mr. Hoon: Perhaps I can help the hon. Gentleman. Does he believe that the Conservative party should reject incorporation?

Mr. Leigh: My personal view, which I have argued all along, is that we should reject it. Along with those of my hon. Friends who, like me, have a particular interest in religious liberties, I have said that we are going down a very dangerous route.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): I hope that my hon. Friend will not be self-effacing about his opposition to incorporation. It is extremely robust, very articulate and widely shared.

Mr. Leigh: My hon. Friend is typically generous. I claim no particular virtue in opposing incorporation, except to make a general point. I believe that, over many centuries, our country has developed a rigid demarcation between the role of judges, which is to interpret the law, and the role of Parliament, which is to make the law. Those of us who oppose incorporation do so because we believe that judges will be given a new, expanded role that will eventually politicise them in the way in which they have been politicised in the United States.

Mr. Hogg: As this is a Committee stage, I hope that I shall be forgiven for intervening again—and, no doubt, again and again.

I know the background from which my hon. Friend comes, and I know that he is concerned about the religious issues raised by the convention. May I suggest, however, that while his conclusion that he is safer with the European judges' interpretation of the convention may be justified in the context of religious freedoms, it is not justified in the wider context?

I am sure my hon. Friend will agree that the judges of the European Court have extended the convention well beyond what the founding fathers originally contemplated, in, for instance, the sphere of unusual punishments. I suggest that, because of his concern about one particular point—religious freedoms, and what has been done in the European Court to safeguard them—my hon. Friend has reached the general conclusion that he is safer in the hands of the European Court than in those of the courts of England and Wales.

Mr. Leigh: My right hon. and learned Friend may be making a valid point. I hope that he will not mind if I see my role in this short debate as that of spokesman for religious organisations. As he will know, there is a great deal of concern, especially in the religious press and among religious organisations such as the Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches. Those bodies need to be reassured, and I therefore thought it important to mention them today, as I did a couple of weeks ago.

Mr. Clappison: My hon. Friend has moved on to important terrain. Religious organisations will be looking for protection from the European Court, within the conservative frame of reference that we have been discussing. As they will no longer have an absolute defence, as the Lords Committee voted to take it out of the Bill, will they not now look for a certain amount of judicial self-restraint from judges in this country and in the European Court to protect them from the vexatious litigants that many fear will follow decisions that we have already made?

Mr. Leigh: My hon. Friend makes an important point, and I hope that the Minister will make a similar point. There are vexatious litigants waiting out there—people with an anti-Church agenda. I assume that the Bill will be passed as it is now drafted, given the parliamentary arithmetic. Our judges will therefore not feel bound by the conservative jurisprudence that has developed in Europe over the past 40 or 50 years. They will have to apply many self-denying ordinances to ensure that they do not go down a dangerous route. I can see no way out of the dilemma. If the Bill is enacted, our judges may be bound by European jurisprudence. I do not want that, because I have great confidence in our judges.

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire): I do not accept that there is an argument for the incorporation of the convention rights into English law, but if there were, incorporation would allow our judges to make decisions in the English context based on their interpretation of the convention. The argument continues that, if the matter proceeds to the European Court of Human Rights, at least the input of our judges will have been taken into account.

Does my hon. Friend agree that it would be extraordinary if our judges were bound by previous decisions of the European Court, the opinions and decisions of the commission and decisions by the Committee of Ministers, because one of the strongest arguments for incorporation is precisely that our judges can interpret the convention afresh?

Mr. Leigh: I presume that, if the Lord Chancellor were taking part in the debate, he would make a similar point. He would say that I do not have sufficient confidence in our judges and in the precedents that have developed over hundreds of years.

Our system is unique because our judges base their judgments on precedent, but there is no precedent in this case. We are opening a whole new area into which judges can walk—I shall not say wander, because that would be pejorative—and make new judge-made law. Under the fast-track procedure, an Order in Council may be used or the Government may decide that Parliament should accept such judgments and our constitution could be radically changed. That is why those of us who oppose incorporation are worried by the Bill.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): My hon. Friend brings us back to the dilemma. Our choice is between allowing European jurisprudence to continue or,

as the Government have said, bringing it home to our judges. My hon. Friend expressed a preference for the more conservative jurisprudence of Europe, but is he confident that that will continue? Does he accept that many of us are reluctant to accept incorporation into English law because we believe that we would be better off renouncing our accession to the convention in its entirety?

Mr. Leigh: I do not know how European jurisprudence will develop. However, judging by recent history, it has taken the view, under margin of appreciation, that these matters are best dealt with by national courts. I understand that vexatious litigants who attack Churches and other religious organisations, charities and Church schools have had the door of the European Court shut in their face. That is why I have said that of the 45 applications to Strasbourg under article 9 only five have been allowed to proceed to the court.

My original point is important. The Secretary of State for Scotland made a fundamental error when he said, "Don't worry. The convention has been around for ages, and if there had been a problem dozens of schools would have been taken to court." However the European Court is international, and such courts have always locked their doors and said that such matters are best decided by national courts. We are moving into a new and dangerous area in which we will no longer have that protection. Judges will not be bound by the traditional, conservative jurisprudence of the Strasbourg court. There will be no other court to which they can refer such matters, and they will not be able to turn away vexatious litigants. They will be unable to say, "We cannot hear your case, and it would be better dealt with by another court." They will have to hear it.

By their nature, Church organisations are not rich. People put a few pennies on the collection plate, and they do not do so to fund expensive cases at the lower court, the Court of Appeal and the House of Lords. However, some vexatious litigants are well funded; that is why we are worried.

Mr. Garnier: I take it that my hon. Friend uses the expression "vexatious litigant" in the non-legal sense. Anyone who is deemed to be such a litigant would be shut out. I presume that he means a tiresome person.

Mr. Leigh: Perhaps I should not use that term. I should have referred to organisations that have particular agendas, are well funded and contrary to the Secretary of State for Scotland's assurances, will be able to take organisations to court. I hope that, in his winding-up speech, the Minister will deal with the worries of Church organisations.

5.45 pm

Mr. Hoon: I congratulate the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) on wringing every last nuance of alleged ambiguity out of the Bill's plain, straightforward English words. He was keen on the word "flexibility". As the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) said, I sought to expose the flexibility of the Opposition in the context of their attitude here and their attitude in the other place. I need not have troubled, because much flexibility was on display in Committee. I am not sure whether any Opposition Member agreed with the hon. Member for Hertsmere, but I may be unkindly wrong. If I am, I apologise to the hon. Gentleman.

I shall deal with the matters that have been raised, but if any hon. Member feels that I have not done so thoroughly, I shall return to them. Clause 2(1) provides that a court or tribunal that is determining a question in connection with a convention right must take account of the relevant jurisprudence of the European Commission, the European Court of Human Rights and the Committee of Ministers whenever it was made or given. The purpose of the provision is to point our courts towards an interpretation of convention rights that is consistent with the interpretation in Strasbourg. In other words, we are bringing home the jurisprudence of the convention rights as well as the rights themselves. Amendment No. 4 would make taking those matters into account discretionary rather than mandatory.

Mr. Heald: Does the Minister agree that there are alternatives? One is to have uniform jurisprudence in this area throughout Europe, in which case the Bill as framed may suit. The other is that the United Kingdom courts can, in the circumstances of this country, make their own judgment and interpretation of the convention. Lord Browne-Wilkinson spoke about that distinction and said that uniform jurisprudence may not be in this country's best interests.

Mr. Hoon: With respect, the hon. Gentleman puts two different points. The words "take into account" have the precise meaning of his second point. The right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) also asked about this matter. The phrase clearly allows for Strasbourg jurisprudence not to be precisely followed but to be taken into account. That is the meaning of the English words.

Mr. Heald: The Minister chooses to stress the words "take into account", but the courts may take special account of the word "must". Does he agree that the words "must take into account" impose a heavy burden on the English courts to move towards uniform jurisprudence matching that of Strasbourg? That point was made by the noble Lord Browne-Wilkinson.

Mr. Hoon: The word "must" in this context clearly means that the courts must take into account the jurisprudence. That is what the words in English say. They do not mean that there has to be uniform jurisprudence. They mean that the courts must take the jurisprudence into account in reaching a decision.

Let me suggest what the effect of the discretionary word "may" will be. It will mean that our courts might produce, on the same set of facts, different results because some may take the jurisprudence into account and some may not. That can hardly be sensible when we are trying to promote consistency in the decision making of our courts. If we allow courts not to take into account the jurisprudence, we shall end up, on similar facts, with different results. That can hardly be satisfactory.

Mr. Hogg: I agree with much of what the Minister says, but may I probe the Government's position on this a little further? Ultimately, the Government will have in

[Mr. Hogg]

mind an objective. Is it their objective that, in the generality of cases, United Kingdom courts will follow the jurisprudence of the European Court and all the other decisions and opinions there stated, so that, in the generality of cases, the ways in which this country's courts interpret the convention will be shaped by the decisions made by the European jurisprudence?

Mr. Hoon: Clearly, it is important, because the UK is bound internationally by the convention's provisions, that our law should be consistent with the general provisions of the European convention. That is already the law of the UK in relation to the international position. The Government are seeking to incorporate those international obligations into our domestic law. Therefore, it is important, ultimately, that the law of the UK, as applied by UK courts, is broadly consistent with the jurisprudence of the Strasbourg court.

That is something which, if cases were pressed to their logical and ultimate conclusion, is already necessary. Having been bound internationally to satisfy the terms of the convention, there is an obligation on the UK, as a signatory state to the European convention, to translate those decisions into our domestic legislation, so there is no legal distinction between the position today and the position that will obtain once incorporation has taken place.

Mr. Heald: In his explanation, the hon. Gentleman seemed to argue that, if the factual basis of a case were the same in Greece as in Northern Ireland, Wales, Scotland or England, the outcome would have to be the same, on the basis of his present drafting. Is that really the situation?

Mr. Hoon: I did not say that, and the hon. Gentleman knows full well that I did not say that. I congratulate him on his ingenuity. What I said was that the Opposition amendment would lead to a situation where it would be possible for a court in one part of the UK to apply the jurisprudence of the Strasbourg court and a court in another part not to take it into account, producing different results on the same facts within the UK. That cannot be satisfactory. It is important that courts are consistent in the material and information that they take into account. That is why the Opposition amendment is defective, and it is clear from comments by certain Conservative Members that they recognise that fact.

Amendment No. 5 would require the court or tribunal to "have regard to" the convention jurisprudence, rather than take it into account. Like the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve), I do not think that there is any significant difference between "have regard to" and "take into account". I struggled hard, as he did, to see what the purpose of the amendment was. Like him, I have failed to find any distinction. The latter phrase is in the Bill, and I do not see why it needs to be changed.

Amendment No. 6 would retain the reference to the jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights, but remove the reference to the opinions and decisions of the European Commission of Human Rights and the Committee of Ministers. I believe that the domestic courts should, when determining questions in connection with the convention of rights, be required to take into account all relevant decisions of the Strasbourg authorities, rather than only those of the European Court of Human Rights.

Mr. Hogg: Will the hon. Gentleman be good enough to tell the Committee the extent to which the commission and the Committee of Ministers hear argument before expressing an opinion or making a decision? I simply do not know. Therefore, I do not know to what extent the decision results from the process of argument and debate.

Mr. Hoon: It is impossible to give a precise answer to that question because, clearly, it depends on the circumstances of the particular case. An application to the commission, which first hears the application, may be so manifestly ill founded that it can be dealt with immediately, without a formal hearing. On the other hand, for those cases where clearly there is a substantial issue, there is a full hearing at present before the commission. Indeed, if the hon. Gentleman were to walk into its courtroom, he would find that it looks very much like a court and like the European Court of Human Rights. As he may know, that is one of the reasons why, after the reform of the process of the European Court of Human Rights, there will be a unified and single court from 1 November this year. Therefore, depending on the circumstances, there will be thorough argument before the commission. Indeed, its decision may look very much like a decision of the court.

It is important to recognise that many cases are settled on the basis of an opinion of the commission and do not necessarily proceed to the court, but that opinion may nevertheless be extremely relevant to the interpretation of the convention by the domestic courts. Perhaps more important still, the commission is responsible currently for decisions on the basic admissibility of complaints, including whether they are manifestly ill founded, as I have mentioned. That is an important part of the body of Strasbourg decisions and one that, on any view, it is right for our courts to take into account.

Amendment No. 7 would remove the reference to judgments "whenever made or given".

Mr. Grieve: Before the hon. Gentleman moves on, let me say that I have no difficulty with his points about the commission and its role, but I found it a little more difficult to understand why the Committee of Ministers—particularly the reference to its decisions under article 46—is slotted in at that point. He may not know the answer. There may be an obvious answer that I have completely missed, but I should be grateful to know why it was thought that that point—where one is dealing with jurisprudence, as I understand it, and previous decision making—is the appropriate place to put that reference.

Mr. Hoon: The obvious answer may be that the hon. Gentleman has missed the amendment to article 46 in protocol 11. Essentially, article 46 requires the high contracting parties, the signatory member states, to undertake to abide by final judgments in the court in any case to which they are parties. Therefore, in that sense, the decision of the Committee of Ministers is on all fours with decisions of the court. That is why that particular provision appears in its place in the Bill.

I was dealing with the point that the hon. Member for Beaconsfield made about amendment No. 7 and the reason for the inclusion of the words "whenever made or given". That phrase makes it clear that the domestic courts are to take into account not only existing jurisprudence of the convention institutions, but their future jurisprudence, which in due course will be influenced by the contribution of our courts. Removing the phrase would serve only to cast doubt on the duty to take account of future Strasbourg jurisprudence. I think that, during his debate with himself, he reached that conclusion in any event, but, for the avoidance of any doubt, I make that clear.

Having explained to Opposition Members the weakness of the various amendments that have been tabled, I hope that they will be willing to withdraw them.

6 pm

Mr. John M. Taylor (Solihull): I cannot claim to speak with any of the legal authority of so many of my distinguished right hon. and hon. Friends. I was no more than a humble high street solicitor, and the extent to which I have practised in human rights in 22 years is almost exactly nil. My interest in the debate was engaged by the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh), who began to develop his anxieties—which I share—about the distinction that we have sustained in this country between the role of Parliament and the role of the judges.

This is a political judgment—I shall not try to follow the lawyers in their legal arguments. The argument of my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough gave rise to a political question—who appoints the judges? In this country, we have the anomalous but rather magnificent position of the Lord Chancellor—splendidly ensconced as he is. He is the complete denial of the separation of powers and the rule of law, because he is, at the same time, a member of the legislature, of the Executive and of the judiciary. His record in appointing judges has been rather good.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough said, what happens if we begin to assume forms and practices not unlike those in the United States of America? We all know what happens in terms of appointments to the Supreme Court, which are made by senators—for all practical purposes—who are divided on party lines. They examine the record of the candidate, not least his personal life—it seems to be an automatic feature of American politics that someone's private life is thoroughly turned over—and his previous political positions.

During the presidency of Lyndon Baines Johnson, there was a suggestion that a man by the name of Abe Fortas be appointed to the Supreme Court, which had a vacancy in its fixed number of judges. He had developed a reputation as a liberal judge in a more junior forum, and the conservatives on Capitol hill began to argue against his appointment. In particular, they reckoned that he had a liberal record on cinema licensing and that he had let all sorts of things go through. They arranged to get all the films that Abe Fortas had permitted as film censor, and they had a constant show of the films approved by the liberal Abe Fortas. It was known as the Abe Fortas film festival. That is a fine level to which to reduce the appointment of judges.

Mr. Leigh: My hon. Friend is making a powerful point. If we go down that route, we may end up with a system similar to that of America where, from the early 19th century, the judges have claimed the last word on the constitution. Effectively, that means that, on important areas such as abortion, contraception and capital punishment, the Supreme Court and the judges, not Congress, make the law. Indeed, the Supreme Court strikes down Congress on those matters. This country may legitimise the politicisation of our judiciary, which we believe would be fatal to the way in which our constitution has developed over three or four centuries.

Mr. Taylor: I do not think that I could have put it as well as that. I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention and for adding that lustre to what will become an important record of this significant debate.

Mr. Bercow: I agree with virtually everything that my hon. Friend has said, as I ordinarily do. The only exception is that, in his references to the Lord Chancellor, he was showing excessive generosity to what might be regarded by some members of the Committee as an undeserving cause. Further to the observation of my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh), does my hon. Friend agree that the effect of this increasing arrogation of powers to the courts and the simultaneous stripping away of the powers of the elected legislature threaten to weaken the umbilical cord that has traditionally linked the Government of this country with the people who elect the Government?

Mr. Taylor: That is the fear at the heart of the matter. Whatever references I may have made to the Lord Chancellor were references to an office, and not to any particular incumbent. I had the great honour of serving a previous incumbent in this House, and I hold the office in high regard.

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend has endorsed what my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) said—that we are giving judges the final say on a range of rights. However, that is surely the consequence of any Bill of Rights. It is, in fact, the logical objection to the Bill of Rights. Once we have accepted a Bill of Rights—as we have done by adopting the convention—the question for this Committee and this House is whether the judge in question is a European-based or a UK-based judge. That is the narrow question we face, rather than the broad issue so eloquently put by my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough.

Mr. Taylor: My right hon. and learned Friend contends that the adoption of the convention into domestic law is the beginning of a Bill of Rights. I offer an alternative interpretation—that it is perhaps the beginning of a written constitution. He would be welcome to intervene on me on that matter if he wished to do so.

Mr. Hogg: Of course it is—this is indeed a Bill of Rights. It does indeed mean a written constitution, and my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough—

The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. The right hon. and learned Gentleman and other hon. Members are straying further and further from the amendment. The hon. Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor) must get back to the amendment.

Mr. Taylor: I shall get back to it—if I was ever there. The correct way for me to bring my speech to a

[Mr. Taylor]

conclusion is to remind the Committee that it is a part of our culture, our idiom and all that we have developed in this great country in our great history that the judges defer to Parliament. That point has not been made in the debate. The judges have a customary form of words with which they defer to Parliament—as seen in many law reports—which is "Parliament in its wisdom". That is the view of the judges towards Parliament, and it is a good attitude for them to take.

Mr. Garnier: I do not know whether my hon. Friend intended to or not, but he was on point in at least some of his remarks. Clause 2(1)(a) refers to a

"judgment, decision, declaration or advisory opinion of the European Court of Human Rights."

If, in his 22 years as a solicitor, my hon. Friend has read some of the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights, he will have seen that, in some cases, the court says candidly that it sees the convention and the development of its rights as a constitutional Bill of Rights. The court makes no secret of that.

Mr. Taylor: I am very grateful to my hon. and learned Friend for comforting me, even at the conclusion of my speech. I take that solace and endorsement very kindly. I have—to answer his question—read judgments of the Court. Furthermore, having served briefly as a member of the Council of Europe, I have also read the convention. I remind myself that the convention was written largely by British lawyers. We were the first to initial it, and the first to endorse it. It is not exactly an alien creature, except perhaps in its new constitutional setting.

My initial view of the matter generally was that part of the British people's objection to judgments made in Strasbourg was, more or less, that they were made in Strasbourg by people who were not citizens of the United Kingdom, and whose surnames made it sound as if they were not citizens of the United Kingdom. Initially, I felt that the British people would be happier with the convention, feel kinder towards it and have greater respect for its general authority if it were incorporated into domestic law, and if contentious human rights issues could be decided by English and Welsh judges in law courts in the Strand.

Mr. Lord, that was my speech, and those were some of the points that I wanted to make. I am very glad of the opportunity to be able to do so.

Mr. Heald: Many hon. Members in the Chamber are lawyers. I make that confession—mea culpa.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Jack Straw): It is a badge of honour.

Mr. Heald: I am pleased to hear the Home Secretary say that, and I certainly would not disagree with it.

I do not know how many hon. Members in the Chamber have experience of taking human rights cases to the European Court of Human Rights. I have not. However, over many years, I have had experience of appearing in the English courts and being impressed by the quality of our judges and the way in which the law is allowed to interact with the circumstances within our island. I think that many of us want to protect the history and quality of our judges being able to interpret the law based on the conditions within our island—or in England and Wales, which is the jurisdiction in which I practise.

Above all, our judiciary do not involve themselves in political decisions, or in decisions that involve interpreting high-sounding and vague principles—the type of imprecise statements in the European convention on human rights itself.

In our jurisdiction, the convention has operated so that our judges have had no involvement with it. Our judges have always made their decisions in the traditional manner, although there has also been the right of recourse to the European Court of Human Rights when that is appropriate.

Mr. Clappison: My hon. Friend is making an extremely valuable point. Is he aware of the recent decision of Lord Justice Mustill, in which he drew attention to the great difference between the general terms in which judgments are given in the European Court of Human Rights and the more precise terms in which they are given in the United Kingdom? Does my hon. Friend agree that there can be a very big difference between the two?

Mr. Heald: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. There is a danger that, if we import into our judges' jurisdiction the idea that vague and imprecise concepts can be the subject of their jurisprudence, and that they can reach that type of decision, the overall system may become contaminated, changing our current precise practice of the law—which has been a proud part of our history—into a much more vague, imprecise and undoubtedly high-sounding practice. Ultimately, however, it will result in political judgments being made.

Mr. Grieve: I do not disagree with any of the sentiments expressed by my hon. Friend. Many judgments of the European Court of Human Rights seem to be very woolly and general. Does he not think that English judges are likely to apply their minds to such decisions—as they have had to do to decisions of the European Court of Justice, which have the same quality of woolliness—and succeed in extrapolating basic principles from that woolliness? They have subsequently applied those principles very specifically—so greatly improving jurisprudence, and case law, in this case, in relation to the convention.

Mr. Heald: My hon. Friend expresses the contrary viewpoint, with which I was about to deal. If our judges are allowed to be pioneers in the matter, they will not half improve that sphere of jurisprudence across Europe, especially as it operates for United Kingdom citizens—*[Interruption.]* The Minister does not like the way in which I have described the argument. However, I think that he himself would accept that his argument is that our judges should have an input into the matter and be able to define and deal with cases on the basis of the European convention.

I do not accept that argument. I think that there is a danger of contaminating our system and of changing it, so that it conducts not a precise legal exercise, as it currently does, but a rather vague, woolly and rather imprecise one, as the convention demands.

6.15 pm

In the other place, Lord McCluskey—who is no Conservative, but, none the less, a former Law Officer—said:

"The present Bill does a great deal to achieve a remarkable and reasonable compromise. However, I still believe that it offends against points of fundamental principle. By incorporating into our domestic law vague, imprecise and high sounding statements of legal rights, we hand what is truly legislative power away from a democratic and accountable Parliament to an appointed, unelected and unaccountable judiciary."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 3 November 1997; Vol. 582, c. 1266.]

Mr. Hogg: That is already the position. Once we subscribed to the convention, that was the consequence. The question that the Committee and the House will have continually to face is whether interpretation of existing provisions under the existing convention is best entrusted exclusively to the courts in Strasbourg or, in the first instance, to courts in the United Kingdom. Speaking for myself, at first instance, I prefer having a United Kingdom judicial interpretation to not having one.

Mr. Heald: My right hon. and learned Friend has made the contrary argument that I tried to describe. I do not know whether he accepts that that was the contrary view that I was trying to describe.

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend did describe it.

Mr. Heald: The question is the effect on domestic jurisdiction of incorporating such vague principles. My view—like Lord McCluskey's—is that it would be bad for our law and our tradition in the courts of England and Wales.

Mr. Bercow: My hon. Friend is advancing a powerful argument. Does he agree that, in contemplating the fears that he has expressed, it is not necessary for Committee members to gaze into the crystal ball, when we can already for ourselves read the book? Is it not the case that—precisely as a result of the ambiguity of existing European law, of the European convention and of European treaties—much political rancour within and between member states of the European Union has resulted? The precise fear that he has expressed has already been justified and vindicated by the train of events that have occurred over many years.

Mr. Heald: There is a trade-off between the important declaratory effect of the convention itself and the price that one pays for it, which is an element of—almost certainly political—interference in the affairs of the countries that sign the convention. I accept that that is a proper concern for my hon. Friend.

The Minister tried to allay my fears about the use of the word "must" in clause 2, which would be changed by amendment No. 4. If one accepts the argument made by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg), which I have described as the contrary argument—that our judges should decide these matters—how does one achieve the type of benefits described by my right hon. and learned Friend: our judges being able to consider the convention in the light of the circumstances within the country in which they exercise their discretion—England and Wales—so that they can give us the benefit of importing their wisdom to the convention and considering local circumstances?

If judges are going to be required, as the word "must" implies they will be, to take into account the judgments, decisions, declarations and advisory opinions of the European Court of Human Rights, we are going down the route of trying to achieve a sort of international jurisprudence—a uniform jurisprudence—for the convention. That is to say that the convention is not one that all countries ratify and are then able to interpret according to their own individual circumstances, but one that is introduced and results in a case in Greece determining the outcome of a case in England.

I would argue against that, if one accepts the argument advanced by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham, which I do not, one has to say that it is important that English judges should be able to take account of English conditions when making their decisions. The mandatory quality of the word "must" is wrong—the word should be "may".

Mr. Hogg: I do not like to defend the Parliamentary Secretary, but I shall in this case. He will say, rightly, that the word "must" requires a court to take into account—have regard to—the decisions about which we have been talking, and that it would be impossible to have a situation in which the courts in Scotland and in England might or might not do so. There must be a duty on the courts to have regard, but the phrase "to have regard" does not oblige the courts to adopt. There is a difference between "having regard to" and "being bound by", and the form of words used does not require the courts to be bound by the decisions in question.

Mr. Heald: I fully appreciate my right hon. and learned Friend's point—that the fact that the courts must take account of those decisions does not mean that they have to follow the judgment. However, my point, which is much the same point as was made by the noble Lord Browne-Wilkinson, is that, in practice, there is encouragement to follow and produce a uniform jurisprudence once one has got as far as saying "must". The argument my right hon. and learned Friend deploys makes my point for me, because Scotland is a separate jurisdiction, and, once one has made the concession of saying that a factual basis in one country for legal purposes must mean that the outcome—or at least the way in which the jurisprudence is dealt with—is the same in another country, one is saying that there should be a uniform jurisprudence.

I do not accept that. The best way in which the convention could be incorporated in English law, although I do not want that to happen, would be to allow the English courts to look at the circumstances in England and apply their own judgment as to whether or not to take account of the judgments, decisions, declarations or advisory opinions of the European Court of Human Rights. What the courts will have to take account of is the wording of the convention itself, and I do not see why we

[Mr. Heald]

cannot have a system in which each court in each country that has the convention can make its decisions in the light of that country's own circumstances and traditions.

Mr. Hoon: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman believes all the rhetoric he is using, but will he put it to the test by applying the same arguments to the decisions of the European Court of Justice at Luxembourg?

Mr. Heald: The Minister's point is not really valid—he laughs, but I have seen him laugh and enjoy himself many times over the years. The European Union is a form of grouping very different from that which takes in the countries that have signed the European convention on human rights—there may be parallels, but the body and the body of law are not the same.

Mr. Garnier: May I help my hon. Friend by pointing out that the Minister's point is false? Under the treaty governing the European Union, which deals with the European Court of Justice, we are obliged to subordinate our legislation to that of the decisions of the European Court of Justice, so there is no genuine parallel of the sort suggested.

Mr. Heald: I am grateful to my hon. and learned Friend for that point, which makes it game, set and match.

Mr. Leigh: May I, too, assist my hon. Friend in rebutting the attack on his arguments by our right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg)? My right hon. and learned Friend appears to be suggesting that it is better to have British judges making the decisions than to have European judges making them.

Can my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald) quote the remarks made by a distinguished former Law Officer in a previous Labour Government, Lord McCluskey, who dealt precisely with that point? He started by saying that we were effectively "empowering judicial legislation", and that, in general terms, we would be giving the same power to judges here as are enjoyed by judges in the United States. He went on to make a powerful point, which answers the one made by my right hon. and learned Friend, saying:

"Parliament will at once move to bring the law into line with what judges say the convention says it is. In fact, Parliament has no option if the Strasbourg Court so decides."

He went on:

"The certain aim of British judges will be to interpret the convention in the way that they think the Strasbourg Court will. Otherwise, they will be overturned in Strasbourg."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 3 November 1997; Vol. 582, c. 1267.]

Mr. Heald: That is such an eloquent statement of my point that I need not add to it.

In answer to the Minister's rather footling point, my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) said, rightly, that there was no direct and clear parallel between the European Court of Justice and the European Court of Human Rights. The classic statement of that was made in the other place by the Lord Chancellor, who conceded that the United Kingdom was

"not . . . bound . . . to follow the court's judgments in cases to which it has not been a party".—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 19 January 1998; Vol. 584, c. 1271.]

That is not the case in respect of the European Court of Justice, and I am surprised that the Minister, with all his years of learning in the law, was not aware of that.

Mr. Hogg: I am sorry to speak again—although this is Committee, so one is entitled to do so—but I should like to respond to what my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) said. His analysis of the role of the courts in this country runs something like this: the courts in the United Kingdom will interpret the convention in the way they think that the court in Strasbourg will interpret it; and therefore no benefit will flow from having brought the convention back to this country. That is his position, and it is one that deserves serious attention, because it is advanced by my hon. Friend and supported by others.

I do not agree with that position, because the doctrine of margin of appreciation means that the Strasbourg court will itself place great weight on the interpretation that the courts in this country place on the language of the convention. Therefore, the effect of bringing the convention back to the United Kingdom will be to give the courts of this country an important—indeed, paramount—role in the interpretation of the convention in so far as it bites on circumstances in this country.

It is a mistake to think that the courts in this country will simply seek to adopt what they deem would have been the ultimate decision made in Strasbourg, had the Strasbourg court determined the matter in the first instance. Therefore, on that point, I disagree profoundly with my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough.

6.30 pm

Mr. Clappison: This has been a very interesting and useful debate, on an important subject that is well worth exploring. I shall deal with a few of the points raised by my hon. Friends.

My hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) made a very important point about the effect of decisions taken some time ago, and whether equal weight should be given to them. It is common sense that we should not be bound too much by practices of the past.

Although my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) made certain technical points about the amendments, he agreed with the thrust of what we are seeking to do and the issues that we are trying to explore.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) made some very important points arising from his general concern about the approach of the European court and his wish to see a similarly cautious approach following incorporation.

The Minister was not entirely correct to suggest that European Court jurisprudence will be the same following incorporation. The courts have decided in several cases that they cannot take jurisprudence into account as though it had already been incorporated into our law. In the fairly recent Brind case, as well as many others, the higher

courts have made that explicit. They can use jurisprudence as an aid to interpretation, because they have taken the view that Parliament would not want to legislate inconsistently with the convention, but they have not taken the view that the position now is the same as it would be following incorporation should we eventually decide to incorporate the convention.

My hon. Friend the Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor) made an important speech, which I enjoyed. His remarks were the antidote to the comments of all those who speak about bringing rights home—as though they had ever left this place. This Parliament is the guarantor of our rights, and we have faith in its record as the defender of our liberties.

Without wishing to be prejudiced against the European convention on human rights, the mere fact that a document contains rights and describes itself as a Bill of Rights or a written guarantee of rights is, on historical evidence, no guarantee of those rights. The other day I read a document that contained a very fine statement of human rights. It guaranteed, it said, freedom of speech, freedom of movement and freedom of thought and conscience. Then I saw that it was the constitution of the Soviet Union of 1936. I do not think that any of us would judge that as the fountainhead of human rights.

I listened carefully to the Minister. He has taken the debate on the words "must take into account" a little further since it was discussed in the other place. He began by saying that there was no difference between our amendments and what is in the Bill, but then said that the amendments were technically defective. There is a slight contradiction in that. None the less, we got out of the Minister in the end the measure of flexibility for which we have been looking.

It has been our objective all along to try to ascertain just how flexible the Government are prepared to allow our courts to be through the use of the term "must take in account". Since the matter has been taken a little further, I do not propose to press the amendment to a vote. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Mr. Hoon: I beg to move amendment No. 119, in page 2, line 18, leave out 'Lord Advocate or'.

The Second Deputy Chairman: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Government amendments Nos. 126 and 127.

Mr. Hoon: The amendments are purely technical, arising out of the Scotland Bill and the transfer of powers to the Scottish Executive when it is established. I shall try to explain the matter as briefly as I can.

The Scotland Bill will provide for any powers that the Lord Advocate has to make subordinate legislation to be transferred either to Scottish Ministers or to the Secretary of State for Scotland, depending on whether they relate to devolved or reserved matters. Those include the power to make procedural rules relating to tribunals, which is referred to in clauses 2(3)(a) and 7(11)(b) of the Human Rights Bill. The effect of the technical amendments is to remove references to the Lord Advocate in those clauses, and therefore to pave the way for the transfer of powers that will take place when the Scottish Executive comes into being.

Mr. Clappison: I appreciate that the amendments are technical. The Minister has explained that references to the Lord Advocate concerning the rule-making power are to be omitted because they are contingent on devolution in Scotland. Will he assist the Committee by telling us who will end up with that rule-making power following these technical amendments?

Mr. Hoon: That will clearly depend on whether the matters are devolved or reserved. The Scotland Bill clearly indicates which are which. Amendments to the Human Rights Bill are necessary in order to ensure that, depending on whether the matters are reserved or devolved, they go in the appropriate direction.

Mr. Grieve: That is not quite right—is it? Is not the reality that the Government have not sorted out where the powers are to lie under the devolved legislation? The Scotland Bill does not make it clear where some of the powers will reside. I thought that that was unfinished business.

Mr. Hoon: The Scottish legislation provides that the Lord Advocate and the Solicitor-General for Scotland will cease to be members of the United Kingdom Government, and become members of the Scottish Executive. It is therefore necessary, in the context of references to the Lord Advocate, to ensure that the powers enjoyed are either exercised in relation to reserved matters by the Secretary of State for Scotland or such other appropriate Minister as he or she should ultimately designate, or dealt with as devolved matters through the Scottish Executive.

Mr. Clappison: If the Minister is saying that the powers will be either devolved or reserved, will he tell us which the Government wish them to be?

Mr. Hoon: It is not a matter for the Government to wish or desire. The Scottish legislation specifies what is devolved and what is reserved. The amendments are purely consequential on, and, in effect, tidy up, matters that have arisen from that legislation.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendment made: No. 137, in page 2, leave out lines 22 to 35.—*[Mr. Hoon.]*

Question proposed, That the clause, as amended, stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Clappison: I should like to highlight a point that I made in a brief intervention on my hon. Friend the Member for North–East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald). We, and therefore the judges, are entering new territory It is important that we spend time getting this right, and recognise the difficulties that judges will face in interpreting the European legislation and how it will mean a change in the judicial way of thinking. In the course of debates on clause 2, we have tried to create a partnership between judges and Parliament, of which it is important for us to keep sight. We shall return to the theme.

Mrs. May: I should like to refer to debates on the first allotted day in Committee, which relate to clause 2 and amendment No. 137. I hope that the Minister will reiterate that the Government have taken on board the concerns expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) and others on the extent to which the concerns of the Churches should be taken

[Mrs. May]

into account in the context of the Bill. A long debate in the other place focused on whether, in taking into account various aspects of decisions in clause 2, the Bill should also require the issue of religious faith to be taken into account.

The Home Secretary made it clear that the Government were very alive to the concerns that the Churches had expressed. It is important that we do not allow the debate on clause stand part to pass without asking the Government to reiterate their assurance. The Churches are greatly concerned about the impact of the Bill. I hope that the Minister will be able to assure us again.

Mr. Hoon: I am delighted to give the Committee that assurance, in response to the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May). My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary set out precisely and very clearly the Government's position during debates on clause 1. I am entirely happy to endorse it.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 2, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 3

LEGISLATION

Mr. Clappison: I beg to move amendment No. 9, in page 2, line 37, leave out 'possible' and insert 'reasonable'.

The Second Deputy Chairman: With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following: Amendment No. 13, in page 2, line 38, after 'legislation', insert 'where ambiguous'.

Amendment No. 14, in page 2, line 38, leave out 'read and given effect' and insert 'interpreted'.

Amendment No. 101, in page 2, line 38, after 'way', insert

'which reflects the intentions of Parliament and'.

Amendment No. 26, in clause 6, page 4, line 13, after 'cannot', insert 'reasonably'.

New clause 8—*Margin of appreciation*—

'In any proceedings in which a court is considering the question of whether primary or subordinate legislation is compatible with a Convention Right, full regard shall be had to the margin of appreciation accorded to a member state in relation to its statute or common law.'.

Mr. Clappison: The amendments are exploratory. Clause 3 deals with the way in which United Kingdom courts are to interpret legislation following incorporation. That is an important issue, and we want to ensure that the clearly expressed will of Parliament is heeded if incorporation takes place.

Amendment No. 13 explores that issue. We are conscious of the fact that it reflects a current pre-incorporation practice of the courts, in that the convention can be relied on as a guide to the interpretation of Acts of Parliament where the domestic court finds that the relevant statutory provision is ambiguous. That rests on the basis that Parliament can be presumed to have legislated in a manner consistent with Britain's treaty obligations.

Next we wish to explore how the courts are to go about what is required of them under clause 4. Earlier this afternoon, we were told that the Government were keen on plain English and consistency in language, and that words had to be given their ordinary meanings, so we were slightly intrigued to see the term "read and given effect" in clause 3. We were even more intrigued when we looked at the heading—"Interpretation of legislation"—and we wondered why the body of the clause did not simply use the term "interpreted" rather than the term "read and given effect". Is there any significance in the difference? We look to the Government to tell us what, if anything, is meant by it.

Amendment No. 101 explores the question of interpreting legislation in a way that reflects the intentions of Parliament. We think that that is important. The other amendments in the group are similar. We want to ensure that the will of Parliament is not overridden in inappropriate circumstances. If the courts find that legislation is incompatible, the proper course under the Bill is for a declaration of incompatibility to be made.

Although new clause 8 is important, I hope that the Committee will forgive me if I speak only briefly about it, because we have already been through the arguments about the margin of appreciation, which we regard as an important doctrine. We want to put those words in the Bill because we want that doctrine to be reflected in our courts when they apply the European convention.

The amendments explore important issues, and we look to the Government for a constructive and clear response.

Mrs. May: I shall concentrate my brief comments on amendment No. 101 and new clause 8, because both are at the heart of the concerns expressed by some of my right hon. and hon. Friends in our earlier debates, both on the first day in Committee and today, about the relationship between the courts and Parliament.

The importance of that relationship was ably described by my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor), who, in an earlier debate, talked about the way in which it has stood the test of time and maintained human rights in this country for many hundreds of years. We should retain that relationship, and there is a genuine concern about the extent to which the implications of the Bill will strike at its heart, and at the distinction of powers between the judiciary and Parliament.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) said in his summing up of the first group of amendments tabled to clause 2, Parliament has been the defender and protector of human rights in this country for many years—a position that has stood the test of time—yet there is concern about the Bill's impact on the role of Parliament as the protector of human rights in the United Kingdom.

The Government have stated their position several times—that they do not intend that relationship to be usurped and that they respect the role of Parliament as it has been described. The intention of amendment No. 101 is to make the role of Parliament clearer on the face of

the Bill and to draw attention to it. It would insert words into clause 3(1) so that it would read:

"primary legislation and subordinate legislation must be read and given effect in a way which reflects the intentions of Parliament",

as well as

"in a way which is compatible with the Convention rights."

6.45 pm

It is important to explore that issue with the Government and to ensure that their intentions are clear. We reiterate the importance of the requirement that the will and intentions of Parliament should be taken into account. The Bill will give more powers to the judiciary in this country, and it is important that we continue to explore the relationship that will exist after enactment, assuming that the Bill is passed—it does not need the power of Mystic Meg to guess that it will be passed.

The intentions of Parliament should be referred to in the Bill. If I understand the notes on clauses correctly, the Government have conceded that

"there comes a point when an interpretation must yield to the intention of Parliament notwithstanding that, in the result, the legislation is incompatible with the Convention rights."

Amendment No. 101, like several of our other amendments, would put words in the Bill to give effect to the intention that the Government have expressed.

Many references have been made to the concept of the margin of appreciation. New clause 8 would specify on the face of the Bill that

"full regard shall be had to the margin of appreciation".

I believe that the importance of that concept is accepted on both sides of the Chamber, but, as the Bill stands, it is not expressly referred to or explicitly stated.

The European Court of Human Rights has already allowed for the concept of the margin of appreciation, to respect the sovereignty of each nation state that is signatory to the convention. If new clause 8 were added to the Bill, rather than our simply accepting that that practice has occurred over the years, the concept would appear explicitly in the Bill. That would be useful in drawing to the attention of the United Kingdom courts that issue and the importance that Parliament attaches to it—an attitude that is shared and respected throughout the House of Commons. I therefore hope that the Government will look favourably on new clause 8.

Mr. David Maclean (Penrith and The Border): I wish to speak briefly on this group of amendments. I am deeply concerned about the proposal that the judiciary should have the right to strike down subordinate legislation without any reference to Parliament. The Committee will be fed up with hearing me say, as I now do for the third time in two days, that the Home Secretary is a reasonable man—

The Second Deputy Chairman: Order. I think that the right hon. Gentleman is on the wrong group of amendments. The amendment to which he refers comes later.

Mr. Maclean: I beg your pardon, Mr. Lord. I wished to talk about amendment No. 17.

Mr. Hogg: The use in the clause of the word "possible" causes me some concern, as it may encourage the courts to give an unduly artificial interpretation to statutory language. I support amendment No. 9, as it substitutes "reasonable" for "possible".

An argument that may appeal to the Home Secretary is that, once one has started in one statutory context to give language an artificial meaning, there is a danger that it could serve as a precedent and be carried over into other interpretations in a different context: a word that has a particular meaning in one statute may serve as a precedent for the interpretation of that word in a different context. I prefer the word "reasonable" to "possible", as suggested in the amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison). A declaration of incompatibility is the proper remedy if the statute cannot properly and reasonably be interpreted in a way that is compatible with the convention.

A different point arises from new clause 8, on which I shall follow from where my hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) left off. It is clear and right that a court should be slow to depart from the decisions of a Parliament in concluding that a Parliament has derogated from convention rights—that has long been accepted in the jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights. I think it right that that should be specified in the Bill, as the Bill will guide the United Kingdom courts in their approach to the convention.

The statute should expressly state that the courts should have due regard to the expressions of parliamentary will, in the hope that the courts will be slow to hold that Parliament has departed and derogated from convention rights. I believe that there is an advantage in specifying in the Bill the concept of a margin of appreciation.

Mr. Paul Stinchcombe (Wellingborough): I wish to reply to some of the points made by the right hon. and learned Member for North Hykeham and Sleaford—

Mr. Hogg: Sleaford and North Hykeham.

Mr. Stinchcombe: I was close.

The points made by the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) were seductively made, but they were wrong in principle and dangerous in effect. Clause 3(1) and clause 6(1) are the provisions that truly give the Bill teeth—if rights are to be brought home, it will be precisely because of those provisions. Clause 3(1) states:

"So far as it is possible to do so, primary legislation and subordinate legislation must be read and given effect in a way which is compatible with Convention rights."

Paragraphs 2.7 and 2.8 of the White Paper "Rights Brought Home" make it clear that those words are intended to go beyond pre-existing law:

"This goes beyond the present rule which enables the courts to take the Convention into account in resolving any ambiguity in a legislative provision. The courts will be required to interpret legislation so as to uphold the Convention rights unless legislation itself is so clearly incompatible with the convention that it is impossible so to do."

It is precisely because of the opening words of the clause and their effect that convention law will be moved forward in this country in a way that I believe is desirable.

Mr. Grieve: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point but, like my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for

[Mr. Grieve]

Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg), I want to know whether the construction of those words will force courts into making artificial interpretations. Would it not be better for the courts to tell Parliament that primary or subordinate legislation was incompatible with the convention than—as might happen under the current wording—to do painful gymnastic exercises to make existing legislation fit convention principles when it cannot?

Mr. Stinchcombe: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's argument, but I reject it—I shall invite my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary to confirm that clause 3(1) was constructed in accordance with paragraphs 2.7 and 2.8 of the White Paper precisely to avoid such problems.

Hon. Members may know that there has been some academic discussion about the opening words of the clause. Sir William Wade, who is a member of the chambers of which I was a member before I came to the House, and the hon. Michael Beloff, who is head of those chambers, have publicly disagreed in academic articles and speeches about the meaning of the words. It is now a perfectly appropriate time, given Pepper *v.* Hart, for my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary to resolve the matter once and for all. We must make it clear that the words in clause 3(1) mean what they say and what we said that they meant in paragraph 2.7 of the White Paper—the words go beyond the present rule and, wherever any interpretation of legislation can be made so as to uphold convention rights, that is what the courts must be invited to do.

Mr. Swayne: I hope that the Home Secretary will confirm, as the hon. Member for Wellingborough (Mr. Stinchcombe) requested, that that is the plain meaning of the words. I fear that the courts will avoid the clear parliamentary intention of legislation and do the gymnastics that my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) described to accommodate the word "possible"; I fear that they will place a construction on legislation to make it compatible with the convention when it clearly is not, so circumventing the proper remedy in the Bill, which is to bring the matter back to Parliament.

Mr. Straw: This has been a short, but interesting, debate on one of the most fundamental issues about the method that we have chosen to incorporate the European convention on human rights in British law. As hon. Members from both sides of the Chamber will understand, there was considerable debate inside the Labour party and between the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats before the election, and much consideration by the Government after the election, about the form that incorporation should take.

As the White Paper makes clear, we considered how other common law countries had incorporated Bills of Rights. We examined how Canada and New Zealand—both outside the continent of Europe—had dealt with similar issues and whether a Bill of Rights could appropriately be entrenched as a basic and fundamental law with a higher status than the law passed by their Parliaments. We decided to reject Canada's approach, which was, in effect, to establish a fundamental law that, in certain circumstances, took precedence over laws passed by its Parliament. We also considered the New Zealand model. We came up with our own approach—it is a British answer to a British problem—fundamental to which is the sovereignty and supremacy of Parliament.

I have never believed—my colleagues share this view—that it would be sensible in this country to have a supreme court that could override the will of Parliament. Indeed, such a system would be extremely dangerous without a written or codified constitution or—as applies in the United States and almost all other constitutions—the mechanisms to override the fundamental law as laid down by a supreme court.

It would mean that judges in a British supreme court would be accorded more power than is, in practice, accorded to US Supreme Court judges, whose decisions can, in the final analysis, be overridden by the popular will through an amendment to the constitution—without such a facility to override judges who are unelected or who were elected many years before, the democratic processes cannot operate effectively.

For that reason, we decided that, while of course the courts would have clear powers to apply the European convention—without that, we would not be bringing rights home—ultimately Parliament's will would prevail. We have applied that in a number of ways which I shall place on record before answering the specific points that have been raised by hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber.

Clause 19 requires a Minister introducing a new measure to

"make a statement to the effect that in his view the provisions of the legislation are or are not compatible with the Convention rights"

or say that he is unable to make such a statement.

7 pm

Nothing could be more compatible with the sovereignty of Parliament than the fact that the Bill incorporating the convention on human rights refers to the possibility—that may happen week by week—that Ministers have to apply it to future legislation. That is not to say that they have to force future Bills into the apparent straitjacket of the convention; they simply have to make a statement to the House on whether a measure is compatible with the European convention, and therefore with the Bill.

Obviously, it will be incumbent on Ministers—certainly under the present Administration—to do their best to ensure that Bills are compatible with the convention. Indeed, that practice was followed for many years by the previous Administration. They also subscribed to decent human rights, and for the practical reason that, if Bills were introduced that were knowingly incompatible with the convention, the Government could easily end up in trouble, if not with United Kingdom courts, with the European Court of Human Rights, which in practice has a facility to override Parliament so long as Parliament decides to accede to the convention. That is the first way in which we respect the sovereignty of the House.

The second is through clause 3, which is very clear. I should let the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) know that we will go on to discussing its detailed wording—it was easier to refer to his constituency when he represented the former Prime Minister's home town, which was not such a mouthful.

Clause 3(1) states:

"So far as it is possible to do so, primary legislation and subordinate legislation must be read and given effect in a way that is compatible with the Convention rights."

Subsection (2)(b) makes it absolutely clear that

"This section . . . does not affect the validity, continuing operation or enforcement of any incompatible primary legislation".

The issue of incompatibility of legislation can be addressed only by the higher courts. I should explain to the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) that no group of senior judges looking at the clause will come to any other view but that the intention of Parliament is that there may be legislation that is incompatible with the convention—either in future or previously—and, that even if it is found to be incompatible, it will remain in force unless and until the House, by accelerated or normal procedure, decides otherwise.

Mr. Hogg: The Home Secretary has been making the point that, in this context, the Government are keen not to undermine parliamentary sovereignty. Does he understand that Opposition Members who have studied the argument would have much greater confidence in that approach had he not adopted the remedial order procedure set out in the Bill, which provides for affirmative resolutions for changing primary legislation? We would feel very much happier if he gave sympathetic consideration to amendment No. 64 to clause 10. We would then have much greater confidence in his assertion that he is not seeking to undermine parliamentary sovereignty.

Mr. Straw: The right hon. and learned Gentleman raises an important point that he also made on Second Reading. I have been considering it, but I shall make no promises, except to say that I found it a cogent argument. It is by no means the only occasion on which the right hon. and learned Gentleman has made a cogent argument, and I listened to him with great care. We shall discuss the matter in more detail when we reach clause 10, but our intention is that the procedure under clause 10 should be used not to bypass the will of the House, but simply to deal with practical problems that may arise. I hope to provide the right hon. and learned Gentleman with a satisfactory explanation when we reach clause 10 and, if I cannot, I shall take further account of his remarks.

Even on the most dismal interpretation of clause 10, the will of the House still prevails. It may be a truncated procedure, but it certainly does not give the courts the power to say what the law of the land should be. We are seeking to provide a truncated procedure with rather more care than the previous Administration took with the famous Henry VIII clauses on deregulation, for example.

I shall now respond to some of the specific points that have been raised during the debate, although I hope that Opposition Members will accept that I have dealt with the gravamen of their points in some detail.

Amendment No. 9 would require legislation to be construed in accordance with convention rights so far as it is "reasonable" to do so, rather than so far as it is "possible" to do so. The likely result—and no doubt the intention—is that the courts would not go so far down the road of interpreting legislation as they would under the terms of clause 3 as it stands.

As I have said, we want the courts to strive to find an interpretation of legislation that is consistent with convention rights, so far as the plain words of the legislation allow, and only in the last resort to conclude that the legislation is simply incompatible with them. The Opposition want the courts to arrive somewhat earlier at the conclusion that the legislation is simply incompatible with the convention. I cannot see what could be gained by that, bearing in mind our responsibilities under the convention, apart from the prospect of more cases ending up in Strasbourg because fewer people would be satisfied with the interpretation of the United Kingdom courts.

Mr. Hogg: There are at least two disadvantages to the Home Secretary's argument. First, the courts may be required to give a strained meaning to language, and that in principle is not a good thing. Secondly, if they give a strained meaning to language in the context of this legislation, it could serve as a precedent that reads across and guides courts in their interpretation of language that is wholly outwith the statute under discussion.

Mr. Straw: The right hon. and learned Gentleman is right on his second point. The legal section of the House of Commons Library, like any other law library, has wonderful tomes—of which, no doubt, the right hon. and learned Gentleman has made good use, as I did in my brief practice—of words and phrases judicially interpreted. Of course interpretation by one of the higher courts of a particular word will read across into many other circumstances, often anticipated. That is why, as the right hon. and learned Gentleman knows better than I do, parliamentary counsel is so keen on one word rather than another.

I am not convinced, however, by the right hon. and learned Gentleman's first point that the courts will contort the meaning of words until they lose their meaning altogether. In many cases, particularly in respect of statutory interpretation, the whole task of the court is not to make up the law, but to say what it means where that is not clear or where its application in particular circumstances is not clear. The courts are well versed in the interpretation of the law and of Parliament's intention.

Let me say in reply to a point made by the hon. Member for Maidenhead that there was a time when all the courts could do to divine the intention of Parliament was to apply themselves to the words on the face of any Act. Now, following Pepper *v.* Hart, they are able to look behind that and, not least, to look at the words used by Ministers. I do not think the courts will need to apply themselves to the words that I am about to use, but, for the avoidance of doubt, I will say that it is not our intention that the courts, in applying what is now clause 3, should contort the meaning of words to produce implausible or incredible meanings. I am talking about plain words in what is actually a clear Bill with plain language—with the intention of Parliament set out in *Hansard*, should the courts wish to refer to it.

Mr. Grieve: Perhaps the clause should say "possible and reasonable", but the right hon. Gentleman might then say that the courts are always supposed to be reasonable, so it is not necessary to include that word.

Mr. Straw: Ever since the Wednesbury decision, the courts have chided others for being unreasonable, so it is difficult to imagine them not being reasonable. If we had used just the word "reasonable", we would have created a subjective test. "Possible" is different. It means,

[Mr. Straw]

"What is the possible interpretation? Let us look at this set of words and the possible interpretations." My bet is—without putting this in the Bill—

Mr. Clappison: How much?

Mr. Straw: More than I have placed on a horse in the Derby, but the amount remains a matter between me and my bookmaker.

My bet is that the courts will say that they will adopt a reasonable approach. As the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) said, they would be the last to admit to adopting an unreasonable approach. I am comfortable with the words in the Bill and I do not believe that the courts will contort them in the way that hon. Members implied.

I come back to the point about parliamentary sovereignty. If the higher courts come up with an interpretation that makes the intention of Parliament risible and means that legislation is applied in a way that is unreasonable and has ridiculous results, it is open to the House to change the decision. For example, in the Crime and Disorder Bill we are overturning the decision of the court in Regina *v.* Khan—

Mr. Clappison: No, you are not.

Mr. Straw: With great respect, we are; we are abolishing the concept of doli incapax—*[Interruption.]* I hope that we are overturning Khan, but I will not go any further into that—*[Interruption.]* It is open to the House—it is its ultimate right—to change a decision.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr. Stinchcombe) asked which of the academics I backed. I back those who have read the plain words in this clause and take the view that it moves us on from the way in which the courts currently interpret convention legislation. Hon. Members should feel reassured by the fact that our courts have had quite a lot of experience in interpreting the convention. Where there is ambiguity, they come down on the side of the convention.

Just before the general election, I amused myself by reading *The Times* law reports. I try to do that most days. There was a very technical report about the interpretation of a contract. To resolve the issue, the Court of Appeal had wisely looked at the European convention—this was a long time before there was any prospect of its being incorporated—to help it to form a view. The courts have experience. We are moving forward, and we intend to ensure, as the wording makes clear, that, in so far as it is possible, primary and subordinate legislation is read and given effect in a way that is compatible with convention rights.

I think that I have dealt with most of the points raised. In conclusion, I want to deal with new clause 8. It would require the courts, in considering whether legislation was compatible with convention rights, to have full regard to the margin of appreciation accorded to states by Strasbourg institutions. Presumably that is intended to signal to the courts that they should recognise the primary responsibility of Governments for detailed decisions on how convention rights are given effect in domestic law.

The doctrine of the margin of appreciation—it is an important one—recognises that a state is allowed a certain measure of discretion, subject to European supervision, when it takes legislative, judicial or administrative action in respect of some convention rights. In other words, it is best placed to decide in the first place whether—and, if so, what—action is required.

My first point about the margin of appreciation is that it is more relevant to some convention rights than to others. It is especially relevant to articles 8 to 11, which enable restrictions to be placed on rights where that is necessary in a democratic society, for any one of a number of reasons. It is less relevant to some of the other articles, for example, article 2 on the right to life, and article 3 on the prohibition on torture or inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment.

7.15 pm

The doctrine of the margin of appreciation means allowing this country a margin of appreciation when it interprets our law and the actions of our Governments in an international court, perhaps the European Court of Human Rights. Through incorporation we are giving a profound margin of appreciation to British courts to interpret the convention in accordance with British jurisprudence as well as European jurisprudence.

One of the frustrations of non-incorporation has been that our own judges—for whom I have a high regard, as, I believe, do Opposition Members—have not been able to bring their intellectual skills and our great tradition of common law to bear on the development of European convention jurisprudence.

Mr. Grieve: I agree with every word that the right hon. Gentleman has said on this matter. It is why I favour incorporation. However, it is interesting to note that, although that is clearly the intention—and I believe will be the result—this Bill is statute, not common, law. Where does it spell out to the judiciary that the margin of appreciation is available to it in the way that it interprets the Bill? This is an interesting point and I would welcome the right hon. Gentleman's comments on it. We may have implied that that is what the courts should do, but where is that stated in the Bill?

Mr. Straw: The margin of appreciation is laid down in many commission and court judgments. Therefore, it is spelt out in the meaning of clause 2. That is the direct answer to the hon. Gentleman's point. In addition, and as the financial memorandum makes clear, we will spend £5 million on judicial training. I am not making a trivial point. A great deal of time, effort and money will go into the training of the judiciary. I know from my contacts with senior members of the judiciary that they are already alive to the need to bring themselves up to speed on this important development of our law.

Mr. Hogg: Is it the right hon. Gentleman's view that the British courts should be very slow to find that, where Parliament has expressly dealt with an issue involving convention rights, the decision of Parliament is a derogation, a departure or a diminution of convention rights? The working assumption should be that, when Parliament has addressed a matter, it has not derogated

from convention rights. If that is the approach that the courts should adopt, would it not be helpful to put that concept—perhaps differently expressed—in the Bill?

Mr. Straw: We are working that matter not only into the drafting of future legislation, but into the presentation of Bills by Ministers. That is the purpose of clause 19. When a Bill comes before Parliament, the Minister will give Parliament his best view, based on advice from officials and, above all, parliamentary counsel, on whether it is compatible with the convention.

That was the practice for some time under the previous Conservative Administration. I think that it would be impossible to say that all legislation, of whatever antiquity, was passed in a manner compatible with the convention. It is, by definition, impossible to say that of legislation passed before the convention was even a gleam in the eye of a former Conservative Lord Chancellor.

It took some decades before the House, our courts and the parliamentary draftsmen became sensitised to the need to ensure compatibility. It was not until the changes of 1966, allowing individual petition to the European Commission, that Governments began to take on board the need for compatibility in the way in which they went about their daily business and in the drafting of Bills. That is my answer to the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham.

Mr. Hogg: It is an historical answer.

Mr. Straw: It is. As far as the future is concerned, we are of course inviting the courts to work on the assumption that the House has applied itself to ensuring that legislation is compatible with the convention, except where a Minister comes to the House to say that there are overriding reasons why it is not, to give those reasons and to ask the House to agree the legislation in any case.

Mr. Hogg: The right hon. Gentleman has made a sound point, and I concede that he is right. However, I see no objection to the concept of incorporating into the Bill the proposition that, for prospective legislation, the courts should proceed on the assumption that there has not been a derogation of convention rights where Parliament has expressly addressed that question. I see certain advantages in doing that.

Mr. Straw: We are achieving the right hon. and learned Gentleman's purpose by a different route through clause 19, which we shall discuss when we reach it. I ask him to read that and to contribute at that stage.

I have gone into some detail to answer the important points that have been made. In the light of what I have said, I hope that the Opposition will withdraw the amendment.

Mr. Clappison: This has been an interesting debate, and the Home Secretary, having rightly acknowledged that important points have been raised, has endeavoured to deal with them. It has been reasonable—if I dare use that word—to explore these issues. My first reaction to the proposals was similar to that of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg). Having considered the words used in the clause, we were concerned by the prospect of courts straining to give legislation an unrealistic interpretation, and by the possibility that the clearly expressed will of Parliament might be lost in that process. In those circumstances, it would have been preferable for the courts simply to make a declaration of incompatibility, which would have resulted in legislation returning to the House.

I drew some encouragement from the Home Secretary's initial remarks. I respected the clearly argued contribution of the hon. Member for Wellingborough (Mr. Stinchcombe), who drew on academic authorities. The Home Secretary's response against that background gave me some encouragement about the importance that the Home Secretary attached to parliamentary sovereignty. The Home Secretary clearly feels that parliamentary sovereignty has been preserved in the Bill.

We have reservations about clause 10, to which the Home Secretary referred, and we may put some of his comments to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham in the bank for when we debate that. I appreciate that the Home Secretary made those remarks quite deliberately, but they may, less deliberately, have implications for the next group of amendments, which relate to the striking down by courts of subordinate legislation without that legislation coming back to the House.

The Home Secretary knows our concerns. We wanted a clear exposition from the Government to the effect that the courts were not to strain to give legislation an artificial or unrealistic meaning. We have drawn some reassurance from his remarks, although not complete reassurance. On that basis, and because we need to make progress, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Mr. Clappison: I beg to move amendment No. 17, in page 2, line 46, leave out from 'legislation' to end of line 2 on page 3.

The Second Deputy Chairman: With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 11, in clause 4, page 3, line 13, leave out from 'right' to end of line 15.

No. 12, in page 3, line 16, at end insert

'and save for making a declaration of incompatibility as aforesaid a court shall not otherwise strike down any subordinate legislation by reason of its incompatibility with a Convention right'.

Mr. Clappison: We now come to what happens when a court finds that legislation is incompatible with a convention right. In the case of primary legislation, the court may make a declaration of incompatibility, which results in the procedure for remedial action to which I referred in the previous debate.

In the case of subordinate legislation, the position is a little more complicated. If subordinate legislation is incompatible with a convention right, and the primary legislation under which it was made prevents removal of that incompatibility, the court may make a declaration of incompatibility. If, however, the subordinate legislation is incompatible and the primary legislation does not prevent removal of the incompatibility, the court may strike down the subordinate legislation without it coming back to the House.

That is a significant development, which goes beyond the present position, in which courts may hold subordinate legislation to be invalid only in certain limited

[Mr. Clappison]

circumstances under judicial review. I do not want to go too far into the intricacies of that, but it is established that the grounds on which courts can strike down legislation are limited.

The powers to strike down subordinate legislation conferred by the Bill go beyond that, and take us into new constitutional territory. The courts will be able to strike down subordinate legislation that is unobjectionable on existing grounds of ultra vires. We do not question the legitimacy of the established doctrine of judicial review on grounds of ultra vires, but we are worried by the new constitutional implications of allowing courts to strike down subordinate legislation on grounds of incompatibility where the legislation is not ultra vires and without the matter coming back to the House. That may mark a change in the constitutional role of the courts, which we should not allow to pass without comment.

The Lord Chancellor, a supporter of incorporation of the European convention on human rights, made a robust statement of the principles governing the constitutional position of the courts in his 1995 Administrative Law Bar Association lecture. He said that the key principle was that

"judicial review is not an appellate procedure. The court must not substitute its opinion for that of the decision maker. The court must rule only upon the legality of the decision and not upon its correctness. The court will concern itself with the manner in which a decision is reached rather than with the substantive merits of the decision itself."

The Lord Chancellor was correct on that occasion, and right to draw a distinction between the procedural grounds on which judicial review is exercised and an appellate procedure that looks at the substantive merits of a decision.

The Bill's new procedure seems to lead the courts into considering the substantive merits of issues, rather than procedure. The Lord Chancellor's considered speech drew on a long line of historical precedents, to justify his analysis of the constitutional role of the courts and the place that they occupy in our constitution. The Lord Chancellor's line of precedence went back at great length, almost, although not quite, to Tudor times—I say that without meaning anything by it—and began with Bonham's case in 1610.

We know that the noble Lord Chancellor loves historical precedents, and he drew together a number to justify what he thought was the correct constitutional position between Parliament and the courts. We think that that was right, but we are now being asked to do something new under the clause. It involves the courts moving beyond the existing constitutional framework into new territory. We cannot allow that to happen without marking it in some way.

One of our main concerns throughout the Bill has been the position of parliamentary sovereignty. We have just heard the Home Secretary speak at length on how parliamentary sovereignty has been preserved, notwithstanding incorporation, through the mechanisms in the Bill. However, we now have an example of exactly what the Home Secretary warned about: courts having the power to strike down legislation without the matter coming back to the House. Although we have reservations about the Government's remedial action, it is important, as a matter of principle, for legislation to come back to the House rather than be struck down by the courts without coming back to the House.

This is a constitutional precedent, and it is relevant to parliamentary sovereignty. The Committee should mark it and not allow it to pass.

7.30 pm

Mr. Grieve: I find the position in respect of this clause particularly difficult. I shall explain why. We are dealing with subordinate legislation, and my experience as a barrister is that subordinate legislation is sometimes struck down by judges for being ultra vires. When that has happened, no seismic shock has passed through this House, because most subordinate legislation is brought into being after the merest scrutiny by the House.

I sit on the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments, so I know that our method of scrutinising subordinate legislation is totally inadequate. It is not far from being a disgrace. I say that on a non-partisan basis, because it has existed for a long time.

Mr. Leigh: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Grieve: I should like to develop my argument first.

The prospect of the courts striking down subordinate legislation on the ground that it is incompatible with the European convention as incorporated bothers me less than my anxiety that this will be an area of potential conflict unless Parliament puts into operation proper methods of scrutiny of subordinate legislation before it comes into being. In practical terms, it is far more likely that subordinate legislation will be the subject of dispute than primary legislation, although I am sure that the Government and individual Departments will in future provide close scrutiny of subsequent subordinate legislation to ensure that that does not happen.

The problem, which we shall come to when we consider the Henry VIII clause, is that I have always been absolutely persuaded that, if the principle of incorporation is to work, it will be because Parliament and the courts seem to be acting in tandem because one is not subordinate to the other and it is Parliament's will that the rights as set out in the Bill should be incorporated and upheld, and because Members of Parliament will look to the courts to provide them with guidance in carrying that out.

We must move away for a moment from the question of the precise wording of the Bill and whether judges ultimately have the power to strike down subordinate legislation and persuade the Government, particularly the Parliamentary Secretary and the Home Secretary, that regard must be had to how subordinate legislation is brought into being. Unless it is perceived by both Parliament and the public that Parliament takes an active role in ensuring that the subordinate legislation is compatible with the European convention, we shall subsequently have a fertile area of conflict if the judges then go round striking it down.

I accept that I am widening the scope of the argument a little beyond the precise wording of the amendment, and I apologise to you, Sir Alan, for doing so. However, it is a point of fundamental importance and it must be addressed. I am aware that Justice has been particularly exercised on the matter, because it is convinced that there will have to be some form of parliamentary Committee to scrutinise subordinate legislation. With a certain refreshing naivety, it came to see me and inquired whether

I thought that the Select Committee dealing with statutory instruments could do the job. The answer is, "Yes, it could. But it would have to be several Committees, not one, and it would have to be given the teeth to do it. It certainly has the expertise."

I realise that it is a separate issue, which will be discrete from the Bill, but the acceptability of the courts striking down subordinate legislation will be greatly enhanced if the mechanisms by which that subordinate legislation is brought into being are subject to proper scrutiny. Unless they are, we run the serious risk of the courts operating in that area, and Parliament will be held in contempt. We do not scrutinise subordinate legislation properly in the first place, so we shall be ill prepared to complain when subsequently it is deleted.

That is more important, potentially, than amending the Bill as it stands. My experience as a barrister is that, ultimately, subordinate legislation is regarded as the creature of Ministers. If Ministers get it wrong and it is struck down, no seismic shocks ripple through our constitution. Nevertheless, it is an important point and I hope that the mere fact that it highlights the deficiencies in the creation of subordinate legislation means that we shall end up with a much better constitutional procedure for dealing with the growing amount of such legislation. In the 1960s, we passed some 25 pieces of subordinate legislation a year, and today we look at about 70 a week in Committee. Unless the matter is brought under control, it will cause serious problems in the future.

Mr. Hogg: I wish to follow what my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) has been saying. Ever since I have been in the House, I have been extremely concerned by the volume of secondary legislation and how the House considers it. I agree with my hon. Friend that it is a scandal. Important obligations are created and extensive penalties sometimes imposed through the process of secondary legislation. As we all know, the House pays almost no attention to the content. Frequently, we cannot do so because it is the subject of the negative resolution procedure. Even when we can, because it is the subject of the affirmative resolution procedure, the debate is extremely short—normally 90 minutes—and one cannot amend the documents. One can simply hope that a draft is presented for discussion before the order is ultimately laid.

I admit that the Government of which I was a member used secondary legislation to a huge extent—all Governments do. The House should resist doing that. The paradox is that, if the Committee accepts the argument of my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield and, as a consequence, improves how we consider and debate secondary legislation, it will be much more offensive to allow the courts to strike it down on the ground of incompatibility.

A serious constitutional issue is raised by the courts' ability to strike down any form of legislation—in this case, we are discussing secondary legislation—and that will probably be made greater if we do what we should do, which is fundamentally to overhaul how we consider and control secondary legislation.

Mr. Leigh: I must confess that I have difficulty with the arguments presented to the Committee by my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) and my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg). They seem to be arguing that the fact that the House gives inadequate consideration to subordinate legislation is a good excuse for allowing judges to strike it down. If that is their contention, it is extraordinary. That is not a good excuse for allowing judges to strike down subordinate legislation.

If we are convinced that we are giving inadequate attention to subordinate legislation, surely the remedy lies in our hands: we should make the House less of a legislative sausage machine, and allow sufficient time to consider subordinate legislation. However, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham knows full well from his experience in government, currently that is impossible because we should have to meet not only all week, but all weekend, and we should have no recesses at all. In any event, much subordinate legislation is very technical and the House does not want to consider it. I do not accept the arguments of my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield and my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham.

This is a dangerous precedent, because we are extending the remit of judges. We have made that point repeatedly in these debates. It may well be that striking down such legislation would not, in the words of my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield, produce a seismic shock in the constitution, and no doubt it would not be commented widely upon in the tabloid press. However, that does not negate the important principle that, for the first time, as I understand it—I may be wrong—judges will, at the stroke of a pen, be able to strike down legislation, albeit subordinate, of a sovereign Parliament. That is a development about which we should be considerably worried.

I have been trying to research these matters. There is one point that I do not understand in the otherwise excellent briefing supplied to us by the Library. It states:

> "Clause 3 is not intended to affect the validity, continuing operation or enforcement of any incompatible primary legislation, or any incompatible subordinate legislation if primary legislation prevents the removal of the incompatibility."

I confess that I find that concept difficult to understand. Will the Parliamentary Secretary explain exactly what it means?

I note that subordinate legislation, as defined in clause 21, seems to relate to a great deal of legislation emanating from Acts of the Parliament of Northern Ireland or measures of the Northern Ireland assembly. I wonder whether we are allowing judges to take a close interest in legislation that was passed by the former Stormont Parliament or which will be passed by the future Northern Ireland assembly. That is a small point, but I hope that the Parliamentary Secretary will be able to respond to it.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) for arguing the line he did, because it is important, and I followed it with great interest.

I am not clear whether the amendments deal primarily with an issue of great importance because of the underlying principle or because there could be major consequences in terms of the numbers of cases where the courts felt called on to consider subordinate legislation.

[Mr. Robert Maclennan]

I do not know whether the Government, in putting forward the proposal in the Bill, had in mind the possibility of a flood of cases arising from subordinate legislation and thought that it would be impractical or difficult to bring them all back to Parliament on a signal from the judiciary that there was incompatibility and deal with them as the Bill proposes to deal with cases arising from primary legislation.

It is hard to decide whether to proceed with subordinate legislation in the same way that is proposed for primary legislation. That would open a huge Pandora's box. Because of the manner in which Parliament reviews secondary legislation, we are guilty of allowing inadvertently to be passed much that should not be passed. The wider constitutional points made by the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) and the hon. Member for Beaconsfield were well put, and I endorse them.

Mr. Hogg: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his support, but the point goes further than he has contemplated, because European Union legislation is directly incorporated into the United Kingdom by reason of the treaty. A great deal of subordinate legislation is simply EU legislation that is carried over and is not the subject of any discussion.

7.45 pm

Mr. Maclennan: It is such thoughts that make me think that there may be a profound practical reason for accepting the present drafting of the Bill. That must make much stronger the case for the improvement of our scrutiny procedures. I hope that I am not straying out of order in dealing with this point—I think that it is germane to the issue under discussion. There is a problem of overload in this House. We are dispensing powers to other assemblies and Parliaments and we may consider the tasks that should be done in another place if it is reformed and democratised, so there will be plenty of work to be done by both Houses of Parliament, notwithstanding those significant changes, in ensuring that subordinate legislation does not risk running foul of the European convention on human rights.

Mr. Hoon: The amendments would affect the powers of the courts in respect of subordinate legislation. Amendment No. 17 would amend clause 3(2)(c) so that, notwithstanding the interpretative provisions of clause 3, all incompatible subordinate legislation, rather than only inevitably incompatible subordinate legislation—that is, subordinate legislation that inevitably takes an incompatible form because of the terms of the primary legislation under which it is made—would have continuing force and effect.

Amendment No. 11 is consequential. It would amend clause 4(4)(b) so that the power to make a declaration would apply to all subordinate legislation, not only to inevitably incompatible subordinate legislation as at present.

Amendment No. 12 would insert an additional phrase into clause 4(4) to make it clear, in conjunction with amendment No. 17, that the courts could not strike down subordinate legislation. That, I hope, is a fair summary of the amendments.

The right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire (Sir B. Mawhinney) raised the issue Second Reading, and gave notice that he would return to it in Committee. The present debate gives me an opportunity to explain more fully why the Government disagree with the Opposition's view that the Bill confers on the courts a power in respect of subordinate legislation which differs in kind from that which they already possess. I shall also explain why the amendments would harm the Bill.

The twin starting points are, once again, the sovereignty of Parliament and the protection of individuals' rights under the convention. The Government have decided that the courts should not be able to strike down primary legislation because of the special status that Acts of Parliament and various other measures enjoy. That special status is, of course, acknowledged by the existing powers of the courts. They cannot strike down Acts of Parliament because of the doctrine of parliamentary sovereignty.

However, subordinate legislation can already be, and is, struck down by the courts in certain circumstances. The courts will review the exercise by a Minister of a power to make subordinate legislation, just as they will review the exercise by any public authority of a discretionary power. I emphasise that, because it may be their reluctance to take that on board that lies behind the Opposition's difficulties with the Bill on that point.

Subordinate legislation may be struck down as ultra vires when the making of the instrument in question is outside the scope of the enabling power. Such legislation may also be attacked on procedural grounds—for example, when the mandatory procedure for making it as set out in the parent statute has not been followed or, less commonly, on the ground that the discretion involved in making the relevant instrument has been exercised unreasonably.

Mr. Hogg: The Minister's argument is less good than he thinks it is. He is saying that the courts already have the power to strike down secondary legislation on the ground of ultra vires and under the Wednesbury principles. I understand that, but we are arguing about the courts having the power to strike down secondary legislation on the ground of incompatibility. That raises the question of merit, which goes beyond vires. Although there is a power to strike down secondary legislation, it is narrowly defined and usually applies to ultra vires or unreasonable acts, whereas the Bill gives the courts an ability to determine not just issues of vires but questions as to compatibility that are themselves issues of merit.

Mr. Hoon: I shall deal with that point as I develop my argument in relation to the Bill. I hope that it is common ground between us that, if a Minister exercises an order-making power in a way that is not permitted by the parent Act, the courts should be able to disapply that order. I doubt that there is any dispute about that. In doing so, the courts would, in effect, be reinforcing the will of Parliament by ensuring that the Act that it approved was properly applied. In that sense, the courts would be upholding parliamentary sovereignty, by ensuring that the will of Parliament in primary legislation had been given effect. I hope that that point will be accepted.

Let me apply that argument to the Bill. If Parliament passes an Act that contains order-making powers that are capable of being exercised in a way that is compatible

with convention rights, what is the objection to providing that, if a Minister fails to exercise those powers consistently with those rights, the courts should be able to quash the instrument or set it aside? I cannot see what is wrong with that argument. Indeed, it is the absence of such a power with which I would have difficulty. The Human Rights Bill, if it is approved, will become an Act of Parliament, and it is perfectly reasonable to require that subordinate legislation be consistent both with the terms of its parent statute and with the Human Rights Act. That is what the Bill provides.

It is inherent in the public authority provisions in clause 6 that Ministers will be acting unlawfully if they make subordinate legislation that is incompatible with a convention right, unless the parent statute requires the subordinate legislation to take that form. I hope that that is the answer that the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) was seeking. If he reads clause 6(1), he will find that Ministers are under that duty. These provisions are wholly beneficial. If it is the will of Parliament that something should be done that is incompatible with a convention right, Parliament must be prepared to say so in primary legislation.

The hon. Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) raised the issue of subordinate legislation that is inevitably incompatible with convention rights. The nature of the primary legislation under which an order is made may be such that any subordinate legislation will necessarily be in conflict with convention rights. If the courts were to have the power to strike down such subordinate legislation, it would, at least indirectly, amount to a challenge to the primary legislation itself. That would place the courts at odds with Parliament. I could understand the concern of Conservative Members if the Human Rights Bill gave the courts the power to quash such subordinate legislation, but it does not do so. Clause 3(2)(c) makes that point abundantly clear.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): Will the Minister confirm that this provision will not have retrospective application?

Mr. Hoon: Clearly, it will apply to legislation in force once the Human Rights Act is itself in force.

I hope that Conservative Members will accept that the amendments address an illusory concern. They are not needed to protect the sovereignty of Parliament. Indeed, without these provisions, the sovereignty of Parliament would be threatened, because we would not be able to give effect to parliamentary sovereignty and to the will of Parliament as expressed in primary legislation. The amendments would tie the hands of the courts and would weaken the protection that individuals receive from convention rights. Therefore, I hope that the Opposition will withdraw the amendment.

Mr. Clappison: This has been an interesting debate, and we have had some good contributions from Conservative Members. Whatever view we may have of the merits of the process for scrutinising secondary legislation, we are united in our desire to express our zealousness in defending parliamentary sovereignty. We are not satisfied with the Minister's response.

I listened carefully to what the Minister said about ultra vires legislation. This point was anticipated if not in my opening speech, which may not have been sufficiently clear, then certainly in the intervention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg), who expressed the same view as I did, but more elegantly and more forcefully. The clause will allow the courts to strike down perfectly good subordinate legislation that is not ultra vires and has no procedural defects merely by considering its merits. The Bill is taking us into new territory. The courts will be able to examine the merits of legislation and to strike it down without reference to Parliament.

The Minister argues that the clause safeguards parliamentary sovereignty. We think that Parliament should be the judge of that. The matter should be subject to parliamentary sovereignty. To make our mark and to register our disapproval of this provision, we shall press the amendment to a vote.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 129, Noes 324.

Division No. 291] **[7.55 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Beggs, Roy
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Colvin, Michael
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forsythe, Clifford
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Sir Alastair
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Randall, John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Londy)*
Ruffley, David

Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Sir David Madel and
Mr. Tim Collins.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin, John
Ballard, Jackie
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Breed, Colin
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell–Savours, Dale
Casale, Roger
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, Yvette
Corston, Ms Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davies, Rt Hon Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Gorrie, Donald
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harris, Dr Evan
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Kirkwood, Archy
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
McNamara, Kevin
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Alun
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Norris, Dan
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Rendel, David
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruddock, Ms Joan

Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salmond, Alex
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stott, Roger
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Wallace, James
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Jamieson and Mr. John McFall.

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 3 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 4

DECLARATION OF INCOMPATIBILITY

Mr. Garnier: I beg to move amendment No. 15, in page 3, line 7, at end insert

'setting out the nature and extent thereof in so far as arises from the nature of the case before the court'.

The Chairman of Ways and Means (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 103, in page 3, line 7, at end insert—

'(2A) A court may not make a declaration of incompatibility unless it is necessary for the purpose of determining the matter before it.'.

No. 16, in page 3, line 16, at end insert

'setting out the nature and extent thereof in so far as arises from the nature of the case before the court'.

Mr. Garnier: We believe that clause 4 represents a collision point in the constitution. It does not merely represent a meeting between the supervisory code on human rights that we gain from the convention and the doctrine of parliamentary sovereignty; it represents a meeting between the powers of the courts and this place to instigate a parliamentary process of statutory change. Clause 4 empowers the courts—as defined in subsection (5)—to declare that primary legislation is incompatible with a convention right.

Clause 4 should be read in conjunction with clause 21, which defines primary legislation. According to that clause, "primary legislation" means any

"public general Act . . . local and personal Act . . . private Act . . . Measure of the Church Assembly . . . Measure of the General Synod of the Church of England . . . Order in Council made under . . . the Northern Ireland Constitution Act 1973 . . . Order in Council made in exercise of Her Majesty's Royal Prerogative . . . and includes an order or other instrument made under primary legislation to the extent to which it operates to bring one or more provisions of that legislation into force or amends any primary legislation".

Subordinate legislation is also defined in clause 21, and was referred to in an earlier debate.

8.15 pm

Mr. Gerald Howarth: My hon. and learned Friend has listed the measures that would be caught by the description "primary legislation". Will he tell us whether the matter has been debated by the General Synod, whether its views have been sought and whether they have been referred to the House? Surely that is a material issue, as the new law will apply to the whole body of law passed by the General Synod of the established Church.

Mr. Garnier: My hon. Friend is right: that is a material question. Sadly, I do not know the answer, but other hon. Members who are past or present members of the General Synod may be able to help us.

Mr. John Gummer (Suffolk, Coastal): Will my hon. and learned Friend take this a stage further? Normally, matters pertaining to the Church of England that are to be debated in the House of Commons are brought before the Ecclesiastical Committee, for two reasons. First, the Committee is a joint Committee of both Houses; secondly, unlike the Synod, it contains not just members of the Church of England but members of other Churches, because it scrutinises legislation to see how it will affect other subjects of Her Majesty. Clearly, the Bill will have an effect on the Synod.

I am a member of the Ecclesiastical Committee, but I have not received a note about the matter. Perhaps my hon. and learned Friend can find out whether the Committee has been able to debate it, and to decide whether it is content with the implications for the Church of England.

Mr. Garnier: I am grateful for my right hon. Friend's intervention. He has immense experience of the affairs of the Church of England, and I was interested to hear that, although he no longer belongs to that Church, he continues to take a close interest in it. I suspect that my right hon. Friend will know better than I whether, in one or other of its various forums, the Church has been able to express a view on clause 4. The Minister, too, may have better information than I.

We must consider clause 4 in conjunction not just with clause 21, which defines primary legislation, but with clause 5, which gives the Crown—and, subject to amendments that we may or may not debate later in Committee stage, others—the right to intervene in court proceedings. If those amendments are accepted—strictly speaking, they are not germane to this debate—and if other interveners are given rights under clause 5, the Church of England and other affected bodies, as well as the Crown, may well be entitled to take an interest in a clause 4 question.

[Mr. Garnier]

When considering the effect of clause 4 we must also consider clauses 10, 11 and 12, especially clause 12(3)(a) and (3)(b), because they deal with remedial action—broadly, what Parliament will do in the event of a declaration of incompatibility under clause 4. Clause 12(3) states:

"A remedial order (or draft) laid before Parliament must be accompanied by a statement containing—

(a) an explanation of the incompatibility which the order seeks to remove, including particulars of the relevant declaration, finding or order; and

(b) a statement of the reasons why the person making it (or proposing to make it) considers an order in those terms appropriate."

The person making it would be the Minister. Paragraphs (a) and (b) are especially relevant when considering our amendments that deal with the beginning of the process—the making of a declaration by one of the courts that are listed in clause 4(5) in relation to primary legislation. We debated secondary legislation earlier, but we are now dealing with primary legislation.

I spoke deliberately about a collision point on the constitution because the Strasbourg system is invasive. From time to time, the European Court of Human Rights determines that some aspect of national law or practice is incompatible with a provision in the convention. The way in which human rights are protected in a country that adheres to the convention is no longer exclusively a matter of national sovereignty. In addition, the convention system has not stood still, and has constantly been adapted to bring it into line with contemporary notions of human rights protection—for example, through the introduction of new protocols.

In some Strasbourg court judgments it has been said that the convention represents

"the public order of Europe"

that it imposes objective obligations on the convention states for the protection of human rights in Europe and that the convention is evolving as Europe's constitutional Bill of Rights. Those are the words of the European Court judges, and they may ring alarm bells loudly for my right hon. and hon. Friends, and possibly in the massed ranks of Labour Members.

The convention is no longer seen as an international treaty that creates reciprocal arrangements between contracting states. It is increasingly being interpreted in line with the object and purpose rule—I am sure that the Committee knows all about that—in the Vienna convention on the law of treaties which was entered into in 1969 as Europe's constitutional Bill of Rights.

As I said in an intervention, the jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights over the past 30 to 50 years has been entirely candid in seeing the convention as a growing Bill of Rights for Europe. In the corporal punishment case affecting this country, Tyrer *v.* the United Kingdom, in 1978, the court said that the convention was a living instrument and that it had to consider the standards of behaviour, morality and ethics that are accepted in contemporary European society, and not those that were applicable when the convention came into being in the early 1950s.

The line between judicial interpretation and judicial legislation may be increasingly breached. The amendments are intended to guard against that and to prevent United Kingdom courts from going further than is warranted under our constitution. In view of the parliamentary arithmetic—a phrase which was used not long ago—there can be no doubt that the Bill will become an Act and that the convention, or at least those parts of it that are specified in the Bill, will be incorporated into British law. The amendments seek to limit the damage that we think may be done to our constitution if clause 4 is unamended. It has been said that the Bill would wreck our constitution, but I would not go that far.

In the debate on the Queen's Speech after the election, I said that I had no religious or principled objection to the introduction of the European convention on human rights into domestic British law. However, I remain worried that the procedures that we are adopting could damage the constitution, perhaps unintentionally. That underlines my argument on the amendments. I do not accuse the Government, at least on this occasion, of deliberately setting out to destroy the constitution, but we could make that charge stick on other occasions and we shall have an opportunity to do that.

As the Bill, amended or unamended, will become law, we must do all we can to ensure that the doctrine of the separation of powers, which underscores our constitution, is not put at risk. Our amendments are designed to protect the constitution and to prevent unwanted and perhaps unintended contests between Parliament and the courts. Why is that matter important and why are we determined to prevent the dangers that we expect would arise from an unamended clause?

The Minister does not always give me prizes for original thinking on political philosophy, and I do not think that he will give me a prize for suggesting that elected, accountable Members of Parliament, assembled in Parliament, are the proper persons to make the law, but that unelected, disinterested, unaccountable judges should interpret it. That is our system, and, under our constitution, the courts have no power to declare that an Act of Parliament is invalid.

The United States has an entirely different system. Under its system of judicial review, which is not to be confused with ours, federal judges—the constitutional judges in the Supreme Court—can strike down Acts of Congress if they believe that they contravene the United States constitution. We do not have that, and long may that position remain.

In an earlier debate, we briefly discussed secondary legislation. Because of the development of such legislation and the increasing use of regulation-making powers that are given to Ministers by statute—a matter which greatly concerns my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve)—the courts have felt able to develop the scope of judicial review of administrative action. In some cases, that has led to political criticism of the judiciary when it pronounced on matters of social or political controversy.

Sadly—or perhaps not sadly—hon. Members and the editorials of newspapers are not slow to criticise judges when they make pronouncements with which we disagree. That is what we are entitled to do. We touched on that matter in a debate on the Scotland Bill two or three weeks ago, when we discussed the appointment or removal of Scottish judges and sheriffs under the new Scottish parliamentary system.

One of the points that the hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) brought out was that a judge could be criticised, for example, for overly lenient sentencing and hounded by a group of politicians for doing so. One does not have to go very far back in English political history to know that there have been criticisms of our judges by members of the Labour party and of the trade union movement, who were concerned that English judges were producing laws that were contrary to those members' interests.

8.30 pm

You, Sir Alan, may remember the cries of, "Tory judges are doing the Government's work," in the 1980s. Although that was no doubt a sincere and well-intended criticism—or perhaps an ill-intended criticism—it was wrong-headed because they were not Tory judges, but wholly disinterested politically. None of their judgments was based on their political opinions; they were based on an interpretation of the law, which happened to have been enacted under a Tory Government. The confusion is between Tory laws passed by a Tory Government with a majority in the House of Commons and the interpretation of those Tory laws by disinterested judges.

Mr. Humfrey Malins (Woking): Does my hon. and learned Friend agree that the great strength of our constitution is the fact that the judges have been and remain politically disinterested and separate? That is why people have so much confidence in the judges, despite what one occasionally hears from the Labour Benches. They are politically disinterested, and they realise that their job is to administer the law, not to make it.

Mr. Garnier: My hon. Friend is entirely right. That is why our amendments are so important. They will remove any doubt that may rest in the minds of those who know less about it than they should that the judges who make the declarations of incompatibility are motivated by anything other than a desire properly to interpret the statute law that is in front of them.

This is not a new problem. The tension between the two lives that I lead—one in the law and one in Parliament—is often referred to. It has been referred to by far more eminent lawyers than are here tonight, and I include myself in that. Trade union legislation in the early 1980s caused such alarm among the Labour party. You may remember, Sir Alan, the steel strike of the early 1980s, which led to all sorts of industrial action and then secondary industrial action. Laws were passed by the Conservative Government that made secondary action unlawful. It resulted in the case of Duport Steels *v.* Sirs.

When that case arrived at the Judicial Committee of the House of Lords, Lord Diplock said this. I always like referring to cases in which Lord Diplock has contributed a judgment. He was a very intellectually rigorous man, but he was not without a sense of humour, as I am sure the Minister will appreciate. Lord Diplock was a keen follower of the foxhounds and had a horse called Circuit. When he was at the Bar and his clients rang up and asked, "Is Mr. Diplock available?" his clerk could legitimately say, "No. I'm afraid he is away on Circuit." I digress and I apologise for doing so.

I want to read just a small section of Lord Diplock's judgment in the Duport Steels case, because he well illustrates the points that inform my amendments:

"at a time when more and more cases involving the application of legislation which gives effect to policies that are the subject of bitter public and parliamentary controversy, it cannot be too strongly emphasised that the British constitution, though largely unwritten, is firmly based on the separation of powers: Parliament makes the laws, the judiciary interpret them. When Parliament legislates to remedy what the majority of its members at the time perceive to be a defect or a lacuna in the existing law (whether it be the written law enacted by existing statutes or the unwritten common law as it has been expounded by the judges in decided cases), the role of the judiciary is confined to ascertaining from the words that Parliament has approved as expressing its intention what that intention was, and to giving effect to it. Where the meaning of the statutory words is plain and unambiguous it is not for the judges to invent fancied ambiguities as an excuse for failing to give effect to its plain meaning because they themselves consider that the consequences of doing so would be inexpedient, or even unjust or immoral. In controversial matters such as are involved in industrial relations there is room for differences of opinion as to what is expedient, what is just and what is morally justifiable. Under our constitution, it is Parliament's opinion on these matters that is paramount."

Those words are as true today as they were when they were uttered.

Mr. Leigh: I think that my hon. and learned Friend can add to his point and make it even more powerful. As he knows, in that case, the House of Lords was striking down a judgment by Lord Denning in the Court of Appeal. Just as my hon. and learned Friend admires Lord Diplock, I admired Lord Denning. From my political viewpoint, I particularly admired a remark that he made in the Court of Appeal judgment in that case. He was dealing with that trade union dispute and said that it could have a

"disastrous effect on the economy and well-being of the country".

As much as Conservative Members may admire what he said in those circumstances, the House of Lords acted properly. It struck down Lord Denning. He should not have been making a political point of that nature. That is the powerful point that Lord Diplock was making in that case.

Mr. Garnier: That is exactly right. That is why the Court of Appeal was overturned in that case. Both the point that my hon. Friend makes and the point that I am developing in support of our amendments show that, where one is dealing with the introduction of convention rights into domestic law, and where one is introducing something into our system of law, which traditionally has been concerned more with remedies and duties than rights, the courts are sometimes tempted to introduce the sort of language that the Court of Appeal heard from Lord Denning, which is impermissible under our constitution.

Parliament—this House and the other place—should have the first word and the last. I am positive that A. V. Dicey put it more elegantly than I have, but where we are putting the broad brush—I think that, as I am dealing with European matters, I am allowed to descend into purple prose—of the European convention across the canvas of our constitution, we should endeavour to paint a coherent picture.

I hope that the Minister enjoyed that because I want to remind him of something that Lord Kingsland, the shadow Lord Chancellor, said in the other place on Second Reading of the Bill last November. It was a model speech,

[Mr. Garnier]

if I may say so. It completely stripped bare the Lord Chancellor's arguments in favour of the Bill, and presented a thoroughly unmatched set of arguments. My noble Friend said that, if the Bill, became law—I paraphrase at the moment—it would be a defining moment in the life of our constitution, and as important in the history of our constitution as, for example, the Parliament Acts of 1911 and 1949. He said that all those matters

"lie at the heart of the doctrine of the separation of the powers in our constitution, which has been the hallmark of our liberties throughout the centuries."

We should not scoff at the protection of our liberties under the constitution. Lord Kingsland suggested that the Lord Chancellor had gone for a hybrid of the New Zealand and Canadian models and that

"he is not striking down the previous statute but is giving judges the power to make a declaration of incompatibility. He then gives Parliament the option to legislate not by full primary statute but by order in council.

I believe that that solution is constitutionally unacceptable for two reasons which I shall try to explain . . . In the Bill the courts of this country are not bound by the decisions of the court in Strasbourg."

He said that it is to have

"persuasive but not obligatory effect. When a court in this country makes a declaration of incompatibility, it might be making a declaration which is not an accurate photograph of the law of the convention. Indeed, that option is expressly incorporated in the Bill. To the extent that a declaration of incompatibility does not reflect the true construction of the jurisprudence of the convention, the judges will be making a declaration about the making of new law, judge-made law. Indeed, they will be doing more than that. They will be initiating a legislative procedure in Parliament."

If that is what the clause proposes, it will introduce something that we should be well aware of, and we should do something about it. Clause 4(2) says:

"If the court is satisfied that the provision is incompatible with a Convention right, it may make a declaration of that incompatibility."

Amendment No. 15 proposes to add these words immediately afterwards:

"setting out the nature and extent thereof in so far as arises from the nature of the case before the court"

so that, when the declaration of incompatibility is made by the court, the Government—who will have to introduce a remedial order—will know precisely why the court has found that the Act is incompatible with the convention rights.

Mr. Gummer: My hon. and learned Friend says that it is important that the Government know that. May I suggest that it is more important that the people should know? This is an unusual mechanism—like him, I do not have too extreme a view of it—and some Labour Members appear to agree with my hon. and learned Friend about the change in the constitution. There are a lot of people outside who will be at least suspicious about the matter. Therefore, the Committee should accept nothing less if we want those people to accept the system.

Mr. Garnier: My right hon. Friend is right to pull me up. Of course it is the people who have the right to know. I was thinking, naively, that the Government actually took account of the interests of the people. I was mistaken, and I apologise for being such a silly billy. This Government were described as "unusually tyrannical" in the other place by Lord Simon of Glaisdale—not a man given to hyperbole.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) was right to pull me up. We purport to represent the people in this place—I do not know what the Government think they are doing. They seem to pay precious little attention to what the people care about. *[Interruption.]* I will not be diverted by grumblings from the hon. Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart), who is not a noted constitutional lawyer as far as I am aware.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough) *rose—*

The Chairman: Order. The hon. Lady must not assume that she has the Floor until it has been conceded to her by the Member she is seeking to interrupt.

Fiona Mactaggart: I apologise, Sir Alan, for misreading the body language of the hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier). The point that was being made before I attempted to intervene was about representing the people. I have never suggested to anyone that I am an eminent lawyer; I have never sought to play such a role. However—like the Labour party—I have listened to and represent the people of Slough, which is why we are implementing such a substantial and important change in the Bill.

8.45 pm

Mr. Garnier: I think that I may have been mistaken not to conceal my body language. After that intervention, I shall keep my body language to myself.

My noble Friend Lord Kingsland identified the constitutional danger posed by clause 4, which would allow judges to introduce a legislative initiative. I think that amendment No. 15 goes some way in dealing with the concerns expressed by my noble Friend, which are also felt by very many people in the United Kingdom.

When introducing a convention conferring rights—the interpretation of which has been subject to argument and debate in Strasbourg and in the domestic courts of nations that are amenable to the convention, and still no exactitude has been provided—into a system of law that has until now been concerned more with remedies and duties, it is vital that Parliament should tell the courts what we expect of them.

On 3 November 1997, the Lord Chancellor said in the debate on the Bill's Second Reading:

"the Bill is carefully drafted and designed to respect our traditional understanding of the separation of powers."

That is undoubtedly a worthy sentiment. However, as the Lord Chancellor has also said that his legal aid reforms are designed to "increase access to justice", we should be very careful of sentiment emanating from that noble mouth.

The Lord Chancellor said:

"The design of the Bill is to give the courts as much space as possible to protect human rights, short of a power to set aside or ignore Acts of Parliament."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 3 November 1997; Vol. 582, c. 1228.]

We have tabled this group of amendments to restrict the space within which Parliament allows the courts to operate, not to inhibit the courts from protecting human

rights. We fear that, without the amendments, the courts will increasingly push at the boundaries between the judiciary and Parliament, which would so upset the pertaining balance.

Under the Bill, the courts will take on a new role. Hon. Members must be careful before ceding our powers to initiate legislation to the courts. If we are to have clause 4 declarations, they must be explicit, capable of withstanding scrutiny and public explanation, and in such a form that they can sensibly inform the process that the Bill envisages in clause 12(3).

If we are to have remedial orders, they must work in concert with the final judicial wording of the declarations of incompatibility. To do otherwise would merely add to the tension that will come to exist between this place and the courts. Although it is important that there is a creative tension between them, it is vital that the Bill should not allow a destructive tension to build up.

I suggest that passing the amendments would relieve the constitution of a potential danger—one which would act to the detriment of our constituents.

Mr. Gummer: I shall not detain the Committee long, but I believe that the amendment is of considerable importance because of the need to explain to the public as a whole the effects of this new situation.

I am unhappy about the concept of rights; I happen to believe that we have obligations, and that in our obligations lie other people's rights—as a matter of fact, I do not think, philosophically, that created beings can have rights. It is a pity that we have not understood the distinction, which we have never before had in our laws. We have always seen that there is a matter of duties and obligations, and that has been the key to our handling of the sort of issues with which the European convention is concerned. However, because it is a European convention, it is heavily influenced by the works of Tom Paine and the French revolution, and papal reinterpretation of that in the latter part of the 19th century. One clearly sees that stretch of attitude in the way in which the convention is framed.

Mr. Maclennan: Would it not be historically more accurate to acknowledge the debt owed to the works of Jesuit priests and writers such as Hugo Grotius, Vitoria and others in the long Catholic European tradition, going right back to the laws of nature, which recognised rights?

Mr. Gummer: It would be possible to acknowledge that, but it would be contrary to the truth. I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman will acknowledge the fact that, until the end of the 19th century, the Catholic position was quite clear: rights were not possible for a created being; a created being had obligations, and those obligations conferred rights on others, because others were able to depend on his carrying out those obligations and to expect that he would do so.

The matter is not merely semantic, because the problem arises that the attitude towards rights that is so marked a result of the changes in the 19th century has affected Britain rather differently from the rest of Europe. As an enthusiastic supporter of our close connection with the rest of Europe, I believe that we can offer others some things where we are different and where our long history gives us a certain amount of experience that they do not have. One of those aspects of our history is the long stability that we have enjoyed in this country, but that has not been the experience of many of our neighbours.

Part of that stability arises from the division of powers. Therefore, if we are going to, at the very least, narrow that division, it is important that, on the occasions when that happens, the reason is clear to the public. The public have respect for judges, but do not expect judges to make the law; they have no respect for Members of Parliament, but do expect Members of Parliament to make the law. That distinction is important. On this occasion, we are allowing judges to come closer to making the law than they do in any other circumstance. That is the crucial issue.

Having read the debates in another place, I should have thought that the Government would want to make sure that their promise there would be carried through. They said there that they wished to make this new excursion as compatible as possible with our historic separation of powers.

I hope that the Government will not feel that that there is any way an unpleasantness about the amendment or that it should be overruled merely because the Government have a majority. I should have thought that the Government would not find an amendment that asks that courts give a clear statement of why they find a measure incompatible with the European Convention on Human Rights one on which to divide the Committee. It seems to me that everyone could agree on the matter—not just so that the Minister would find it easier to frame amending legislation, but so that the public should be easier in their minds that the judges have acted properly and constitutionally within the framework laid down by Parliament. I hope that the Government will accept the amendment as a result of that first point.

Secondly—although less importantly, as the public are most at risk of feeling that the change is not one of which they are assured—I hope that the Government will see the amendment as their defence. As things happen to be, it is likely that this Government will be in power on the first occasion—probably within the next three or four years—on which the provision operates. If it takes place after that, this Government will not have to make a decision. Ministers will surely want to know, not least on that first occasion, precisely what this is all about; what the judges are getting at; how narrowly amending legislation can be drawn.

Let us imagine circumstances in which the Government managed to pass a measure that had been hard fought against as it went through the House. Let us imagine that the Opposition had tabled amendments pointing to the incompatibility of some measure that the Government were proposing. Let us think that, in a heated moment, the Government had said very clearly that the Opposition were wrong and that the measure was not contrary to the effects of the European Convention on Human Rights. Let us think that the debate continued along that line and that, in the end, the majority ruled and the Government got their way. In those circumstances, the Government would want to be quite sure that, if the judges struck down the measure, they had the best ground for being able to eat their words. They would like to be able to say to the Opposition, "Well, what you said was not generally true, although it appears that, in a particular case, there was some truth in it."

[Mr. Gummer]

I do not want the Government to feel that they must overcompensate for what has been mistaken. In other words, if the courts struck down, or appeared to strike down, some decision of the House, the Government would want to make as small an alteration as is compatible. How could they do that unless they knew precisely why the courts had struck down the matter? I do not know why I am busy defending the Government—except that we shall inherit the matter thereafter. However, the Government need to be defended from a position in which they will have to make the remedy but will not know how widely that remedy will have to run.

That brings me to the third point. I want to defend not only the Government but all other hon. Members. The Minister is a very honourable Member, and will no doubt seek, if the task falls to him, to bring in as narrow a change as absolutely necessary. However, others will be less scrupulous, and will say to themselves, "We do not want to get mixed up with those courts any more, so let us go as far as it could be thought that the courts might expect us to, and get out of the problem in future." Unless we insist upon the detailed amendment, the Government could propose to amend the legislation far beyond what would be necessary if there were a more particular statement of what the courts were concerned about.

There are therefore three reasons why I believe it necessary for us to carry the amendment into law—the defence of the people so that they know where they are, the defence of the Government so that they know where they are, and the defence of the House, to ensure that its will is not gainsaid by one iota or scintilla more than is absolutely necessary to meet the obligations that the convention lays upon it.

9 pm

Those should be views commonly held on both sides of the Committee. I see nothing in them that could possibly be thought party political. However, my last point is party political. One of the problems with judges is that they share the human frailty of seeking always to move as far as their powers allow. We all tend that way. All assemblies move to become Parliaments; all Parliaments seek greater power; courts are rarely satisfied with the restrictions laid upon them. I believe it is necessary to ensure that our courts do not gain an appetite for what my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) described as the attitudes of the European Courts of Human Rights and of Justice and of other courts in individual nations in the European Union and beyond.

That is why the amendment is necessary for the good of the courts, as well as for the good of the Government, the good of the people and the good of the House. I believe that the courts' natural appetite for the extension of their powers should be restrained, and the only one body that can so restrain them is the House. That is the nature of the separation of powers.

Therefore, the Committee owes it to the courts to be clear in the way that it legislates today and throughout the further stages of the Bill. We must be clear, and we can do that only if we insist that the courts be clear, for in their clarity will be their restriction. Because they have to say in detail what they find incompatible, they will not be able to stretch their powers beyond the degree to which we—of necessity, if the Bill is passed—will have to increase them.

That is why I hope that the Committee will accept that the amendment is reasonable and would be for the good of many of Her Majesty's subjects.

Mr. Maclennan: I am sorry to have to say that I did not find the speech by the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) compelling in its history, its philosophy, its politics or its law. It finished with a rather curious, although not entirely frontal, attack on the judiciary, suggesting that they were institutionally engaged in self-aggrandisement.

That is a caricature of how our judiciary perform. It is evident that our judges are extremely careful not to trespass on the role of Parliament. Indeed, they made it plain before the Bill was introduced that, although they broadly favour the incorporation of the European Convention on Human Rights, they would prefer at this stage in the development of our constitutional thinking not to be given a power to strike down in a simple and straightforward way legislation that they consider incompatible.

The Bill represents a novel approach to the incorporation of a Bill of Rights, and its construction owes a great deal to the judicial restraint of the highest judges in the country—including Lord Bingham and many others—who publicly spoke in favour of incorporation and advised that they should not be empowered like the Supreme Court in the United States simply to strike down incompatible legislation. The attack on the judiciary by the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal was very wide of the mark.

I do not see how the language of the amendments would do anything to achieve what they seem to be intended to achieve. They are not lapidary in their clarity; indeed, they could create a source of great argument and confusion. It would have been one thing if the amendments had stated simply that the declaration of incompatibility should be accompanied by reasons—one might then have been able to understand what was in the minds of those Conservative Members who tabled them—but they are couched in rather serpentine language.

Amendment No. 15 would insert the words

"setting out the nature and extent thereof in so far as arises from the nature of the case before the court".

Almost every phrase of that could give rise to argument—barrack-room lawyers would argue about whether the judges, in making a declaration of incompatibility, had conformed precisely with the terms suggested by amendments Nos. 15 and 16.

It is clearly the case that a declaration of incompatibility would be a constitutionally solemn decision, which the courts would not take lightly or ill advisedly. I believe that the courts would take such a decision very rarely as, like Parliament, judges have, in developing common law, broadly assumed that it was the will of the British people that our obligations under the terms of the European Convention on Human Rights should be observed. It is a natural construction—an a priori view—that Parliament has not legislated inadvertently to breach the convention's provisions, so I believe that a declaration of incompatibility would be prayed in aid only rarely. To suggest that there is any

automaticity in the provision—that there is an automatic triggering of legislation as a result of the declaration of incompatibility—is to misrepresent the contents of the Bill.

Mr. Leigh: As the right hon. Gentleman said, of course Parliament does not legislate knowingly to be incompatible with the convention, but the convention and the European Court move on and what might have been compatible in the past is no longer compatible. That is why there might be rather more cases coming before the European Court than he might imagine.

Mr. Maclennan: We shall see, but I doubt it. I do not doubt that cases will be brought before the European Court praying in aid the convention rights, but they will stem not from defective legislation or parliamentary activity, but more from the executive actions of public authorities.

The right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal implied that a declaration of incompatibility bordered on a legislative provision. That is a distortion of language. First, it is quite plain that the Bill provides a permissive power to make a declaration of incompatibility. The court is not required to make such a declaration. Clause 4(2) allows the court to make such a declaration. Secondly, such a declaration does not require the Government to introduce legislation under clause 10. That also is permissive. So to suggest that the Bill contains a trigger mechanism that could be fired and in some way diminish the role of the executive arm of government and the scrutiny of Parliament is to fail to appreciate the checks and balances that have been carefully written into a remarkable Bill.

The Bill is remarkable because it fulfils the need to provide a remedy quickly in order to avoid the injustices that would flow from a court finding an incompatibility with the European convention and the remedy depending on Strasbourg because of the difficulty of finding legislative time to introduce primary legislation to overturn the incompatible measure. The Bill has neatly tackled that problem, and in so doing has safeguarded the justice of our system without trespassing on parliamentary sovereignty.

Mr. Gummer: Has not the right hon. Gentleman now disproved his previous contention? He suggests that the reason for the particular arrangements under the Bill is to enable the remedy to be applied very quickly if a court declares a measure to be incompatible. Obviously, he expects that, if a court declares a Bill to be incompatible, there will be a speedy remedy. I suggested not that that gave the courts the ability to rule, but that it was adjacent to ruling, because it is likely that Parliament would find it almost impossible not to apply that remedy. Therefore, has not the right hon. Gentleman proved that what I said was strictly accurate?

Mr. Maclennan: No. The right hon. Gentleman has not made his case very effectively. It is quite plain that, if a court makes a formal declaration of incompatibility, it will do so advisedly because it considers the matter to be sufficiently important to trigger the mechanism if the executive arm of government and Parliament consider that it is appropriate to respond to it. It would make such a declaration only if there were an issue of some importance that required remedy. Otherwise, it is not obliged to make a declaration—

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Garnier: I think that the right hon. Gentleman's body language suggested that I was being invited to intervene, and I am grateful to him for that.

The difficulty that the Bill presents is that the procedure begins in clause 19. That is where the Minister makes a statement of compatibility. A litigant might take a matter to court, and if the court agreed with him, it would then make a declaration under clause 4. Even before that, there is the potential for dispute between the Executive—whether within Parliament or without—and the court. The right hon. Gentleman has addressed many points, but not that one.

9.15 pm

Mr. Maclennan: The hon. and learned Gentleman understood my body language and I understood his, but I confess that I did not understand the point that he was making. I am a little nonplussed by it and I apologise for my failure to comprehend.

I believe that the amendments were devised to make a political point—a constitutional point, which in itself is quite important. Those who want to amend the Bill do not want the right of Parliament to deliberate, in the manner to which we are accustomed, curtailed or changed by an act of the judiciary. That is an important issue that should be discussed. However, the language in the amendment can cause nothing but confusion. Therefore, I hope that it will be resisted.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): I intend to do my level best to encourage my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) to make an even more robust rejection of the proposal to incorporate the convention into UK law.

I am sure that the Minister will agree that we share some confusion—having both been active in another place—about the European Court of Human Rights and the European Court of Justice in Luxembourg. Even greater confusion is caused by the fact that, for part of the year, the European Court of Human Rights meets in the same place as the European Parliament. The public are greatly confused by that.

I vigorously support amendment No. 15. I am concerned about the impact that the convention, and particularly clause 4, will have on primary legislation. In view of the Bowman judgment, it is clear that, if the convention had already been incorporated into UK law, the courts would be seeking to repeal part of the Representation of the People Act. That is one of the questions that we should consider.

I regret the intrusiveness and invasiveness of clause 4, and the impact—particularly following the Bowman judgment—that the convention will have when we adopt it into our political, electoral and judicial systems. The Strasbourg system is definitely invasive, and new legislation will have to be deemed Strasbourg-proof before we can adopt it, or we will have a plethora of court

[Miss Anne McIntosh]

cases. Will the Government tell us what mechanism they envisage using to prepare future legislation in a Strasbourg-proof way?

Mr. Hoon: I can deal with that point now. The previous Government ensured for eight years or so that draft legislation was consistent with the terms of the convention. Clause 6 is also absolutely clear. Procedures are already in place, and they will be strengthened by the Bill's passage.

Miss McIntosh: I am not sure that I am convinced by that answer, but I am grateful to the Minister.

What concerns me most about clause 4 is that courts will be able to determine in future that some aspects of national law are incompatible with the convention. I am sure that the Government—the listening Government, the people's Government, they tell us—will appreciate that that could occur in politically sensitive areas, such as prisons, immigration and administrative matters, including judicial review. They may regret their proposal to incorporate the convention in United Kingdom law in toto.

The amendment should be welcomed, because it would ensure that judges would say specifically why they believed any primary legislation to be incompatible with the European convention on human rights. The amendment would also give judges a clear indication that declarations of incompatibility should not be issued unless required to resolve a particular case before the court. I hope that the judge—I mean the Minister; I did not mean to elevate him to another Bench—will comment on that when he winds up.

I do not mean to denigrate the judiciary in any way, but a substantial period will be needed if it is to adapt to its new responsibilities under clause 4. Similar problems were experienced in 1973 when the treaty of Rome was introduced to the UK. Courts and practitioners applying European law for the first time needed a substantial period to be educated—for want of a better word—on the impact of the treaty on the interpretation of legislation.

I am delighted to say, Mr. Martin, that Scotland led the way in that regard, particularly through Professor J. D. B. Mitchell, of whom I had the great honour to be a student. We led the way because constitutional law courses in Scotland implemented a vigorous education for budding practitioners at an early stage. Present practitioners do not have that experience.

Mr. Hoon: Was the hon. Lady happy with how the treaty of Rome was incorporated into UK law?

Miss McIntosh: It might be more appropriate to comment on that on some other occasion, as we have more pressing matters to discuss this evening. Perhaps the Minister would like to discuss it with me at greater length in one of the parliamentary bars, so that we do not take up the Committee's time.

I commend the amendment to the Committee, and hope that the Government might be minded to support it.

Mr. Malins: First, I declare an interest. I am a recorder of the Crown court and, for some years, I have been an acting metropolitan stipendiary magistrate, so I have a great deal of judicial experience behind me. That has enabled me to realise that, when I sit judicially, it is my job to apply the law, whereas in this House it is our job to make the law. It is terribly important to understand and to maintain those differences.

When I spoke on Second Reading, I was vehement in my opposition to the principle of the Bill. I said that the danger was that it would effectively give the judges of this country powers to make law, whereas their job is to interpret it.

The right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan) was a little unkind to my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) when he accused him of launching an attack on the judiciary. My right hon. Friend did no such thing. He was rightly pointing to the different roles of the judiciary and Parliament, and saying that he feared that we might move towards a stage when the judiciary began to overlap into the fields that belong principally to Members of this House. He went no further—indeed, he was generous in his remarks about the judiciary.

Clause 4 is the cutting edge of the Bill. It is the point where the convention will bite in particular litigation to enable the litigant to invite the judge to come to a conclusion different from that which he would have reached but for the convention. Thus the amendments, and the clause generally, are extremely important. I urge the Government to accept the amendments. I see hon. Members who I know have reasonable attitudes. I shall not name them, but a number are known to be sensible thinkers about these matters. If they listen to our arguments carefully, as I can see they are doing, they will inevitably take them on board, and are likely to support us later tonight.

The past is in the past, and I must accept that my opposition to the Bill on Second Reading was not enough to carry the House on that occasion—not enough hon. Members took the same view. I said then, and I repeat tonight, that the roles of the judiciary and the legislature are, and should remain, entirely different. We must deal with the method by which the Government seek to give practical effect to the convention in English law. Having accepted the will of the House, it is important for me carefully to examine the problem, and to argue my corner about how best to give practical effect to the convention in our law.

Surely we can all agree on the need for clarity rather than obscurity and confusion when choosing the method of giving effect to the convention. The Bill's method is to enable the judge to make a declaration of incompatibility between a provision of existing domestic law and a convention provision. There is no reason in principle why that provision of domestic law should be a statutory provision or a provision of delegated legislation; it could well refer to common law. I add that a declaration of incompatibility may occur between a provision of existing domestic law and a convention provision as already interpreted by the European Court of Human Rights.

9.30 pm

The amendments, particularly amendment No. 15, ask the court properly to particularise the incompatibility. I hope to show why that is not only desirable but

absolutely essential. Let us take a simple law case. It may arise under existing landlord and tenant or employment legislation—it matters not.

Let us say that landlord and tenant legislation provides that a three-week period is reasonable notice for a change in the relationship between the parties. Suppose the court, on hearing argument, finds that the three-week period fails adequately to safeguard one or more convention rights. It would be unhelpful—indeed, arguably, faintly ludicrous—for the judge simply to say that and go no further. The judge should perhaps say what period would be a sufficient safeguard.

One can think of Revenue cases, particularly those concerning penalty time limits, in which such a point might be highly relevant. In my hypothetical case, it is no good the judge simply issuing a declaration of incompatibility and saying that three weeks is not long enough: he must go further.

Mr. Maclennan: Is not the hon. Gentleman, in making that suggestion, inviting the judge to usurp the legislative function and say what should be done? That is very much a matter for the House.

Mr. Malins: As I continued to explore that argument, I asked myself that very question. Was I in fact suggesting that the judge should move into the legislative sphere? However, that is not my point. My point is that the judge should not simply issue the declaration of incompatibility but give much more explanation, so that the House and others know what the judge considers the problem to be.

In my example of the three-week period in the relationship under landlord and tenant law on which the judge issues a declaration of incompatibility, such a statement is not enough. For example, what would the House do when faced with such a simple declaration of incompatibility? Would it remedy the point by substituting four, five or six weeks, only to have the same or a different judge saying later that that was not long enough?

The law should not be a game of ping-pong between the courts and the elected House of Commons. There is a danger that that will happen unless the amendments are accepted.

Here is an example of the problem as it currently exists. Under the Unfair Contract Terms Act 1977, a limitation clause in a contract may limit damages to £100,000, and the judge may strike it down as unreasonable. It could be argued that the unjustness in that case arises because we gave no power or duty to the judge to substitute a reasonable figure. Once the limit is judged unreasonable, the contract contains no limit: there is unlimited liability.

There is no obligation on the judge in such a case to tell the parties what would be a reasonable provision, and thus enable them to plan their future affairs properly. We cannot allow such a situation to exist. The amendments are right, and the judge must be required to state what aspect of the provision is incompatible and to what degree. The judge should produce a fully particularised judgment, so that people know why he or she has come to such a conclusion. The parties—the people of this country if it is a common law point, and the House of Commons if it is a statutory point—should know exactly how to alter their respective affairs or the law so as to comply with the convention.

Mr. Hoon: I have listened carefully to the hon. Gentleman's arguments, but some of them are a little far-fetched. Can he contemplate a decision by any of the courts listed in clause 4(5) that does not give carefully particularised reasons for the finding of incompatibility?

Mr. Malins: If the Bill had stated that, the Opposition would not have tabled the amendment. The clause provides that the court

"may make a declaration of that incompatibility."

We want to add the words

"setting out the nature and extent thereof in so far as arises from the nature of the case before the court".

The Minister asked whether I could imagine a case in which the court would not fully particularise the matter in such detail and with such observations.

Mr. Leigh: The Minister has at least done the House a service. Under Pepper *v.* Hart, a Minister's words—especially such a distinguished Minister as the hon. Gentleman—can be used by the courts to interpret the intentions of Parliament. Although the Minister will instruct his minions to vote down this sensible amendment, he has just said, in effect, that the courts should do precisely what the amendment would require them to do.

Mr. Malins: My hon. Friend has hit the nail on the head. It is all very well the Minister sitting there smiling, but this is a serious point, because people outside the House will take note of what is said in this debate. The Minister asked me whether I could envisage a case in which the court did not issue a fully particularised and detailed view on the matter. That requirement is not in the Bill, and the Minister's words may come back to haunt him. He seems to have accepted the substance of the amendment.

Mr. Grieve: I can think of a number of judgments of superior courts, including the House of Lords, which, while dealing with a precise point that had arisen before them, provided no guidelines on how the law might be complied with. That is precisely the point that the amendment is designed to address.

Mr. Malins: My hon. Friend, who, like my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh), has a distinguished career in the law, again makes a valid point. Conservative Members are afeared that the Bill means what it says. The Minister may correct me if I am wrong, but it says that a declaration of incompatibility will be issued.

I have been asked whether I could imagine a situation in which such a declaration would not be full, covering all the points of the amendment. If the Minister is saying that he is absolutely certain that its spirit and wording would be observed in practice, we should be happy to hear it, but that is not in the Bill, which is why we are advancing these arguments.

I must make a few concluding remarks, because the thrust of my arguments has, I hope, become clear. It has certainly become clear to me. Our amendments would

[Mr. Malins]

help to prevent, or certainly discourage, judges from pushing for changes in our law that were not strictly necessary. My right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) referred to that danger, and it lies ahead. The amendments would also discourage judges from getting involved in the political arena too much, and pressure groups from pushing too hard to open up a whole field in any particular case.

It must be clear to Labour Members that the Minister has, by his words tonight, effectively accepted our amendment. Therefore, I am sure that, having heard the arguments, he will accept it and bring his colleagues with him into the Lobby with us. If he does, and if he recognises our concerns, we shall be satisfied.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: The clause goes to the heart of the Bill. My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) was absolutely right to say that it is a collision point; I regard it as a recipe for permanent conflict between Parliament and our courts. I agree with my hon. and learned Friend's assertion and encourage him to go further in attacking the Government. He said that he acquitted them of seeking to destroy the constitution through the Bill. He is a reasonable man, which is a reason why he advanced that case. I am not of such charitable disposition.

As I have said previously in the House, I believe that the Bill is one of a series of measures—on Scotland, the Welsh Assembly and the proposals for the European Parliament—that strike at the constitution. A constitutional arrangement that has served the people of Britain well is being systematically destroyed. That owes much to the vanity of the Prime Minister. He has no great economic issue to fight, because that was done by the Conservatives over 18 glorious years; therefore, he has turned his attention to wrecking the constitution.

My hon. Friend the Member for Woking (Mr. Malins) said that people outside the Chamber would listen to the debate with great interest. I am afraid that he was joking, because our debates on the great constitutional issues, which affect the people of this country, are not being reported. We need only look to see the number of journalists taking careful note of what is said.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) was right to say that the people have an interest in constitutional measures, but those issues are not being brought to their attention. As the Minister knows, people are much more interested in the Lord Chancellor's wallpaper. As the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Tipping) knows, I played a small part—I should be the first to acknowledge that that is an important issue, but it is not half as important as the issues that we are debating.

Consider the relative coverage that constitutional issues have been given by the media: Gazza, and Ginger Spice leaving the Spice Girls have commanded acres of coverage. One day, the people of Britain will wake up, and will see that all these changes are being made to our constitution.

The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. I must ask the hon. Gentleman to confine himself to the amendment. The matters to which he is referring have nothing to do with it.

9.45 pm

Mr. Howarth: You are very kind, Mr. Martin, but I am trying to draw attention to the importance of the issue. I think that what I am saying is pertinent to the amendment, which requires the courts, if they seek to strike down legislation on the ground that it is incompatible with a convention right, to give reasons for doing so. I think that such questions should be aired to a much wider public than they are now.

The Bill strikes at the heart of the concept of the separation of powers. I do not share the benign, indeed complacent, view of the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan). He does not think it possible that judges would seek to challenge Parliament—but, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal pointed out, judges are human beings like the rest of us. As I think my right hon. Friend said, they have a natural appetite for the extension of their powers, and that should be constrained.

In this place, we should anticipate what might come to pass. There are enough eminent lawyers around—I single out just two, George Carman and Geoffrey Robertson—who quite enjoy the limelight. I cast no aspersions on them, of course—not tonight, anyway—but I think that, if the Bill becomes law, we could well be faced with a new breed of judge, who would seek—

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. The hon. Gentleman cannot get away with this. He is trying to engage in a Second Reading debate, but, as he must know, there are amendments before the Committee, and he must zero in on them.

Mr. Howarth: I am grateful for your guidance, Mr. Martin.

We have been discussing the separation of powers, and how the amendments relate to it. My point is that there is a grave danger that the courts will seek to exercise new powers that the Bill confers on them. The amendments merely require them to explain why they seek to strike down laws enacted by this sovereign Parliament.

Mr. Gummer: May I return my hon. Friend to the subject of the amendment? Its purpose, surely, is specifically to constrain the human condition. I am sorry that the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan) took it so personally; I merely said that we were all heir to the same danger—the danger of wanting greater rather than lesser powers. That seems manifestly true to me, and the amendment would enable us to restrain such powers in an elegant but important way.

Mr. Howarth: My right hon. Friend has made his case eloquently, and he is entirely right. I hope that the complacency of the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross will be noted, because I think it extremely dangerous. It should be made clear that, unless the amendment is accepted, the courts may seek to overthrow the rights of our Parliament.

In October last year, in an interesting article in *The Times*, Sir Brian Cubbon—formerly Permanent Under-Secretary of State at the Home Office—wrote:

"The redress of grievances has been a traditional role of the House of Commons. The Bill would shift that responsibility to the courts over the whole field of what are called human rights in the European

Convention. This goes far beyond the present scope of judicial review . . . Rights under the convention cover many of the grievances which MPs receive from their constituents about public authorities."

My hon. Friend the Member for Woking said that pressure groups, having failed to impress their case on Parliament, might seek to come not to this place but to the courts, where they will argue their case in the hope that they will enable the judges to strike down laws that were enacted by Parliament.

My hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) wishes to participate in the debate, so I shall conclude by saying that Mr. Francis Bennion, an eminent constitutional lawyer, has said that the Bill is neither a mirror image of the Strasbourg convention nor free standing, and could enable the courts not to reflect the Strasbourg convention but to interpret it in their own way. Will judges be required to interpret the laws of the land as being consistent with the European convention on human rights or will they be free to develop their own law? It is important to establish that.

The amendment is modest, and the Minister has acknowledged the case for it. If he agrees with its thrust, accepting it will do him no harm, and will clearly show the public exactly what we are trying to achieve.

Mr. Grieve: I do not wish it to be thought that the only speeches supporting the amendments came from those who, on broad principle, were against the Bill. As I think the Minister knows, I support incorporation, although there are some matters that I wish to scrutinise and criticise during the passage of the legislation. I appreciate the point, which I am sure the Minister will make, that one would normally expect a court, when pronouncing on a question of incompatibility, to set out the nature and the extent of that incompatibility as it arises from the nature of the case that is before the court. In principle, that is what one would expect, but, in my experience, courts occasionally do not do that. It is an indispensable prerequisite to Parliament being able to make an objective and correct judgment on incompatibility and on how it wishes to proceed for that decision to be made here.

One of the anxieties that has been expressed at length during consideration of the Bill and with which I broadly disagree, although I understand its nature, is that the courts will start to substitute themselves for Parliament in ensuring the freedoms of the people. As I have said, this legislation will work and will go down in history as being great if it is subsequently perceived that Parliament and the courts are working in tandem to achieve good human rights in accordance with the convention and its incorporation in our national law. It follows that, if primary legislation is considered to be incompatible with the terms of the Bill and the incorporated convention—an event which, I hope, will rarely occur—we should be clear about what the court has said is the problem, and there should be public consideration of the matter.

As I said on Second Reading, the Bill is not written in stone. On occasions, Parliament, having considered the matter carefully, might decide that, notwithstanding what has been said, it wishes to derogate from the court's decision, for sound public policy reasons. I hope that it would not have to do that, but it might. It seems that little would be lost by including amendments Nos. 15 and 16, which relate to subordinate legislation, and that something might be gained, although I would understand the Minister saying, "Normally, I would expect this to be dealt with without any specific reference to it being made." Nevertheless, if no harm would result from including the amendment—I do not see what harm would result—it could properly be put in the Bill.

The matter is somewhat different in respect of amendment No. 103. It requests that a court should not make a declaration of incompatibility

"unless it is necessary for the purpose of determining the matter before it."

I had some hesitation about that when I first considered it, because what the courts may say in obiter parts of their judgment is important for lawyers in respect of similar cases, but it would still be open to a court to reveal in the course of a judgment its anxiety over some passage relating to a case not before it, without making a declaration of incompatibility that did not relate to the matter before it.

I do not think that the amendment will fetter a court's ability to make obiter pronouncements suggesting that, in some other respect, something that it is considering may not be compatible with the convention. I therefore ask the Minister to consider that amendment as well, although I would be not be as worried about it not being made as I would be about the other two amendments not being accepted.

Mr. Hoon: I agree with Opposition Members to this extent. Clause 4 is central to the careful compromise that the Government propose in the Bill—a compromise between parliamentary sovereignty and the need to give proper effect to the European convention. However, the Government will resist the Opposition amendments because they will unnecessarily disturb the careful balance that the Government have sought to establish.

Amendments Nos. 15 and 16 would require a court making a declaration of incompatibility to set out the nature and extent of the incompatibility in so far as that arose from the nature of the case before the court. It is important to remind the Committee of what the court will do when it makes a declaration of incompatibility by virtue of clause 4.

By virtue of clause 3, the court will have done everything possible to find an interpretation of the relevant legislation that is compatible with the convention rights. If one of the courts that is specified in clause 4 is satisfied that it is simply not possible to find a compatible interpretation, it will be able to say so formally by means of a declaration of incompatibility. That is most likely to have followed the procedure that is set out in clause 5 giving the Crown the right to intervene.

With great respect to the hon. Member for Woking (Mr. Malins), I believe that his description of courts suggested that they would pronounce on incompatibility almost at the drop of a hat. There will be a vigorous contest before a court, and both sides of the argument will be extensively debated and discussed before that court reaches a decision. As I have said in an intervention, it will be obvious that the matter has been explored in considerable detail and, clearly, one of the higher courts that are set out in clauses 4 and 5 will be required to explain in some detail the reasons for issuing the declaration.

A declaration of incompatibility will be a statement that, in the court's view, there is a problem with a piece of legislation in terms of its compatibility with the

[Mr. Hoon]

convention, and it is not open to the court itself to rectify or to make good the legislation. That may happen because a Government may have deliberately provided in a Bill that it is not to be open to the court to strike down primary legislation. That course of action could have been considered by the Government when making our proposals. As we heard from the hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier), that approach is adopted in some countries when dealing with such measures. Nevertheless, the Government decided that, in the interests of maintaining parliamentary sovereignty, that would not be the course we would commend to Parliament.

Interestingly, great stress was placed on parliamentary sovereignty in our earlier discussions, but there has been a curious absence of it in this debate. We have placed parliamentary sovereignty at the centre of the proposals and we have not allowed the courts to strike down legislation. By enabling the courts to make a declaration of incompatibility, the situation can be brought to the notice of Parliament and the deficiency subsequently rectified by Parliament, whether by primary legislation or by approving a remedial order. That allows Parliament precisely the opportunity for which Opposition Members have been arguing. I am sorry that they have not accepted that during my comments.

10 pm

Perhaps I should turn in more detail to the formulation offered in amendments Nos. 15 and 16. I doubt whether a requirement on the court to explain the "nature and extent" of the incompatibility would add anything to the Bill, from anyone's point of view. As the Bill stands, I would expect a court, when making a declaration, to explain what the difficulty was and why it had been impossible to overcome it by constructive interpretation of clause 3. How the declaration arose would be apparent from the judgment as a whole.

A legislative provision will be either compatible or incompatible. The idea that it is possible for a court to certify the extent of the incompatibility is patent nonsense—forgive me for putting it so brutally. It is not possible to certify the extent of an incompatibility. There is either a breach of the convention or there is not. That part of the amendments is patently absurd. There will not be degrees of incompatibility, or any difference between one kind of incompatibility and another.

I am not sure what is meant by the "nature" of the case before the court. Does that refer to distinctions between civil and criminal cases, between cases involving juveniles and cases involving adults, between long and short cases, or between cases with a jury and cases without a jury? Not one Opposition Member has troubled to try to explain that aspect.

Even if we accepted such wording, why is the nature of the case relevant to whether legislation can or cannot be interpreted compatibly with the convention? The implication is that legislation could mean one thing in one case and another in another case. That hardly strikes me as a sound basis for judicial interpretation. Having thought more carefully about the amendment, I hope that Opposition Members will accept that they are not arguing for anything terribly sensible.

That applies equally to amendment No. 103. The purpose of a declaration is to draw attention to a legislative incompatibility with the convention and to act as a trigger for a remedial order under clauses 10 to 12. A declaration of incompatibility has no effect on the case before the court. Clause 4(6) expressly provides that a declaration does not affect the validity, continuing operation or enforcement of the relevant legislative provision. This is because we think that any decision to change primary legislation should be reserved for the consideration of Parliament. Again, the Government are upholding the sovereignty of Parliament and are not in any way breaching that principle.

Amendment No. 103 would prevent a declaration from being made unless that were specifically necessary to determine the case in question, yet the kinds of cases where the issues are likely to arise will almost inevitably be complex and involve different issues, each of which will have to be resolved by the court. Under this amendment, it is highly unlikely that a declaration of incompatibility would ever be made. That may be the real intention of the Opposition. *[Interruption.]*

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. There are so many conversations going on that I cannot hear the Minister.

Mr. Hoon: Opposition Members have been anxiously awaiting these observations. I am sorry that they appear to find them less than exciting.

It is important that we deal properly with incompatibility and the declaration that might follow. Amendment No. 103 simply does not deal with it, and has no place in the scheme that we have established in clause 4.

The Government believe that this group of amendments is fundamentally misconceived. I do not believe that the amendments have been read carefully by Opposition Members. I therefore invite the hon. and learned Member for Harborough to seek leave to withdraw amendment No. 15.

Mr. Garnier: I am grateful for this brief opportunity to respond to some of the points made in this debate, particularly those made by my right hon. and hon. Friends.

In a considered and cogent speech, my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) produced four reasons why this group of amendments should be supported: in defence of the people; in defence of the Government; in defence of the House; and in defence of the courts. Nothing that has fallen from the Minister's lips has done anything to persuade either me or my right hon. and hon. Friends that the arguments in favour of the amendments have been in any way defeated.

The right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan) hides within his gentle exterior a waspish tongue. I am not in the least bit surprised that his nickname across the county that he represents is "Tiger". Despite his waspish tongue, he did not say anything to knock our arguments on the head one jot. The substance of his complaint was that the language of amendment No. 15 was confusing. That is a matter for him, but it seems pretty clear to us.

My hon. Friends the Members for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh) and for Woking (Mr. Malins) spoke with experience of membership of the House and, in the case of my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of York, as a Member of the European Parliament and Scottish law graduate, and, in the case of my hon. Friend the Member for Woking, as a recorder and stipendiary magistrate, with practical experience of the judicial function. Both realise the dangers of breaking down the barriers separating two of the three limbs of our constitution. My hon. Friend the Member for Woking also very carefully suggested that the incompatibility which is to be declared under clause 4 must be properly particularised. Nothing has been said by the Minister to dissuade me from the rightness of that argument.

I am happy to say that my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) gave a characteristically robust performance. He was certainly not put off his stride by some of the interventions with which he dealt so expertly.

My hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) has become a noted star of our debates on both the Human Rights Bill and the other constitutional issues with which he has had to deal. He supported amendment No. 15 from the interesting position of someone who supports incorporation. He deserves to be listened to with particular attention. It is perhaps worth reminding the Minister of a point that he mentioned—the European Court of Human Rights does not distinguish between obiter dicta and the ratio of a judgment.

The Minister promised much, but delivered nothing. He is complacent. He is always complacent—on this subject and on others—about the prospect of a constitutional collision about which we have warned. He displayed a touching faith in his own rhetoric, without understanding what has been going on in this debate. Not a single argument that he advanced has persuaded me or my hon. Friends that the matter should be left to lie. I invite my hon. Friends to join me in the Lobby in supporting the amendment.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 128, Noes 320.

Division No. 292] **[10.8 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, D avid
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Beggs, Roy
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Butterfill, John
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Colvin, Michael
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forsythe, Clifford
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gray, James
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Heald, Oliver
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Randall, John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Sir David Madel and
Mr. Tim Collins.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Austin, John
Ballard, Jackie
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Breed, Colin
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Cann, Jamie
Casale, Roger
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann

Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, Yvette
Corston, Ms Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davies, Rt Hon Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Drew, David
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Goggins, Paul
Gorrie, Donald
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
Mackinlay, Andrew
Madennan, Rt Hon Robert
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Alun
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Paul *(Torfaen)*
Norris, Dan
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Rendel, David
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stott, Roger
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Robert Ainsworth and Mr. Jim Dowd.

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): I beg to move amendment No. 107, in page 3, line 24, at end insert—

'(f) in Jersey, the Royal Court or the Court of Appeal;

(g) in Guernsey, the Royal Court or the Court of Appeal;

(h) in the Isle of Man, the High Court'.

The First Deputy Chairman: With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 108, in clause 5, page 3, line 40, after 'Scotland', insert

', the Channel Islands or the Isle of Man'.

No. 109, in clause 21, page 13, line 34, at end insert—

'( ) law passed by the legislature of any of the Channel Islands or of the Isle of Man'.

No. 110, in clause 22, page 14, line 22, at end insert—

'(6A) This Act extends to the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man, and shall have effect as if each of them were part of the United Kingdom.'.

Mr. Mitchell: The amendments would extend incorporation of the European convention to the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands. I suppose that the only phrase to describe them is "semi-independent statelets", but they have a unique status as dependencies of the Crown, too. They are Britain's offshore anomalies, because, although they are responsible for their own domestic law, financial affairs and tax regimes, the United Kingdom has the overall responsibility for good government in the islands.

The United Kingdom can legislate for the islands; it has the paramount power to do so. However, in practice, it does not do so except on matters involving international treaties and international agreements—such as the incorporation of the European convention on human rights, which we signed on their behalf at the outset.

Paragraph 1472 of the Kilbrandon commission's report on the constitution, dated 1973, said:

"Parliament does have power to legislate for the Islands without their consent on any matter in order to give effect to an international agreement"—

such as the European convention on human rights. The power was used in relation to the Extradition Act 1989, which was extended to the Channel Islands as if they were part of the United Kingdom, and also in connection with the Marine, etc., Broadcasting (Offences) Act 1967, which was effectively imposed on the Isle of Man.

The British Government's power to legislate is appropriate, as they have the responsibility to ensure that rights are maintained in the islands. Moreover, the British Government have to answer cases brought to Strasbourg about infringements of rights on the islands—we signed the convention on the islands' behalf. Indeed, in the birching case, the European Court ruled that convention rights applied to the Isle of Man.

My argument is that the convention should be incorporated not only into British law but into the law of the islands. Rights should be protected in these small democracies and dependencies, which are intimate and closed—they are, in many respects, living loopholes from the 20th century. There is no real party democracy that could make the legislature accountable, no open government and no base for dissent. The islands have their own tax regimes, which must cost our Exchequer billions of pounds in lost revenues. They do not have clear, powerful, effective financial regulations—they have become little offshore entrepots for the manipulation of money.

Powers are not separated: in Jersey, for example, the Bailiff—the Lord Chancellor—is also the Speaker of the States, the Attorney-General and the Solicitor-General sit in the States and there is no independent Director of Public Prosecutions. Women have no employment or benefits rights.

The islands have all the intimacies and pressures of any small community—they are like Salem without the witches. In Jersey, which is the richest of them, power is, in effect, controlled by the wealthy island elite—the island establishment—which has a vested interest in providing services to finance. Many members of the elite are business men or maintainers of name plates for incoming companies; many are involved with Jersey banks and the offshoots of other banks in Jersey that manipulate money. The elite controls power through the parliamentary institutions. It also controls the media—Senator Walker owns the *Jersey Evening Post*, which is, therefore, hardly likely to be a vibrant source of dissent.

The islands have been humorously described—by me—as one-party states run by the freemasons. There are no parties and no opposition, so the regimes are cloying and potentially corrupt, because, in Jersey in particular, the governing elite does so well out of the provision of facilities for financial services, which give such a rich living—£200 billion is handled in the Jersey banks and financial institutions, and financial services provide more than 50 per cent. of the gross domestic product of Jersey.

If the people who control political power are also involved in the financial system, that system will be run for their interests and for those of the offshore capitalism that washes through, but leaves little residue for the people of the islands—there is no great trickle-down effect for the mass of the people. It is also possible that they will use their power to control legislation to further their own interests. In other words, legislation could be effectively up for sale. They resent any interference by the British Government or any attempt to control what is going on or to demand stricter regulation or a more effective tax regime.

Two years ago, however, they were perfectly prepared to intervene in the financial affairs of the United Kingdom in respect of limited liability partnerships. Big accountancy firms, terrified of lawsuits resulting from bad audits, were lobbying the British Government, who were then of another party, to give them limited liability status. Rather than becoming joint stock companies as they were given the power to do under the Companies Act 1989—

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. I am very interested in what the hon. Gentleman has to say, but it does not fall within the scope of the amendments. He is talking about the status of the islands rather than the courts. The hon. Gentleman knows better than I do how to handle the amendments.

10.30 pm

Mr. Mitchell: Amendment No. 107 would extend the incorporation of the convention into the islands' legislation. Rights are threatened by the dominance of the financial interests. Those rights can best be protected by the incorporation of the convention.

A row that resulted in a real threat to rights in Jersey was caused by the attempt two years ago to interfere in the United Kingdom financial system in respect of limited liability partnerships in Jersey. Effectively, two accountancy houses bought legislation in Jersey to limit liability. The legislation was drawn up by a London barrister at a cost of £1 million, and was promised a fast-track passage into law by the Jersey States. They sought to interfere here, as the idea was that they would force the British Government to follow suit. The protest against the rapid passage of that legislation resulted in a threat to the rights of Senator Syvaret, whose case is an illustration of the need to incorporate the convention into the legislation of the islands.

[Mr. Mitchell]

Any threat to intervene there is bitterly resented. The establishment in Jersey tries to maintain good relations with the Minister—usually a peer at the Home Office—who is richly and lavishly entertained. One establishment talks rhubarb to another establishment. Not satisfied with that, it employs extensive public relations advice, which is appropriate to the modern world of spin doctors and public relations.

The Max Clifford of Jersey is the Shandwick public affairs consultancy, which was paid £225,000 until the row over limited liability partnerships, when its fee was upped by another £200,000, so nearly £500,000 was paid out of the taxes of the people of Jersey to defend the interests of the elite. That involved all sorts of activities, which I shall not go into as they would divert me from the incorporation of the convention on human rights into the laws of Jersey.

However, I should mention in passing that part of the £500,000 that was spent on public relations as a result of the row over limited liability partnerships was paid in writing letters to me. Shandwick reported to the Jersey States about my article, saying:

"I have ensured that Labour party key people have been briefed on the Jersey line"—

which was against me. It continued:

"Mr. Mitchell is regarded as being a liability by the Labour party".

I am sure that my right hon. Friend will want to assure the people of Jersey that that is not the case, and that I am indeed regarded as an asset by the Labour party.

Mr. Straw: I give my very old and honourable Friend that categorical assurance.

Mr. Mitchell: I am most grateful to my right hon. Friend. That stage-managed intervention gives me a great deal of pleasure.

In contrast to what was said about me, it was said about my hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr. Radice):

"He is not likely to be made a member of the Government but I think he is worth targeting because of his level of knowledge and because he is still listened to by those in senior positions."

That is picking and choosing in the Labour party, but it is part of public relations—*[Interruption.]* I am leaving the topic.

I want to deal with the abridgement of rights that resulted from the attempt to limit liability for partnerships of accountancy houses, which was passed, under the fast-track procedure, by the Jersey States. The problem is that, when the elite feels threatened—when there is a threat to its vested financial interests and the provision of services—whether it be by the British Government or by critics in this country, it is prepared to use all the power and resources at its disposal to beat off that threat, whether it is internal or external. That often produces abridgements of rights, which are endemic in a system where there is no separation of powers; where the Executive is also the legislature; where there is no meaningful opposition; and where there is no protection of rights.

I have already referred to the lack of protection of the rights of women. I was told in a telephone conversation today that a man in Sark still has the right to beat his wife, provided that the stick is thinner than his thumb and he does not draw blood. I do not want to provoke a rush of public school Conservatives wanting to settle in the island as a result of that revelation, but it is a sign of the feudal nature of the regime in Sark and the abuses of rights that it produces. The newspapers cite numerous instances of that.

In Guernsey, not long ago, there was the case of three men being locked up over a bank holiday without trial. The case did not come to court until five months later, and they were acquitted. A construction worker on the island of Brecqhou who was arrested in a drugs case was taken from Guernsey to Sark and charged, probably in the wrong jurisdiction, subjected to a trial in French—a language that he did not speak—and then told by a lawyer on the telephone, "You might as well plead guilty and get it over with." His rights were abridged.

There is the case of the Barclay brothers, the owners of *The Scotsman*. It involved an abridgement of rights. David Barclay wrote to me saying:

"I have discovered by bitter experience over the past three or four years, and to my immense cost, the lack of natural justice and democratic rights in the Bailiwick of Guernsey and the island of Sark".

He said that, on Sark:

"The Seigneur is the head of the Chief Pleas, Sark's Parliament, which is made up of 40 unelected members and he collects a thirteenth of the price of every property purchased on the island. This money is for his own personal benefit"—

it is a marvellous racket—

"and serves no economic benefit whatsoever to the community. He appoints the Seneschal; he appoints the Prevot (Sheriff); he appoints the Greffier; he appoints the Treasurer and he approves the Constable."

What defence of rights is there in such a situation?

David Barclay continued:

"The previous owner of Brecqhou"—

which the Barclay brothers now own—

"was forced into a legal dispute to establish rightful ownership of the island under the feudal laws of primogeniture."

There was a long dispute over which court applied—Sark or Guernsey. The case was referred to Guernsey, but after six years it remained unresolved. The owner was told that the court case could go on for another six years. Justice denied is a loss of rights. There is no appeal; there is no check on that sort of excess, which is now affecting the Barclay brothers. That is an appalling situation. The Barclay brothers are wealthy enough to take care of themselves, but it is difficult to do so when there is no protection for rights.

The case of Senator Syvaret arose from limited liability partnerships. When a Bill was rushed through the Jersey States, he drew attention to a conflict of interest by pointing out that Senator Reg Jeune was part of Mourant, du Feu and Jeune, which was acting for Price Waterhouse and Ernst and Young in trying to pass the Bill. There is a fascinating precedent in that Bill, which we could observe. The introduction expresses Jersey's indebtedness to Ernst and Young and Price Waterhouse for writing the Bill. Perhaps we could have sponsored legislation, too. It is a marvellous system.

Thus the Bill was being handled by Mourant, du Feu and Jeune, while Senator Jeune was urging its speedy passage. When Senator Syvaret drew attention to that

conflict of interest, he was suspended indefinitely, unless he withdrew his remarks and apologised. He was deprived of his rights as a legislator, and his constituents were deprived of representation. Basic rights were denied, and there was no appeal.

Appeals to the Home Office Minister then responsible produced no result. I tabled an early-day motion that was well supported, and which produced a change of heart in Jersey. Senator Syvaret was allowed back without making an apology. They huddled him in by the back door. He is involved in a legal action over the deprivation of his rights, so that the case can go to Strasbourg, but that will remain a long, difficult road unless we incorporate the convention into the laws of all the islands, as my amendments would do.

We have the power to do that, and we have a moral obligation to do it. If we do not, in my view, and in the view of lawyers whom I have read, we shall be in breach of article 14 of the convention, if it is read alongside article 6. We are responsible for the islands, and when Senator Syvaret's case reaches Strasbourg, it will be titled Syvaret *v.* the United Kingdom. What formidable odds the senator from little Jersey faces as he takes on the entire United Kingdom. We are responsible for derelictions of rights in the islands, and we have a right to act under the external agreement. The royal commission on the constitution of 1973 made that explicit.

My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is a canny man. Perhaps he is doing a nice guy, nasty guy routine, and he might portray me as a mean, moody monster who threatens the independence and integrity of the islands. My right hon. Friend knows that that is not my nature; I am warm and cuddly, and I have a vacuous smile for all, as any new Labour politician must. To portray me as some kind of brute or monster, trampling on the freedom of the islands, would be wrong.

I know—I have read it in the papers, and I have been handed letters that confirm it—that the fact that the amendments were tabled encouraged the Under-Secretary, Lord Williams of Mostyn, to go to Guernsey. He did not get to Jersey, because there was a strike, so the Jersey elite paddled over in rowing boats to consult him. They agreed to pass the legislation, but I want to know why it should be done that way. Would it not be better to do it for ourselves? Then there would be no backsliding, and it would be done without delay. The legislative processes in the islands are very slow—unless they are financed by Price Waterhouse or Ernst and Young. It can take three years, and rights would still be abused in that period.

I notice from the newspapers that Senator Pierre Horsfall of Jersey said that the Bailiff told Lord Williams that, when Sir Philip Bailhache was previously Attorney-General—he is now the Bailiff—

"Jersey was on the verge of adopting the convention but was asked not to do so by the Home Office as the UK Government did not want to be seen to be following a dependency in adopting the provisions of the Human Rights Convention."

That cannot possibly be true. I should like my right hon. Friend to comment on it.

10.45 pm

An editorial in the Guernsey *Evening Press* says, more or less, that I should mind my own business. It states:

"We would rather see the Labour MP turn his attention to real problems in the UK, such as the growing hospital waiting lists, prison overcrowding and drugs".

That comes from an island where there is a shortage of nurses and prison staff because they are not paid enough and there is a growing drugs problem. The island cannot afford the latest medical technology, and urgent and serious cases are sent to Southampton for treatment. The British health service and all British social services are being drained of billions of pounds through the taxes and fiddles that are going on in the independent financial regime there.

We shall not ratify the fourth protocol at present, for reasons that were explained to me by the Home Office Minister. I wish to put a further question to my right hon. Friend about the fourth protocol, which has been put to me from Jersey. Is it possible to include the fourth protocol in any Jersey Bill if it is not included in the British Bill—and if not, why not? Is there any reason why Jersey or Guernsey could not introduce the fourth protocol in local Bills, even if the UK does not?

I am afraid that I have spoken for too long, so I shall bring my remarks to a conclusion. Many other hon. Members want to participate in the debate and give their views on offshore havens—those curious offshore anomalies. I know that my right hon. Friend is interested in and concerned about the issue. He has demonstrated his concern by initiating an inquiry into the regulatory regime. I hope that he will rush to accept my amendment, so that we can get the matter over with without delay or backsliding from the islands. If not, I hope that he has bankable assurances from the islands that they will legislate for themselves if he is anxious to maintain the convention. In my view, it is not necessary to do so because I want the rights of the masses of ordinary people in the islands—not those of the elite, who can take care of themselves—to be protected, so that we can make the islands fit for people, not just for money.

Mr. Maclennan: The hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) has raised a valuable issue. In another place, my noble Friend Lord Lester of Herne Hill gave my party's view, which is broadly sympathetic to the hon. Gentleman's objectives, and we support the principle of incorporation for the offshore dependencies. It is not necessary to go into all the circumstances that he has adduced in support of his argument, or even to adopt his reasoning. However, there is no doubt about our ability to do what he suggests.

Mr. Mitchell: I omitted to express my indebtedness to Lord Lester, who wrote the amendments and provided me with helpful support and advice. I am grateful to him. I thank the right hon. Gentleman for giving me the opportunity to say that.

Mr. Maclennan: In turn, I am grateful to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby, as my noble Friend will be.

This country's obligation to take the rights of those living in those dependencies seriously is undoubted. How that is done—whether in the Bill or by the legislatures of the islands themselves—is of secondary importance. What is crucial is that it be done. The hon. Member for Great Grimsby has said that it is likely that it will be done within the islands, or at least that such an intention has been expressed, and I am advised that it is at least probable. That would not necessarily have happened if the issue had not been pressed, as it has been by the hon. Gentleman, and if the House had not expressed strong concern about regularising the position.

[Mr. Maclennan]

I do not doubt that one point that surprises many other countries about our adherence to the convention is that we did not long ago provide domestic remedies designed to give effect to the convention rights. Equivalent legislation was certainly passed in all the other signatory countries. It would be highly anomalous if the islands were to remain outwith the convention scheme under which domestic remedies are made available to give effect to the rights. I hope that that view will have been heard in all the islands and that we shall have no more Manx birching cases being contested in Strasbourg, because they can be handled in Douglas.

Mr. Straw: I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) for tabling the amendments and raising this important issue, just as the Government were grateful in the other place for the way in which Lord Lester raised the matter there.

As we have heard, the amendments would apply the Bill's provisions in various ways to the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man. My hon. Friend has pointed out that the United Kingdom is obliged to ensure that the islands comply with the convention and that there is a right of individual petition to the convention institutions in Strasbourg in respect of the islands, but that the convention does not at present have effect in their domestic law. I am happy to tell the Committee that the island authorities have made it clear that they want to bring rights home to the islands, just as we are doing in the United Kingdom.

Before I move on to the detail of that, it may assist the Committee if I say something about the constitutional relationship between the United Kingdom and the islands. That was set out in detail in the report of the royal commission on the constitution in 1973—the Kilbrandon report. My hon. Friend referred in particular to paragraph 1494 and the conclusions in paragraph 1513.

Briefly, the conclusion of the Kilbrandon report is that the United Kingdom Government are responsible for the defence and international relations of the islands, and the Crown is ultimately responsible for their good government. It falls to the Home Secretary to advise the Crown on the exercise of those duties and responsibilities. The United Kingdom Parliament has the power to legislate for the islands, but it would exercise that power without their agreement in relation to domestic matters only in the most exceptional circumstances.

A domestic circumstance that also affected all the countries that make up the United Kingdom—and, to some extent, had international effects—which was cited at length in the Kilbrandon report, was the issue, which those of us of a certain age remember only too well, of the so-called pirate radio stations that were set up off the shore of the Isle of Man in the early 1960s. Some of us still remember the catch tune of Radio Caroline. Much of the noise harassment that some of us now suffer could be said to have flowed from that experiment. Those were exceptional circumstances: legislation on domestic matters usually takes the form of laws enacted by the island legislatures, although they are subject to endorsement by me as Secretary of State for the Home Department and by the Privy Council.

United Kingdom laws are sometimes extended to the islands with their agreement. We consulted the island authorities about the extension of the Bill to them. All three said that they did not wish it to be so extended, and, as we want to maintain satisfactory relations with the islands, we paid careful attention to their views, as always.

The Committee will be glad to know that my noble Friend Lord Williams, the Minister with responsibility for the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man, has undertaken a series of visits to find out from the island authorities what plans they have in the human rights field. I am pleased to say that their responses have all been positive. Each of the island authorities has made clear its intentions with respect to the Bill and the incorporation in its domestic law of the European convention. I have placed copies of their public statements and letters in the Library and have made them available to the official Opposition, to the Liberal Democrats and to my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby.

It is worth pointing out that Jersey has fairly said that, six years ago, under the previous Administration, a proposal that the island should enact legislation to incorporate the European convention was raised with Home Office officials and was discussed informally with the Secretary-General of the Commission in Strasbourg. The island's Attorney-General was informed at that time by officials that the Home Office did not favour the island acting in advance of the United Kingdom, so the matter was shelved. Consultation goes both ways, and the previous Government, for reasons that I understand, but do not agree with, decided that they did not want incorporation of the convention in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and asked the island authorities to follow suit.

The Bailiff of Jersey has now made it clear that the insular authorities

"wish to confirm their previously declared intention to progress the matter of legislation to incorporate the European Convention on Human Rights into Jersey law, having regard to the particular circumstances of the Island, once the United Kingdom Bill has completed its progress through Parliament in Westminster."

The Bailiff's letter goes on:

"The Insular Authorities confidently expect to have a draft law with the Home Office for pre audit in the normal way by the end of this year."

The States of Guernsey issued a public statement on 22 May. The President of the Advisory and Finance Committee said:

"The States Advisory and Finance Committee intends to recommend to the States of Guernsey that legislation be enacted"—

to incorporate the convention—

"having regard to the particular circumstances of the Island".

He said that, once the Bill has become law, recommendations will be laid before the States of Guernsey. He added:

"The Committee is confident that it will be possible to submit a draft law to the Home Office for pre-audit before the end of this year."

In December 1997, the Isle of Man made it clear that it intended to introduce legislation to give effect in Manx law to the convention on human rights. It says:

"Before any Government Bill is introduced in the House of Keys, a draft is always sent to the Home Office for their comments, if necessary after consultation with other United Kingdom Departments, and appropriate measures are taken to consult local interests."

In the light of those statements, I hope that the Committee will recognise that the Governments of each of the three islands are committed to introducing

legislation fully to incorporate the European convention into their own law and to consult me, my officials and the Government more widely on the precise terms of that incorporation.

I believe that that is a satisfactory outcome.

Mr. Jim Cousins (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

11 pm

Mr. Straw: Of course, in a moment.

I hope that, in the light of those clear undertakings, my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby will see fit to withdraw the amendment.

My hon. Friend asked whether any of the island authorities could incorporate into their domestic law the fourth protocol of the convention, even though it is not being incorporated into the Bill. The answer is that they cannot incorporate any part of the convention that the United Kingdom and the Crown, as high contracting party to the convention, have not accepted. That important part of our relationship with the islands gives the Crown and the United Kingdom Parliament ultimate authority over them: we, and not they, enter into all international obligations, which are then binding on the islands.

That said, it would none the less be open to each of the island authorities and Parliaments, should they want to, to write the terms of the fourth protocol, or of any other protocol not incorporated into the Bill, into their domestic law.

Mr. Cousins: My right hon. Friend's remarks have been extremely helpful—indeed, fascinating—but may I draw his attention to the fact that the third protocol of the treaty of accession to the treaty of Rome, which was passed by the United Kingdom Parliament, specifically exempts the Crown dependencies from participating in the European Union for the purposes of people, finance and capital? They participate in the EU solely for the purpose of movement of goods for trading. Is he satisfied that the rather anomalous position of the Crown dependencies within the EU provides the right constitutional foundation for fully satisfying the terms of the Bill?

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend raises an interesting point. I shall not detain the Committee, because we are due to finish this business in 10 minutes, except to say that, as part of the somewhat onerous duties of the presidency of the European Union, I spent two and a half days in Brussels last week as President of the Justice and Home Affairs Council. A lot of time was devoted to the extent to which the islands were subject to various treaties under the treaty of Rome. We are dealing with a convention arising not under the treaty of Rome and the European Communities treaties, but under the Council of Europe, of which we have been a member for many more years than we have been a member of the European Communities.

The position in respect of the European Union and the islands is complicated, not only because of what the islands desire, but because of difficulties for Gibraltar and other places—not dependencies of the United Kingdom—over how such territories should be dealt with in those treaties. Similar problems arise in respect of Spanish dependencies, for example, but in the Justice and Home Affairs Council last week, we agreed that a convention on a European judicial network should apply to the islands. That will not directly impose obligations on them, but will give them some discretion.

As we had been unable to consult, I did not accept a proposal from other member states that the islands should, without consultation, be made subject to the Eurodac convention on the fingerprinting of asylum seekers and illegal immigrants, and to the convention on driving disqualifications.

Sark has been referred to. I had to point out to some colleagues in the Justice and Home Affairs Council that, whatever else one may worry about on Sark, driving disqualifications should not keep us up all night. As I think the Committee famously knows, there is only one vehicle on Sark, which I understand is a Daimler.

In the light of what I have said, and the clear undertakings given by the island authorities, I hope that my hon. Friend will seek leave to withdraw his amendment.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): I speak, as a good Tory grammar school boy—not, as the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) suggested, a Tory public school boy—to support the Home Secretary in his opposition to the amendments. I thought it particularly sad that the hon. Member cited the Marine, etc., Broadcasting (Offences) Act 1967 as a reason why Parliament should impose legislation on the states of Jersey and Guernsey and the House of Keys. The 1967 Act had a direct impact on me, although I was very young at the time. I remember who introduced the legislation: the notorious John Stonehouse, the then Postmaster General.

One of the reasons for my opposition to the implementation of the legislation on the islands is the fact of their independence. I felt that, in some ways, the hon. Member for Great Grimsby was rather xenophobic in his remarks about Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man—although, of course, xenophobia is not the right word in this context, because it means a fear of foreigners. Those islanders are not foreigners at all; they regard themselves very much as part of the British isles, although not of the British isles.

I am not even convinced that whether those islanders choose to adopt the convention will make much difference. Two years ago, a constituent of mine, Stan Allsop, a truck driver, was arrested and held in France, which is a signatory to the convention. He was held in solitary confinement for 11 weeks. For five weeks, his wife, children and grandchildren were not even informed of his whereabouts. As my former right hon. Friend Malcolm Rifkind said to me at the time, France provided a marvellous example of habeas without the corpus. The convention clearly gave Mr. Allsop no protection.

I do not believe that the Bill will have any impact on the United Kingdom, which will accept it; nor do I believe that we should impose it on the islands of Jersey and Guernsey and the Isle of Man. To do so would not set a precedent, because such legislation was imposed on those islands when the 1967 Act was implemented, but I think that, in the new generation that has grown up over the past 10 years, the Bill creates a dangerous precedent. The islands have secured independence; we have chosen not to involve them in our law, and I think that to do so now would be wrong.

[Mr. Michael Fabricant]

We should also remember the islands' special place in the European Union. They are not part of the EU as such; they have independence in the sense that they are not part of the customs union, and we respect that. I think we should say that they should either be incorporated totally in the EU, or not at all. To do it piecemeal would be completely wrong. Whether the Home Secretary is right to induce them to absorb the convention is for the House of Keys and the Jersey and Guernsey Parliaments to decide, but I feel that it should be their decision and not that of the Committee. For that reason, I oppose the amendments.

The long catalogue of personal objections raised by the hon. Member for Great Grimsby about why Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man should have the legislation imposed on them seemed to be more related to personal slight by agencies or spin doctors than to any legal reasons. I therefore oppose the amendments.

Mr. Mitchell: I am grateful to the hon. Member for Lichfield (Mr. Fabricant) for sharply stating his objections. I am also grateful to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary for his good reply, and I commend him for the efforts that have been put into persuading the islands to pass the legislation in their own way. I would prefer it to be done our way because that avoids delays, which will occur, and any backsliding, which might occur. I trust the Home Secretary more than I trust some legislators. Guernsey had to be pushed into this fairly rapidly.

The image of the islands might be "Bergerac", but the reality is lax financial and tax regulation which gives rise to scandals such as money laundering and BCCI. Some day, we shall have to grasp the nettle of this so-called independence. I am grateful to the Home Secretary, and I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 4 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

To report progress and ask leave to sit again.—*[Mr. Kevin Hughes.]*

Committee report progress; to sit again tomorrow.

Local Agenda 21

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kevin Hughes.]*

11.11 pm

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): I am delighted to be able to debate the topic of Local Agenda 21. It is ironic but pleasing that it is sandwiched between yesterday's debate on electoral reform and tomorrow's debate on the modernisation of the House. Local Agenda 21 and its constituent parts shows what is happening in the wider political field. It shows that there is much democratic engagement outside this place, and we must recognise that and view it as an opportunity and not as a threat.

Many hon. Members will know about Local Agenda 21, but it is important to discuss it and to speak about my experiences in my constituency and in Gloucestershire. The Government have already picked up the ball on the agenda and if in some small way I can help the process along, I am willing to do so. It is not for me to pre-empt what the Minister will say, but "Opportunities for Change", the Government's consultation document on sustainable development and sustainable local communities for the 21st century on why and how to prepare an effective Local Agenda 21 strategy, is an important statement. The Government have shown how the debate can be advanced.

What is Local Agenda 21 and its true meaning? It derives from the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, the so-called Earth summit, which was held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. At the conference, 179 countries, including, of course, the United Kingdom, signed up to an agenda for change in the 21st century, known as Agenda 21. Local Agenda 21 reflects the important part that was played by local government and local democracy at that conference, and important requirements were placed upon them to produce the necessary local change. That was not an imposition, but rather an evolution of what was happening and what could be achieved. The key element is the drive towards sustainable development that is most attainable locally.

As has been said:

> "Many of the problems and solutions being addressed by Agenda 21 have their roots in local activities . . . By 1996, most Local Authorities in each country should have undertaken a consultative process with their populations and achieved a consensus on 'a Local Agenda 21 for the community'.
>
> Through consultation and consensus-building, Local Authorities would learn from citizens and from local, civic, community, business and industrial organisations and acquire the information needed for formulating the best strategies. The process of consultation would increase household awareness of sustainable development issues. Local Authority programmes, policies, laws and regulations to achieve Agenda 21 objectives would be assessed and modified, based on local programmes adopted."

My experience relates to Vision 21 in Gloucestershire, which is how we refer to Local Agenda 21 there. Local Agenda 21 was welcomed in my county. Since 1993, an enthusiastic group of individuals have gradually moulded into a successful team, and have steered the local agenda process with a remarkable amount of achievement. It was originally parented by the Rendezvous Society, and, for that, all of us who have been involved in the process owe it an enormous debt of gratitude.

Vision 21 is now held up as a model of what is possible, and I know that other local agenda teams have drawn heavily on its experiences. If, as the Government suggest, there is much to be learned by the spread of good practice, there appears to be no better place to use as an exemplar.

As part of Vision 21, many thousands of different individuals have come together to engage in this most worthwhile of pursuits—to plan our future society on the basis of a sustainable development approach. Many of those individuals may have attended only one event, such as a conference or campaign activity. However, their contribution has always been welcomed and valued.

As always, while some of our involvement has been minimal, others have worked relentlessly to make Vision 21 the success that it has become. It is never possible to mention many by name, but I should like to make special mention of Lindsay Colbourne, Julia Bennett, Alison Parfitt, Conrad Young, David Christmas, Sue Porter, Diana Ray and Richard Keating, who have done so much to drive Vision 21 along. If I have left out others who should be mentioned, I apologise, but I feel that at least some should be recalled by name, such has been their contribution to democracy in all its form, particularly from Gloucestershire's perspective.

One of the most pleasing aspects of the whole exercise has been the way in which people from across the political divide have combined for the benefit of their constituents—likewise, the manner in which professionals have worked with amateurs, activists from particular pressure groups have combined with generalists from the political class, and the fact that age, class, gender, physical or mental capacity or ethnic origin has been no barrier to participation.

Much has depended on the willing involvement of local government officers, who have given so generously of their time, much of it voluntarily. I pay my respects to my local authority, Stroud district council, and to Gloucestershire county council, which have had a lot to do with the success of Vision 21. All in all, that has shown how it is possible to build consensual relationships, and, if managed properly, how powerful they can become.

Enough of the plaudits. What did Vision 21 set out to achieve, and how can its outcomes be measured? To start with, six big issues were identified as the key challenges facing the county: first, to enhance the physical environment, biodiversity and natural resources; secondly, to introduce new value systems that reflect the importance of the quality of life and environment, rather than simply monetary considerations; thirdly, to embrace the new economy and new ways of working that value the formal and informal sectors; fourthly, to adopt new decision-making processes and structures that promote power sharing, co-operation, local participation, empowerment, democracy and an holistic long-term approach; fifthly, to increase awareness of sustainability and improve access to the quality, scope and aims of education, information, communication and monitoring; lastly, to bring about widespread behavioural and attitudinal change.

The means of meeting those challenges were set out via a series of major conferences, campaigns, local consultations and events. The on-going work was carried out through eight working groups, which covered the following sectors: natural resources and countryside; the built environment; energy, transport, waste and pollution; health and social issues; the economy and education; community and involvement.

The working group agenda followed three different stages. First, where are we now? Secondly, where do we want to be? Thirdly, how do we get there? While the context was essentially local and regional, national and global contexts were always referred to where appropriate.

Several underlying themes arose through the work of each group: the importance of rural dimensions; the need for vision; changes in employment and livelihood; critical environmental balance; the dislocation of supply and demand for natural supplies and the increasing role that conservation would play; and how important community values would be for solving problems.

What has been accomplished? In terms of measurable outcomes, the very fact that Vision 21 has continued to grow and evolve five years on speaks volumes. The true value will be seen with regard to how it is assimilated into structure and local plans, new modes of activity affecting the arts, recreation and people's quality of life, ensuring that future generations are active citizens, and raising the general level of awareness through communication of ideas and educational advancement. Most of these will take many years to come to fruition, but many of us in Gloucestershire feel that a valuable new beginning has been made.

Major stepping stones were laid, which could be seen from a series of publications. "Sustainable Gloucestershire—a general handbook"—which gives an overview of what has happened—and "Sustainable Gloucestershire—an agenda for urgent action for local government" are two worthy of mention, but there are others. The regular editions of "21 Today" newsletters are worth emphasising. Wider communication with both the general public and specialist constituencies has been a crucial element and aim throughout Vision 21's deliberations.

Additionally, a major conference was held on "Accommodating Gloucestershire" which took the housing debate forward and allowed for a perceptive discussion on how much, where and what type of housing should be provided for the county. I have had recourse to this in am earlier Adjournment debate. Other conferences are planned for transport and the local economy. Vision 21 has also launched many practical projects. Three taken at random are a sustainable parish regeneration project, a sustainable energy centre and a rickshaw taxi service—we have everything in Gloucestershire.

Finally, the programme has spawned some community initiatives, including the community planning conference in my town of Stroud. This involved a massive investment of people's time and effort, spread over both weekday evenings and weekends. Its remit was to look to replan the town of Stroud and its immediate environs with practical ideas such as providing a new cinema, regenerating the town centre, setting up the community health forum and greening up the urban area.

As someone who witnessed this at first hand, I can say that the quality and input given on a voluntary basis by many hundreds of individuals gave me hope for what could be accomplished by such an exercise. It is linked, where appropriate, with other community initiatives, especially a credit union, a local exchange trading scheme

[Mr. David Drew]

and incipient co-operatives. This groundwork provided the basis for part of a succesful bid for single regeneration budget funds, which my hon. Friend the Under–Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions was able to announce on her recent visit to Stroud.

By looking elsewhere, we can put all this into context. I was pleased to receive a letter today from the corporation of London, which asked me to mention some of the excellent things that it has been involved with. I know that it is one of many authorities which have taken this on board seriously.

I am indebted to the Local Government Management Board—which regularly investigates and evaluates the progress of Local Agenda 21—for the information it has sent. The LGMB has shown that, despite the difficulty in collating the information, there is a great deal going on across the country—much of which we can be inspired by. As it said in its executive summary:

"Significantly, there is evidence that Local Agenda 21 is staring to play a role in enhancing local democracy and ensuring community involvement in local decision-making processes."

It goes on to talk about local government using Local Agenda 21 as a vehicle for change in community participation, and new democratic structures arising accordingly. The LGMB shows how far local government has gone in terms of eco-management and audit schemes, and how much environmental awareness has been assimilated into this activity.

The LGMB is very explicit in identifying the many pluses—with some minuses—in terms of how it sees Local Agenda 21 performing so far. It also points out many lessons that can be learned and measures that can be introduced to help the process on its way. I am sure that the Government will take close notice of this, and act accordingly.

From my perspective, what has been the Government's response to the process? As I said, they have produced a number of important documents that are well worth highlighting. Vital to the process is the fact that Labour is willing to place sustainable development at the centre of what it is trying to do—whether in production and consumption, in building communities or in managing the environment and resources—by adopting radical new means of engaging in democratic structures, and by working in partnership with a range of different stakeholders.

Pleasingly, the Government have set 2000 as the target date for all local authorities to sign up to Local Agenda 21. In itself, that is an important move. They have placed clear obligations on all local authorities, prescribing action checklists and providing help in evolving strategies that move from the theoretical to the very practical. They have also signalled their willingness not only to listen but to act, and to use a range of tools, such as introduction of best value, to effect necessary change. Similarly, they will provide the nexus of new policy initiatives in transport, housing and social policy.

There are some criticisms of Local Agenda 21 that the Government will have to take on board. Some of the process, for example, seems to be rather introverted, and can occasionally be described as a talking shop. Nevertheless, if the process is allowed to follow its proper course, it will be very valuable in informing communities, and ensuring that people have a proper say in how they want their society to evolve.

What can the Government do to help? With so much already happening and appearing to go so well, it may seem churlish to ask them to do more. However, in seeking advice from those with whom I have worked in Vision 21, a number of points have been raised.

First, how can Local Agenda 21 enable active citizenship, without burying people in more bureaucracy? That is a real issue, and there is a need to fund research into and the dissemination of enabling structures, focusing especially on how local authorities can contribute to such structures. If that is to happen, the LGMB, the Government offices for the regions and the Local Government Association should be asked to work with grass-roots activists from Local Agenda 21—thereby helping to create a better understanding of the bidding process, which often militates against smaller organisations and local partnerships. Often, such bodies cannot get into the running, or waste enormous time resources on futile bids.

Secondly, how can local authorities' overload be reduced? The deluge of sustainability-related legislation and regulations—although valuable in its own right—is beginning to put local government under pressure, as each change demands an evaluation and response, and incorporation into existing policies. Authorities might be helped in adapting if there were a way of redefining the changes so that emphasis was placed on the process rather than on fixed outcomes.

Thirdly, how can help be given for community development and for capacity-building and parallel organisational development? There is a belief that insufficient effort is being placed on developing the whole organisation by meeting identified training needs, and on how such training could be used to encourage better collaborative working at lower skill levels and in higher-order skills, such as by developing new approaches to audit, evaluation and planning processes.

Finally, there seems to be some weakness in how Local Agenda 21 might be translated to the regional level—which, because of the Government's intention of devolving responsibility to the regions, could be so important.

I could make other points, but, as I know that the Minister would like to reply to the debate, I shall end there.

11.27 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Angela Eagle): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) on securing this debate. Sustainable development is central to the Government's policies. As this debate has shown, and as many hon. Members will know from their constituency work, sustainable development grass-roots expression—which is Local Agenda 21—is thriving across the country, not least in Gloucestershire.

I am delighted to have this opportunity to pay tribute to the excellent work of the Local Agenda 21 steering group, with its wide membership of nongovernmental organisations, of community, education and business

groups and of central and local government. I pay tribute also to the many local authorities, and their communities, which are contributing to the United Kingdom's growing reputation as a world leader in implementing at local level the commitments of the Rio Earth summit.

As we have heard tonight, Local Agenda 21 recognises no political divides among parties, tiers of government, NGOs, businesses, the rich, the poor, the young, the old, volunteers, employees or ethnic groups. It is a policy that links us all to a joint determination to improve the way in which we live; it is a way of translating concern about our environment into action; and it is a way to ensure that each and every individual can have an effect and can make a difference. I hope that we can use tonight's debate to encourage those communities which are not yet fully committed to the process to get stuck in.

The terms "sustainable development"—and, indeed, Local Agenda 21—are puzzling to many. People do not immediately understand what the concept means, or get excited by it; but the concept underlying the phrases—that of ensuring a better quality of life for everyone, now and for generations to come—is one that the public fully support and that can provide plentiful and enthusiastic resources into which local authorities can tap.

As a Government, we are committed to getting people involved in the national debate to determine our new sustainability strategy. Now that we have come to the end of the consultation period on the debate, which was launched in February in "Opportunities for Change", responses are flooding in: we have already received more than 4,000 responses, and 500 more detailed comments.

In that document, we proposed a new and integrated way of thinking about choices right across Government and throughout the country, so as to build, for the present and for the future, a modern and fair society that is founded on a strong economy and a healthy environment. We need to bring together the most important economic, environmental and social objectives, so that we can set in train social progress that recognises the needs of everybody, while at the same time effectively protecting the environment, using natural resources prudently and maintaining high and stable levels of economic growth and employment. We also need to monitor achievement, through target setting and devising meaningful indicators that keep track of progress; and to report that in a way that is clear, comprehensive and meaningful to a wider audience.

As part of our initiative to encourage people to understand what sustainable development means and to contribute to the national effort to achieve lasting improvements, we are keen to encourage people to play their part in creating a more sustainable world. Schemes such as "Doing your bit" and Eco Cal, the computer gadget with which Going for Green is involved and which measures the greenness of individual life styles, show all of us how we can help the environment by reducing pollution and saving energy.

We know that people are concerned about the environment and global warming, and that they want to do something about it, yet many do not appreciate how much their personal use of energy causes global warming. Many are also sceptical that their individual action is important, but it is. The schemes aim to bring home the message that individual actions do count and that the public can make a big contribution to protecting both their local and their global environment. Simple things, like sometimes walking or cycling rather than always using the car, cleaning the car with a bucket and not a hose, or heating only enough water in the kettle for a cup of coffee, all help.

Our research shows that, after seeing "Doing your bit", people were more likely to mention as environmentally friendly turning the television off instead of leaving it on standby, switching off unnecessary lights, and keeping the car tuned. The main messages they picked up were to reduce car use, use less energy and resources and stop pollution. They also picked up on the need to save the environment, fight global warming and do something positive; and the fact that environmental pollution can aggravate asthma.

I am delighted that so many local authorities are taking up the challenge set out by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister at the United Nations General Assembly special session in New York last June, when he called on all local authorities to have a Local Agenda 21 strategy in place by the end of the year 2000.

In January, at a Local Government Association conference in London, my right hon. Friends the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister for the Environment launched a guidance document, which we had jointly produced with the LGA and the local government management board, to show why and how to produce a local strategy. I am glad to say that it is proving very popular: we have already issued 10,000 copies of "Sustainable local communities for the 21st century" and are having to print more.

Over the next few weeks, each of our Government offices in the regions will be holding a seminar to offer practical guidance on producing and implementing effective Local Agenda 21 strategies. They will be targeted in particular on those local authorities that have yet to develop such a strategy, but there will be workshop options for councils and authorities to work at more advanced stages. We believe that, if sustainable development is to become a reality, the concept must become part of the structural processes of planning within the organisation. That means creating commitment and understanding at all levels.

Actions of groups such as Gloucester Vision 21 take the sustainable development campaign right out to the local level. The dynamic Local Agenda 21 strategy is about creating a vision for a community's action plan to produce a lasting improvement in the quality of life for all, and then deciding how to implement it, review it and update it. It means identifying the major priorities for long-term action for that community, and then working with and through local groups by harnessing their resources and enthusiasm to deliver action to help meet those priorities.

It means measuring and reporting on progress, and being honest about areas where more needs to be done—perhaps where the community is not behaving sustainably. It is about raising awareness about what everyone can do: business, trade unions, voluntary bodies, central and local government, families and individuals.

My hon. Friend rightly praised the work of Gloucestershire's Vision 21. That local project is somewhat unusual in being co-ordinated by a local charity—Rendezvous—but it has won the full participation and support of local authorities in the county.

[Angela Eagle]

It shows that there is no single template for success, but that Local Agenda 21 is strongest when it grows from a base of local commitment and enthusiasm. Indeed, the Gloucestershire model will be just one of a number of varied approaches to producing Local Agenda 21 strategies, which will be highlighted in the new guidance being produced by the Local Government Association in the early autumn.

Equally commendable work is taking place in many other places. Obviously, I have not time to mention them all, but some inspiring examples are given in the Local Government Management Board's review of the first five years of Local Agenda 21 in the UK and in the case studies that we are jointly funding to disseminate best practice. For example, in Reading, the borough council has teamed up with the World Wide Fund for Nature and the Community Education Development Centre to focus on achieving community empowerment. Training, collaboration and increased access to local decision-making processes are empowering local people and groups to deal with quality-of-life issues that are identified locally.

Plymouth's young person's Agenda 21 encourages the young people of Plymouth to make themselves heard in the local decision-making process. There are 32 members from 15 schools, aged from three to 15. The project builds leadership and communication skills, and enables members to be more proactive in their local environment.

The Building Blocks project in Hackney, co-ordinated by Groundwork, aims to improve the well-being of people living in housing estates across Hackney. Partnerships with residents and tenants' associations have developed strategies for involving young people and improving housing estate environments.

The Bradford business and environment support team is a widely acclaimed model, which shows how a local authority can reduce the cumulative environmental impact of the small business sector. It is promoting sound environmental management, making the small business community in that area much more sustainable.

There are also community enterprises—which I am glad my hon. Friend mentioned—and initiatives such as local exchange and trading systems. People are doing something about organic food, cycling, recycling, self-build and energy projects, and there are pioneers such as the Centre for Alternative Technology. Those offer inspiring glimpses of a new path, in which the social and environmental strands of sustainability, far from being opposed to each other, each hold the key to the achievement of the other. There are other leaders in developing local strategies and indicators in Lancashire and west Devon.

At the end of his speech, my hon. Friend called on the Government to respond to some specific issues. I am delighted to be able to continue in the collaborative and co-operative spirit that he set. We share his concern to promote active citizenship. Our proposals in the local democracy and community leadership consultation paper are aimed at producing precisely that reinvigoration of local democracy.

The most successful Local Agenda 21 schemes are helping to achieve just that, by promoting discussion groups and other means of achieving dialogue with local people, and encouraging collaborative projects with all sections of the community. We must certainly keep in mind the need to keep grant systems as simple as possible, while ensuring that public money is allocated fairly and properly, and that we spend resources in the most effective way. We welcome any suggestions for achieving that.

Our proposals for improving local government are also designed to meet my hon. Friend's point about improving the delivery of public services. I cannot promise that the amount of legislation and the impetus for change will reduce, because, since we are a new Government, there are many things that we need to change—and our manifesto commits us to that. We recognise, however, the upheaval and work load that such change can bring, and are alive to the need to set up new frameworks and systems that help deliver our policies at national and local level in the most effective way.

Best value aims to encourage local authorities to find ways in which to deliver services at the quality and cost that most effectively meet the aspirations of local people. I believe that Local Agenda 21 offers the means for councils to take a corporate and holistic approach to the delivery of services, and to encourage effective training and staff management programmes throughout the authority. That meets my hon. Friend's third call, for capacity building.

As for my hon. Friend's final point about helping to develop a regional identity for Local Agenda 21, I am pleased that our Government offices for the regions are now getting much more involved than they were in the past. Sustainable development objectives are being built into their management strategies, and into the agreements they have with central Government on the services they provide. As I have already said, they are holding seminars over the next six months or so to offer practical guidance on producing and implementing effective Local Agenda 21 strategies.

As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said, Britain will never be a modern, forward-looking country if it is a place whose beauty, character, air and rivers are polluted, defaced and contaminated. Building a modern Britain means seeking new solutions to new social, economic and environmental challenges—not just so that future generations have a planet that is still habitable, but so that all of us going about our lives today can improve our quality of life. That will include working with business to ensure that our companies and industries can take advantage of the huge opportunities that markets for new technologies offer.

That is all about recognising that we will succeed only if we work together. Individuals, businesses, communities and central and local government must all act if we are to meet those significant new challenges. I congratulate my hon. Friend on initiating this important debate, and I wish him and the Local Agenda 21 strategy in Gloucester even more success in the future.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty minutes to Twelve midnight.

House of Commons

Thursday 4 June 1998

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

LLOYDS TSB BILL *[Lords](By Order)*

Order for Third Reading read.

To be read the Third time on Thursday 11 June.

Oral Answers to Questions

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

The Minister was asked—

Food Safety

1. **Mrs. Anne Campbell** (Cambridge): What steps he is taking to improve food safety. [42720]

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Dr. John Cunningham): We are setting up what will be a powerful, effective and independent Food Standards Agency operating across the whole food chain, clearly focused on protecting consumers. In the meantime, I have already ensured that public health is our first consideration in matters of food safety.

Mrs. Campbell: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. Is he aware that, after 18 years of Tory Government and a disastrous record on food safety, there is still widespread concern and anxiety about food safety, and especially about genetically modified food? Does he agree that it is important that we give consumers real choice in the consumption of such foods, and that labelling genetically modified foods would be an important step forward in giving consumers that choice? What progress has my right hon. Friend been able to make in persuading other countries to agree with us on that important issue?

Dr. Cunningham: My hon. Friend is right to say that there is still a high level of public concern about food safety. We must continue to be vigilant in protecting the public and in bringing to them the best available scientific advice on those matters. On genetically modified food, the British presidency recently negotiated an agreement in the Agriculture Council that will ensure that food is clearly labelled. The labels will say either that food contains a genetically modified product or that it does not. There will therefore be absolutely no doubt in consumers' minds. I was very pleased to be able to negotiate that outcome in the Agriculture Council.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): In looking at the issue of food safety, will the Minister consider, too, the issue of vitamin safety—and, in particular, the safety of vitamin B6? The United States Government allow over-the-counter sales of 100 mg of vitamin B6, whereas the Government are proposing to restrict such sales to 50 mg. The US is the toughest regulatory authority to the world. Is not the British restriction therefore simply another case of the Government acting as nanny state and knowing better than their subjects?

Dr. Cunningham: To the latter part of the hon. Gentleman's assertion, the answer is no, it is not. Neither is it the case, as he asserts, that the United States necessarily employs the toughest regulations. The United States allows, for example, hormone growth promoters, which are banned in the European Union. So the hon. Gentleman is wrong on that point, too. We are still consulting and considering responses to the work on B6 being undertaken by my hon. Friend the Minister of State.

Mr. Derek Wyatt (Sittingbourne and Sheppey): Will the Minister bear in mind the fact that the farmers in my constituency reckon that it costs them 38p a pound to raise lamb, which they can sell at only 43p a pound at Ashford? They see lamb on sale at Sainsburys, Tesco or Asda at £2.78 a pound. Is there a chance that, within the Foods Standards Agency, we could consider having a regulator for supermarkets?

Dr. Cunningham: The answer to that is no.

Farming Incomes

2. **Mr. Desmond Swayne** (New Forest, West): If he will make a statement on his policy in respect of the level of farming incomes. [42721]

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Elliot Morley): The Government are working to create the conditions that will enable farmers to develop their businesses and maximise their income by pressing for market-oriented reform of the common agricultural policy.

Mr. Swayne: I should be very interested to know precisely what those conditions are. The fact is that farming incomes have fallen by well over 40 per cent. Farmers have been hit again today, by a sixth rise in interest rates. Those who can no longer afford farming and want to get out have been devastated by the abolition of retirement relief on capital gains. Meanwhile—all this time—the Chancellor of the Exchequer is building up a war chest for the next general election. Will the Minister ask for some of that money now, while we still have a farming industry?

Mr. Morley: The Government have helped the hardest-hit sections of the industry with £85 million of aid for the sheep and suckler sector and by absorbing £90 million of start-up costs. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman might ponder the enormous overspend on BSE aid to renderers by the previous Conservative Administration. Some of that money could have gone to farmers.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): May I bring my hon. Friend back to a point that I made in a recent debate about the damage done on the hills by overstocking? The only way for hill farmers to increase their income is by increasing the number of sheep and cattle on the land, which is doing serious damage. Is my hon. Friend considering ways of compensating those farmers to reduce the number of animals on the hills?

Mr. Morley: My hon. Friend is right that overstocking and overgrazing are serious problems in some hill areas. We need to address that as part of the structural changes and negotiations for Agenda 2000 and potential reform of hill livestock compensatory allowances.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): Has the Minister seen the well-researched and well-documented evidence that appeared recently in *Farmers' Weekly* of the number of farming households that have to claim family credit, income support and other social security benefits? Is that not a sad indictment of the present plight of many in the farming community? Given that the Government have obstinately refused since last May to access the European funds that could be available, will the Minister take the opportunity to promise to set up an interdepartmental analysis of whether withholding that money, when set against the money being claimed from the Department of Social Security, will cost the British taxpayer—as well as the farmers, their families and their communities—more in the long term than help is received in the short term?

Mr. Morley: We are not withholding compensation. We have accessed nearly all the available resources for the beef and sheep sector. Farming incomes have been under pressure in the past year, but that agrimonetary compensation would not benefit the pig, horticultural or poultry sector. Some sections of the industry have had a difficult time, but others have successfully targeted their customers, broadened their customer base and diversified.

Mr. Huw Edwards (Monmouth): Does my hon. Friend appreciate the dismay of farmers in my constituency, who have seen farming incomes decline while a supermarket chain such as Tesco claims that it makes no money on selling meat? Will he join me in commending the investigation by the Welsh Affairs Committee and its recommendation that the matter should be referred to the Office of Fair Trading?

Mr. Morley: I accept that there is concern in the agricultural sector about certain aspects of the role of retailers. However, retailers have also played a positive role in developing markets and driving up standards.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): The answers the Minister has given so far on this serious issue of falling farm incomes—particularly in the light of the Government's failed inflation policy, which has now led to a sixth increase in interest rates—are nothing short of complacent. Does he accept that today's announcement on interest rates will increase borrowing costs for farmers and lead to further reductions in farm incomes? Will he come clean on whether he has sorted out the level of arable area payments and livestock payments in the agrimonetary arrangements—or is he content for another £400 million disappear from farming at the end of the year?

Mr. Morley: Surveys show that, because of three exceptionally good years of farm income, almost 50 per cent. of farmers have no borrowing with the banks. The right hon. Gentleman should also be aware that the UK taxpayer has to find 71p of every pound of agrimonetary compensation. I presume that that is why the Conservative Government voted against the setting up of the agrimonetary scheme.

Common Agricultural Policy

3. **Dr. Rudi Vis** (Finchley and Golders Green): If he will make a statement on the Agenda 2000 proposals on reforming the common agricultural policy. [42722]

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Dr. John Cunningham): The Commission's proposals broadly reflect the direction of reform that the Government have advocated, but, in some respects, they are insufficiently radical or discriminate against United Kingdom interests, and, therefore, need changing accordingly.

Dr. Vis: I thank my right hon. Friend for that rather optimistic answer. It is my understanding that the Agriculture Council is rather protectionist. Why has he been relatively successful and why has such progress been made? Is it to do with the Government's more thoughtful attitude to the single currency, as compared with that of the Conservative party?

Dr. Cunningham: My hon. Friend is right. We were able to secure unanimous agreement to interim conclusions on the consideration of Agenda 2000 at the Agriculture Council in May. Those conclusions will go to the Cardiff European summit later this month and be considered by the Heads of Government. The conclusions contain almost all the major points of emphasis from the United Kingdom point of view. My hon. Friend mentioned the Conservative party's position on the single currency: as it meanders aimlessly further to the right and further into a hopelessly anti-European stance, that party abandons not only the interests of the United Kingdom in general but of farmers in particular.

Sir Michael Spicer (West Worcestershire): If, as part of reform of the common agricultural policy, the Government return to some efficiency payment system, will they ensure that they do so on a national basis so that we support British farmers and not farmers in foreign countries?

Dr. Cunningham: If the hon. Gentleman is really asking whether we will oppose proposals that may take financial support from British farmers and reallocate them to the benefit of farmers in other European member states, the answer is yes, we oppose any such proposal.

Cattle Traceability Scheme

4. **Mr. Don Touhig** (Islwyn): If he will make a statement on progress of the cattle traceability scheme. [42723]

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Jeff Rooker): We are making good progress in implementing the cattle tracing system, and we are on course to launch it and go live on Monday 28 September.

Mr. Touhig: I thank my hon. Friend for that information; progress in setting up the British cattle movement service is most welcome. Will he assure the House that reports that the system will be so bureaucratic as to require farmers to register the twice-daily movement of cows to the milking parlour are completely false?

Mr. Rooker: The answer to my hon. Friend's question is yes. Reports in one of the Sunday newspapers last week were wholly inaccurate; farmers will not be required to record those daily movements. The cattle movement service is, I admit, a complex operation, but we are very confident that we will be able to make it work and track the estimated 20 million cattle movements a year. That figure compares to, say, the 16 million Visa cards in this country. We shall also issue 3 million cattle passports every year, which is double the number of new pension and child benefit books issued by the Department of Social Security.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): Notwithstanding the Minister's statement in the House on 21 May, livestock producers in the west country are still unclear—as are we all—about what will happen to the over-30-months scheme once there is a date-based scheme. Surely the Minister of State understands that beef finishers need to know now whether they will be able to market animals in February next year which are reaching 30 months of age. They are already having to plan their food regimes for the summer and the autumn. Given the continued failure of the Minister to visit the west country to answer questions personally, will the Minister of State take this opportunity to answer them clearly and without equivocation?

Mr. Rooker: I will do my best, although the hon. Gentleman's questions do not relate to the question on the Order Paper. The cattle-tracing system that will go live in September is not connected to the date-based scheme; the two are quite separate and must not be linked—otherwise, success of the date-based scheme will be more difficult to achieve. We have said repeatedly in the House that, for the foreseeable future, the over-30-months scheme will remain in operation. It will definitely remain in operation as long as the advice from the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee is such that it is required to be in operation.

Beef Cull

5. **Mrs. Alice Mahon** (Halifax): If he will make a statement on the progress of the selective beef cull. [42725]

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Jeff Rooker): The selective cull is progressing very well. We have now slaughtered over 71,000 animals in the United Kingdom. The cull of animals in Northern Ireland is already complete.

Mrs. Mahon: That progress is good news, but does my hon. Friend agree that nothing better illustrates the 18 years of Tory misrule than the BSE scandal, and that, although the Tories have now walked away from it, the rest of the country will pay a heavy price for it in future?

Mr. Rooker: My hon. Friend is right. The cost to the taxpayer of the selective cull—that is, of the 71,000 animals slaughtered so far—is more than £100 million. We have also slaughtered 2.25 million cattle under the over-30-months scheme, and 1.25 million calves under the calf processing aid scheme, otherwise known as the Herod scheme—all healthy animals—in addition to the 172,000 cattle identified as having BSE. It is a financial disaster.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): Given the serious and sad nature of the scheme, does the Minister agree that it has been effectively carried out? Will he pay tribute to the work that is being done under the scheme, and will he also send a message of good will to the world congress of the Sussex Cattle Society, which opens next week at the Ardingly showground? Does he agree that Sussex cattle, like all the other native breeds, have a heroic place in British agriculture?

Mr. Rooker: Yes, I am happy to do that. I am also happy to pay tribute to the work involved in the selective cull. It is extremely difficult and complex, as some Opposition Members will appreciate, simply because we are dealing with animals which, by definition, are several years old and will never enter the food chain—any of those that are not found, that is. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, farm records were not as good as they are now, but we estimate that we are on course for finishing the selective cull this autumn.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Will the Minister tell the House when he expects the National Audit Office report of its investigation into the costs of the cull to be published? Did he hear, on the "Today" programme just before the Whit recess, the former Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg), admit that, without going out to tender, excess sums of public money had been spent on the cull, and that the large rendering companies and some large abattoirs had profited at the expense of farmers and small abattoirs? Can he confirm that that is the case, and can he tell us when the NAO report will be available?

Mr. Rooker: Not only can I not confirm any of that, I cannot even comment on it. None of the papers that the NAO has looked at are available to my right hon. Friend or me; they date from the previous Administration. I do not know when the NAO will publish its report; that is not a matter on which it would consult the Government. However, we all await the report with great interest.

Mr. William Thompson (West Tyrone): I welcome the fact that the cull is now complete in Northern Ireland.

Will the Minister accept the thanks and appreciation of the farmers of Northern Ireland now that the beef ban has been lifted there? May I add that we also greatly appreciate the £2 million that has been given to help with marketing, to get the beef back into the foreign countries? Thank you very much.

Mr. Rooker: I am happy to say, for once in a while, thank you for a thank you.

Farmers (Paperwork)

6. **Mr. Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield): If he will introduce an audit of the volume of forms which need to be completed by farmers. [42727]

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Elliot Morley): We already have systems in place to keep the number of forms that farmers need to complete to the minimum consistent with our obligations to observe legislative requirements and to safeguard health and public funds.

Mr. Fabricant: I thank the Minister for that answer, but I think farmers will find it rather complacent, especially as the Under-Secretary of State for Wales, the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths), admitted a week or two ago that farm incomes have fallen by 43 per cent. over the past year, and the increase in interest rates will mean a further drop in incomes as the green pound rises. What will the Minister actually do to reduce the burden of form filling by farmers who are already hard-pressed enough?

Mr. Morley: I can tell the hon. Gentleman what we have actually done: we have introduced changes that have so far saved the equivalent of £5.4 million in the reduction in time spent filling in forms. A further £1.1 million in savings is to be found in the coming year, by rationalising forms, pre-printing names and addresses, introducing bar codes and trying to minimise the costs and the burdens for farmers.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): Am I right in believing that most of the forms that farmers fill in were introduced by the previous Administration? Does my hon. Friend agree that no one in the farming community minds filling in forms if they are for a purpose, which surely must be to help the small and medium farmers to make a good living? The more encouragement they receive to specialise in niche markets such as organic farming, the better, as that is the way forward.

Mr. Morley: My hon. Friend is right. It is also the case that most of the forms are related to European Union subsidy schemes.

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): Will the Minister now accept that farmers are not concerned only about more subsidy—or even any subsidy? More than anything else, they want to believe that they are being treated fairly in comparison with producers from all the other countries from which we import food. Will the hon. Gentleman give an undertaking that the Ministry will set up a study to examine the application and enforcement of rules and regulations placed on British farmers and on farmers in the countries from which we import food, so that British producers can be sure that the hygiene, animal welfare, pesticide and other regulations that affect them are being applied elsewhere, and the British consumer can know that, if she buys imported food, it is being reared or produced to the same standards as apply in Britain?

Mr. Morley: It is important that European rules are applied equally and fairly across all member states. When the industry brings us complaints, we have on occasion asked it to provide information on what it regards as a deficiency in the uniformity of enforcement. The Government will not hesitate to take action in such matters. For example, under Britain's presidency, we have brought forward new measures in the Fisheries Council to improve cross-European enforcement to ensure that the same standards are applied in all member states and that there can be confidence in all countries.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): What submissions did the Minister or his colleagues make on the new integrated administration and control system form and its ridiculous notion of having to remove outcrops from acreage, which is a rather time-consuming and stupid measure?

Mr. Morley: We have considered the IACS form, which is an example in which there has been some simplification, both in pre-printing and in the fact that we are not asking farmers to resubmit full details if there has been no change in the acreage. We are always willing to consider representations on future improvements and the structure of forms—we shall obviously be pleased to look at any such representations from the hon. Gentleman or from farming organisations.

Exchange Rate (Ancillary Services)

7. **Mrs. Caroline Spelman** (Meriden): What assessment he has made of the impact of the level of the pound on the ancillary services in agriculture. [42728]

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Elliot Morley): We fully recognise and understand the concerns of those industries providing ancillary services in the agricultural sector about the recent level of the sterling exchange rate.

Mrs. Spelman: The chamber of commerce in Hereford and Worcester estimates that for every job in agriculture there are 15 in ancillary industries, so does the Minister accept that today's announcement of an increase in interest rates is a bitter blow not only for agriculture but for the wide range of industries that serve it?

Mr. Morley: There is no denying that an increase in interest rates is bad news for many sectors, particularly those involved in manufacturing and export. However, we should remember that an increase in inflation or a challenge to the strength and well-managed stewardship of the economy would be even worse news. The economy is being managed for the long term, not—as happened under the previous Administration—for the short term.

Mr. Ben Bradshaw (Exeter): Will my hon. Friend join me in welcoming the dramatic fall in sterling since the

successful launch of the euro—in stark contrast to the predictions of most Conservative Members—which has been welcomed across the whole of the agricultural industry? Does he agree that we can achieve a realistic and stable exchange rate only by being in the euro, which is why the National Farmers Union and now the Country Landowners Association support the Government's policy on the single currency?

Mr. Morley: It is true that there has been a welcome decline in the pound in recent months. In relation to Opposition Members' criticism, membership of the euro is one of the ways to stop the swings in currency exchanges which damage many sectors of industry, including agriculture. Unlike the Conservative party, we judge membership of the euro by only one criterion—whether it is in the best interests of our country and not whether or not it should be ruled out for purely ideological reasons.

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): When agriculture is doing well, the whole rural community is doing well—which is exactly the opposite of the present situation, as there has been a 43 per cent. drop in farming incomes. Is the Minister aware of the problems facing agricultural ancillary industries—the feed merchants, the markets, the machinery merchants and the haulage industry, to name a few? What does he propose to do about them?

Mr. Morley: First, it should be remembered that two thirds of the rise in the level of the pound took place under the previous Government. Secondly, agriculture and ancillary industries have been hit—no one is denying that. However, it is worth pointing out that rural unemployment has fallen by 4 per cent. in the past year.

Mr. Dale Campbell-Savours (Workington): Does my hon. Friend recall that interest rates were nearly 15 per cent. under the Tories? Does he also recall that when he and I spoke from the Opposition Front Bench on agriculture in the early 1990s, we saw a steady stream of farmers complaining about very high interest rates under the Tories—rates which are double those of today?

Mr. Morley: I do recall that, and I am confident that the management of the economy under the Government is in the best long-term interests of agriculture and industry in general.

Beef on the Bone

8. **Mr. Laurence Robertson** (Tewkesbury): If he will review the ban on the sale of beef on the bone. [42729]

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Dr. John Cunningham): The Beef Bones Regulations 1997 are being kept under review, as is the case with all BSE-related control measures. Any future decision will be taken in the light of scientific developments and progress with the eradication of BSE.

Mr. Robertson: Does the Minister not think it rather odd that in Northern Ireland beef can now be exported, but beef on the bone cannot be eaten?

Dr. Cunningham: It is not odd at all because it cannot be exported on the bone.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Could there be a generous word to mine host at Carfraemill and the sheriff who so dramatically acquitted him?

Dr. Cunningham: Since the case to which my hon. Friend refers is sub judice and the subject of an appeal, I shall not comment one way or the other.

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Beckenham): If, however, the law is found to be defective in Scotland, can the Minister guarantee that any English prosecutions will be withdrawn?

Dr. Cunningham: No, because the law in Scotland does not affect the law in England, and this case has no relevance to England.

Animal Feed (Antibiotics)

9. **Mr. Gordon Prentice** (Pendle): What steps he is taking to prevent the use of low-level antibiotics in animal feed as a prophylactic. [42730]

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Jeff Rooker): Low-level antibiotics are simply not authorised for prophylactic or preventive use in animal feeds. However, certain low-level antibiotics are authorised as growth promoters, but only under the terms of EC directive 70/524.

Mr. Prentice; The Government moved swiftly last month on the Agriculture Committee's recommendations of 22 April. However, we are very close to witnessing some kind of biological Armageddon—and that is not overstating the issue. [HON. MEMBERS: "Come off it."] Well, perhaps it is overstating the issue. But, seriously, what can we do to persuade farmers to return to more traditional methods of animal husbandry? People are sick to death of all the food scares, of the fact that we seem to have been poisoned year after year and of the fact that farmers are congenitally incapable of producing food that is safe to eat.

Mr. Rooker: For the record, the Government did not move quickly after receiving the Agriculture Committee's report. We are still considering our response. A week earlier, the House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology reported on antibiotics for human beings and included a chapter on animals. That will also be carefully considered.

We are taking a range of measures to encourage farmers to produce food without lots of chemicals. We have a rigorous surveillance programme for pesticide and veterinary medicine residues. We shall publish brand names when people exceed limits in future and we are giving more aid to organic farmers.

Mr. David Maclean (Penrith and The Border): Will the Minister accept from me, as someone who perhaps has a slightly longer memory of farming practices than the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice), that there were no good old days of animal husbandry before some of today's wonderful medicines were developed? The matter of concern is not medicines, but how they are used. If today's agriculture did not have access to a range of antibiotics and other medicines developed by the Central Veterinary Laboratory at Weybridge, the standard of animal welfare would not be the highest in the world, which it is. Will the Minister ensure that all farmers are given sufficient guidance to ensure that medicines are not inappropriately used and that there are no high residues in food to cause unnecessary concern?

Mr. Rooker: I am happy to pay tribute to the work of the Central Veterinary Laboratory at Weybridge, which is a world-class organisation. Last year, it examined 34,000 samples of residues in meat, fish and honey. Only 0.01 per cent. of samples proved to be over the limit, which is a tiny proportion. In future, we will even publish brand names. The right hon. Gentleman is quite right that there never was a golden age, and it is a mistake to assume that there was.

Mr. Alan W. Williams (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): The Minister will be aware of the House of Lords Science and Technology Select Committee's report on antibiotic resistance and of the alarming rise in methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus caused by it. The agriculture industry has rarely taken responsibility for that, but it is an urgent problem. Should not the Food Standards Agency, which is responsible to the Department of Health, investigate that problem in detail?

Mr. Rooker: Yes, except that the Food Standards Agency will not be up and running until the second half of next year—and we are not waiting for that. The independent Veterinary Products Committee, which advises the Government, is to hold on 18 June a meeting on antibiotics in animal feedstuffs, and we await a report later this year from a sub-committee of the Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Food.

Common Agricultural Policy

10. **Mr. Tim Boswell** (Daventry): What steps he is taking to ensure that the revised common agricultural policy takes account of the opportunities for novel crops. [42731]

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Elliot Morley): In recent Brussels discussions, the Government have argued that the common agricultural policy should take full account of the opportunities for novel crops, which we strongly support.

Mr. Boswell: Will the Minister bear in mind the importance of ensuring that novel crops for foods and animal feeds are treated equally by CAP regimes and are not discriminated against if they have agronomic or technical advantages? Will he also bear in mind the importance of new developments in biomass production and non-food crops, which can benefit farmers with difficult land and which may increase farm incomes and help to reduce global warming?

Mr. Morley: I accept those points. The first biomass power station will open shortly and will encourage development of the crop involved. How the CAP treats crops is a serious point as, under the existing regime, there is a penalty for farmers who want to develop novel crops. We want that to be rectified.

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke–on–Trent, North): May I draw my hon. Friend's attention to this week's report from the first citizens panel on food and biotechnology, which was horrified that new crops had been introduced without the Government doing anything to stop them? When considering CAP reform, will my hon. Friend put sustainability at the heart of agriculture policy, particularly for genetically modified food?

Mr. Morley: Yes. Two issues are involved: first, novel crops, such as biomass, which are generally welcomed, and, secondly, genetically modified organisms. It is important that any crop of that sort is exposed to the proper procedures. We are ensuring that that happens and that there is proper scientific evaluation of any such crop.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): Does the Minister agree that the Central Science Laboratory has a role to play in developing novel crops? Will he make a statement on the laboratory's future and, in particular, where it will be located?

Mr. Morley: That announcement has been made by my right hon. Friend the Minister.

Bees

11. **Mr. Nigel Beard** (Bexleyheath and Crayford): What steps are being taken to prevent the spread of the Varroa Jacobsoni mite into British bee colonies. [42732]

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Jeff Rooker): A statutory infected area was declared in 1992 to control the spread of varroosis. Movements in and out of the affected area are possible only under licence and imports of bees from third countries are restricted.

Mr. Beard: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Does he also recognise that the licensing of only one treatment for varroa—Bayverol—is likely to lead to immunity gathering in the mites that spread it? If that happens, the bee population of Britain could decline sharply, with serious repercussions for food growing and agriculture. Will he consider licensing at least two treatments so that they can be used alternately, therefore avoiding immunity gathering and reducing the threat of a serious plague in the bee population of the British isles?

Mr. Rooker: My hon. Friend refers to the bee population. I can inform the House that I had no idea about its size. Every hon. Member has beekeepers in their constituency, I think, to judge from the amount of representation that has been made on the matter. The population is actually 10 billion, and it produces some

4,000 tonnes of honey. My hon. Friend raises an important point. In many ways, we are governed by our membership of the European Union. Authorising veterinary products simply cannot be done on the nod by one state alone. I am well aware that some beekeepers use other preparations. By and large, as long as they do not end up as residues in the food, they are acceptable. Nevertheless, we are seeking information about some of them.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): The Minister came close to admitting that the reason for one product being used is some Eurocrat's recent definition of bees as food-producing animals. Will he now admit that that is unfair European interference in the traditional British way of life and will he make representations to the European Union to turn round that definition and, by that means, allow British beekeepers to return to using tar and icing sugar, which are perfectly good ways to deal with Varroa Jacobsoni?

Mr. Rooker: The Department spends a considerable amount of money to ensure that we have a viable United Kingdom honey programme.

Cattle Traceability Scheme

12. **Mr. Ian Stewart** (Eccles): What steps he has taken to inform other EU Agriculture Ministers of progress on British cattle tracing systems. [42733]

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Dr. John Cunningham): I demonstrated the cattle tracing system to other EU Agriculture Ministers during the informal Agriculture Council in Newcastle upon Tyne on 11 May. I am glad to report to the House that they were impressed.

Mr. Stewart: I note that the informal Council of Agriculture Ministers took place in Newcastle upon Tyne and believe that it has been reported as being highly successful. My right hon. Friend has to be congratulated on that. I am also aware that he dedicated a large part of that event to demonstrating the traceability of British cattle from birth to supermarket shelf. Does he agree that that shows that British beef is safe to export anywhere in the world?

Dr. Cunningham: Yes, it does. My hon. Friend is right to emphasise that, as I did again yesterday when addressing the Agriculture Committee of the European Parliament.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): The right hon. Gentleman and his predecessors have told EU Agriculture Ministers in the past what we were doing to eradicate BSE. Did he get assurances from his European Union colleagues that once the traceability system and the other measures that have been taken are working, they will immediately allow us to export British beef?

Dr. Cunningham: I understand the hon. Gentleman's wish to be constructive, but the answer is no, because having the Workington centre operational is not a condition for lifting the ban. We expect a proposal from the Commission before the operational date of 28 September.

Genetically Modified Foods

13. **Ms Gisela Stuart** (Birmingham, Edgbaston): What safeguards are in place to ensure that consumers have adequate labelling and information on genetically modified foods. [42734]

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Jeff Rooker): European Community regulations require all foods containing genetically modified materials to be clearly labelled. In addition, we have taken a number of initiatives to ensure that consumers have information about these types of food.

Ms Stuart: I thank the Minister for that response. I understand that there are already several controls in place. Can he assure me that they are strictly monitored and updated in the light of new technology?

Mr. Rooker: Yes. None of the crops involving genetic modification can be planted unless they are approved by the Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment, which reports to the Department of the Environment, not to the Ministry of Agriculture. On food production, the Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes has to examine and license every product that comes on to the market. As my right hon. Friend the Minister said earlier, we have taken steps with our European partners in the past few days to ensure that labelling will be more precise than ever contemplated by our predecessors.

ATTORNEY–GENERAL

The Attorney–General was asked—

Customs and Excise (Prosecutions)

28. **Mr. John Burnett** (Torridge and West Devon): What guidelines he has given to HM Customs and Excise as to when they should seek his consent before initiating a prosecution. [42751]

The Attorney-General (Mr. John Morris): The circumstances in which Her Majesty's Customs and Excise is required to seek my consent before initiating prosecutions are prescribed by the statutes that create the offences. I also exercise superintendence over prosecutions relating to defence exports and sanction breaches on a non-statutory basis. A paper outlining those arrangements was placed in the Library by my predecessor on 17 June 1996.

Mr. Burnett: I am grateful to the Attorney-General. I understand that, in Scotland, Customs and Excise cases are run under the aegis of the Lord Advocate. Has the Attorney-General considered that such cases in England and Wales should be run under his aegis?

The Attorney-General: As Attorney-General for England and Wales, my responsibility is confined to England and Wales. I have another responsibility as regards Northern Ireland. That is the extent of my responsibilities.

Mr. David Lock (Wyre Forest): Will my right hon. and learned Friend explain the circumstances in which his non-statutory supervision of Customs and Excise comes into effect and how it works in practice?

The Attorney-General: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. Under the supervision arrangements, I am answerable to the House for action taken by Customs and Excise on individual prosecutions relating to defence exports and sanction infringements, other than those involving strict liability. Treasury Ministers continue to be answerable for general enforcement and prosecution policy, and remain responsible for investigation of such offences. Under the arrangements for consultation, the Commissioners of Customs and Excise will consult me in all prosecutions of defence export offences where intention is an ingredient of the offence and will keep me generally informed of activity in this area. I am also consulted by the commissioners on any proposals to change prosecuting policy. That may meet some of the fears of the hon. Member for Torridge and West Devon (Mr. Burnett).

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): Can the Attorney-General help me resolve a case involving two constituents of mine, whose son was tragically killed in a collision with a vehicle driven by a Customs and Excise driver who, I understand, was involved in a high-speed chase during an investigation? Because of complications under the Fatal Accidents Act 1976, the fatal accident inquiry has been delayed and the case has not reached a conclusion. Can he use his good offices to expedite its conclusion?

The Attorney-General: If the hon. Lady gives me the name and the details, I shall forward them to the appropriate agency.

Crown Prosecution Service

29. **Mr. Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield): What steps he is taking to ensure that the Crown Prosecution Service adopts common standards across England and Wales. [42753]

The Attorney-General: The CPS issues guidance to staff to facilitate the consistent application of national standards on prosecution decisions, the consistent application of charging standards agreed with the police and agreed standards for victim and witness care.

Mr. Sheerman: Why is it that in some parts of England and Wales prosecutions take place that criminalise children who have been caught soliciting, and children exploited in that way are given a criminal record, whereas in other parts of the country the CPS and the police do not take any action, but do what they should do and go for the evil people who manipulate those children?

The Attorney-General: My hon. Friend has a long-standing interest in home affairs generally and in this issue in particular, which he has raised in the House from time to time. I appreciate his continued concern.

I should explain that prostitution is not in itself a criminal offence; loitering or soliciting for the purposes of prostitution is a criminal offence. The overriding principle in cases involving young people is that they should be protected from harm. In such cases, the public interest may require the prosecution of a young person who persistently and voluntarily returns to prostitution; but each case is considered on its merits. If there is any particular divergence apart from that, or if my hon. Friend draws my attention to a particular case, I shall refer the matter to the Director of Public Prosecutions.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): The Attorney-General will know that the Glidewell report on the CPS referred to the widespread, but inaccurate, perception throughout England and Wales that the CPS constantly downgrades criminal charges and it said that a further study is required, but the CPS has already had to cope with a year's uncertainty waiting for the report. What does the right hon. and learned Gentleman intend to do about that recommendation and how much would a further study cost?

The Attorney-General: As the hon. and learned Gentleman, whom I welcome to the Opposition Front Bench in his new capacity, knows, the Government have accepted the broad thrust of Glidewell, which contains 75 recommendations in all. Unhappily, the CPS and Court Service statistics and, in some instances, the Home Office statistics, do not correlate, so further work is needed to get the basis of concern right. Sir Iain and his colleagues expressed concern and advocated further study.

Sir Iain noted that there were variations in discontinuances as between different offences. The Government as a whole, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and I must consider how we approach the matter. We have invited anyone concerned to make representations by 31 July and I invite the hon. and learned Gentleman and the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Sir N. Lyell) to do so. We shall take all the representations into account when determining the best means of proceeding, because there is a great deal of concern about the matter.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Will my right hon. and learned Friend tell me whether, as part of the reorganisation following the Glidewell report, it will be possible for judges who are concerned about particular aspects of cases that come before them automatically to have the right to report that information, over the head of the CPS, to Ministers?

The Attorney-General: The appointment of judges is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Lord Chancellor and I shall draw my hon. Friend's remarks to his attention. Judges have always been forthright in bringing into the public domain their criticism and concern about cases, from the highest to the lowest.

30. **Mr. Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield): What percentage of cases referred to the Crown Prosecution Service by the police resulted in *(a)* prosecutions and *(b)* convictions in the last year. [42754]

The Attorney-General: During the year ending March 1998, the Crown Prosecution Service dealt with cases in respect of 1,354,208 defendants in the magistrates courts. It proceeded with 1,097,147 of those cases, amounting to 81 per cent. of the total. Convictions for the same period totalled 953,753 defendants, representing 98.1 per cent. of all cases proceeding to a hearing.

In the Crown court, proceedings were completed in respect of 105,083 defendants, of which 95,721 were proceeded with. That amounts to 91.1 per cent. of the total cases. In the Crown court, 87,273 convictions were recorded, representing 90.6 per cent. of all cases proceeding to a hearing.

Mr. Fabricant: I thank the Attorney-General for that detailed reply. Does he accept that there is concern among beat officers in the Staffordshire police and, I know, in other forces throughout the country that those high conviction rates—98.1 per cent. and 91.1 per cent., representing an average of over 90 per cent.—could be leading the Crown Prosecution Service to continue with prosecution only if it thinks that there is a high possibility of conviction? Is he aware that many beat officers who suffer assaults, albeit minor ones, feel that their cases are not proceeding to court simply because the CPS wants to maintain a high conviction average, rather than ensure that justice is done? Will the Glidewell report improve the situation for those police officers?

The Attorney-General: There is concern and, over the years, my postbag has, like the hon. Gentleman's, contained correspondence about the concerns of victims, families and the police. I have given the House general figures, which include the high number of uncontested cases. For contested cases, in the year ending March 1998. convictions were recorded in 74.5 per cent. of contested hearings in magistrates courts and 59.8 per cent. of contested hearings in the Crown court. The hon. Gentleman may want to reflect on that, because those are the figures with which we should be particularly concerned.

Mr. David Kidney (Stafford): It was not clear whether the hon. Member for Lichfield (Mr. Fabricant) was referring directly to discontinuances; perhaps I might ask my right hon. and learned Friend about what the Glidewell report says about discontinuances. Is he alarmed that in the past separate statistics for discontinuances have not been kept and that there has been no significant analysis of regional variations in discontinuation rates? Should not the public be reassured that cases that should be prosecuted are prosecuted and that those that should not are never even started?

The Attorney-General: Sir Iain Glidewell and his team were very disappointed that they were not able to reach conclusions about that because of the problem of the variety of statistics, to which I referred earlier. Obviously, my hon. Friend will examine the details in the report, as will the House. On discontinuances, the report noted that there was a variation between offences. For some offences involving violence against the person, there was a higher rate of discontinuance than for offences such as motoring offences. That variation caused concern, and the team reflected on the matter and suggested that there should be a further study, as the hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) mentioned, and that in cases of doubt and difficulty a second opinion should be obtained within the prosecuting authority.

Mr. Humfrey Malins (Woking): Does the Attorney-General agree that the percentage of convictions in contested cases in the Crown court could and should be improved by simple measures? First, there should be higher salaries for CPS lawyers. Secondly, and most important, there should be less form filling and paperwork for those involved in the service. Thirdly, wherever possible, the CPS headquarters should be near the courts where the service operates.

The Attorney-General: I know of the hon. Gentleman's experience, both judicially and in practice. What will help is a better interface between the CPS and the police, and Sir Iain makes detailed suggestions about the best way to integrate the two. The Home Secretary and I must study them carefully. The views of the Association of Chief Police Officers and the police will be very important in that respect. They have said that they welcome the move to the 42 areas, in which there will be a chief Crown prosecutor who will be akin to the chief constable. I very much appreciate their reaction.

On form filling, Sir Iain found that there was over-centralisation, undue bureaucracy and insufficient autonomy to the chief Crown prosecutors. I hope that, with the appointment of a chief Crown prosecutor in each area, and with real devolution and a slimming down of headquarters, we can achieve what the hon. Gentleman and I agree is necessary.

Business of the House

3.30 pm

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire): May I ask the right hon. Lady to give us the business for next week?

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mrs. Ann Taylor): The business for next week will be as follows.

MONDAY 8 JUNE—Progress on remaining stages of the Teaching and Higher Education Bill *[Lords]*.

TUESDAY 9 JUNE—For three hours, conclusion of remaining stages of the Teaching and Higher Education Bill *[Lords]*.

Consideration of supplemental allocation of time motion relating to the European Communities (Amendment) Bill.

Consideration of a Lords amendment to the European Communities (Amendment) Bill.

WEDNESDAY 10 JUNE—Until 2 pm, there will be debates on the motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Second Reading of the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Bill.

THURSDAY 11 JUNE—Debate on the prospects for the Cardiff European Council on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

FRIDAY 12 JUNE—The House will not be sitting.

The provisional business for the following week will be as follows.

MONDAY 15 JUNE—Consideration in Committee of the Human Rights Bill *[Lords]* (second allotted day).

TUESDAY 16 JUNE—Consideration in Committee of the Human Rights Bill *[Lords]* (third allotted day).

WEDNESDAY 17 JUNE—Until 12.30 pm, debate on the fourth report of the Social Security Committee, on disability living allowance, followed by a debate on the first report of the Defence Committee, on peace support operations in Bosnia and Herzegovina. They will be followed by debates on the motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Opposition Day (13th allotted day)—a day for the official Opposition. The Opposition motion subject will be announced in due course.

THURSDAY 18 JUNE—Opposition day (14th allotted day).

There will be a debate on an Opposition motion in the name of the minority parties. Subject to be announced next week.

FRIDAY 19 JUNE—Debate entitled "Enterprising UK—The Small Business Agenda" on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Sir George Young: I am grateful to the right hon. Lady for the information for next week, and for the indication of business the week after. We very much welcome the debate next Thursday on the prospects for the Cardiff European Council, but that leaves outstanding a more general debate on foreign affairs, for which my predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard), had been pressing for some time. When might we expect that?

We are anxious to have a debate on the national health service, whose 50th anniversary is within the next few weeks. Perhaps the Leader of the House can arrange a debate to coincide with that very important anniversary. There is still no sign of the promised debate on freedom of information. Perhaps we might have some idea of when we shall have that.

The Leader of the House must be aware of mounting interest in the outcome of the Chancellor's comprehensive expenditure review. Can she give us an idea of when we might expect its announcement, and an assurance that it will not be made in the days immediately before the summer recess? As that review is likely to set the financial parameters for the rest of this Parliament, it is clearly a most important statement and document. I am sure that the House expects to debate it in Government time before we rise for the summer recess. The need for a general economic debate is underlined by today's sixth rise in interest rates.

The right hon. Lady will be aware that it is customary to have three successive debates on the armed services. We had the Royal Air Force debate more than a month ago on 23 April, but debates on the other two services appear to have been grounded. Can the right hon. Lady assure the House that we shall debate the Army and the Navy before we rise for the summer recess? On defence-related matters, in his statement on the Madrid summit on 9 July last year, the Prime Minister promised a debate on NATO enlargement. Other countries are in the process of ratifying that document, but, almost a year later, we still have not debated that very important subject. When might we expect that debate?

I return to an issue raised by my predecessor in response to the first special report of the Foreign Affairs Committee and its request seeking the views of the House. I have seen the exchange of correspondence, but I suggest that the right hon. Lady has not addressed that crucial question or recognised the fact that it was a special report. Does the right hon. Lady propose to provide time for the House to give the Committee the guidance that it has specifically requested?

Finally, I have seen reports that, because of problems with the legislative programme that predate the welcome progress in Northern Ireland, the House may have to sit on Saturdays. Will the right hon. Lady confirm that she has no plans for the House to do that?

Mrs. Taylor: First, I welcome the right hon. Gentleman to his new position. We are pleased to see that his deputy, the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack), remains in his place. I hope that the combination of a new approach and continuity will work well. I am sure that it will.

I shall deal quickly with the right hon. Gentleman's questions, some of which have been raised before. We shall have a debate on Cardiff next week. I told the right hon. Gentleman's predecessor and the House that we would like to find time for a more general debate on foreign affairs, but it is never possible to have all the debates that we would wish in any Session of Parliament. As to the right hon. Gentleman's comments about a debate on the national health service, my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) suggested some weeks ago that we should have such a debate around the time of the 50th anniversary. I said then that I was sympathetic to

the request, although I could give no guarantees in view of the other requests that have been made and the difficulties we have satisfying them all.

The right hon. Gentleman also asked about freedom of information. That legislation will be published first in draft form, and the relevant Select Committee will consider it at that stage. That is one of the procedures recommended by the Modernisation Committee, and I hope that several Bills can be treated in that way.

There will clearly be much interest in the spending review, both inside and outside the House. There will be a statement about that in the House in due course, but I cannot tell the right hon. Gentleman when that will be—it will depend on when it is appropriate to debate the statement and other economic matters.

The right hon. Gentleman mentioned the Royal Air Force debate and asked when we shall have the Army and Navy debates. I must admit that I did not notice much enthusiasm from some Opposition Members for that RAF debate. When I announced the debate, I was told by a senior Opposition Member—who is not a million miles away—that he did not demand such a debate. The right hon. Gentleman now asks for the other two service debates, and I shall bear his request in mind. However, as he has said, other matters also require debate and it is never possible to meet all requests.

The right hon. Gentleman mentioned NATO enlargement. I have told the House that we shall seek to provide time for a debate on enlargement before ratification, and I hope that that debate can take place before the summer recess. I think that the right hon. Gentleman's remarks about the Foreign Affairs Committee, and indeed that report, have been overtaken by events and by correspondence and discussions between the Foreign Secretary and the Committee.

With regard to sitting on Saturdays, we are certainly not considering that for the normal business of the House.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): There is a drift mine at Moorside at Eckington in my constituency, which is the last pit in Derbyshire. Two men were killed this morning when a roof fell in at a heading—Mr. Hill, the assistant manager, and Mr. Martin. A third man escaped but is naturally somewhat traumatised by the experience. I am sure that the House will want to join me in sending sympathy to the families of the men who were killed and to the work force there, which consists of 20 people and is rather like a small family. To be in order, may I ask for a debate on safety in small mines?

Mrs. Taylor: I am sure that the whole House will wish to associate itself with my hon. Friend's expression of sympathy to the families of the deceased. It is right that we should all associate ourselves with those remarks. It was a very bad accident and investigations are being carried out by the Health and Safety Executive's mines inspectorate. I understand that there have been no previous fatal accidents at the pit, but that does not ease the situation today. The most appropriate course for my hon. Friend might be to apply for an Adjournment debate on the matter that he raises.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): We associate ourselves with the welcome to the new shadow Leader of the House, but we dissociate ourselves from his apparent distaste for Saturday sittings, in one particular. There is widespread support in the House, as I hope the Leader of the House will accept, for the early ratification of the Ottawa convention on land mines, as is evident from the large number of signatures from all parts of the House on early-day motion 1387.

[*That this House congratulates Her Majesty's Government as one of the first signatories of the Ottawa Convention on 3rd December 1997; supports the commitment of the Government to encourage other states to sign and ratify the Convention at the earliest opportunity; applauds the efforts of the Inter- Parliamentary Union to encourage through parliamentary action the early entry into force of the Convention; and calls on Her Majesty's Government to fulfil the stated aim to be one of the first 40 states to ratify the Convention and to make early arrangements for the introduction of the necessary legislation in this House to enable ratification to take place as soon as possible.*]

I hope that the Leader of the House will accept that that is urgent and should be in place before the anniversary of the death of Princess Diana. That could be a special case, and if there is difficulty in finding time, many hon. Members would agree that that is a worthy cause.

I do not know whether your morning, Madam Speaker, was brightened by the absence of the "Today" programme and in its place, soothing music. In my case, it was particularly improved by the fact that we did not have a succession of Ministers making statements to the wider world that they were not prepared to make to the House. Why have we had no statement on the group considering pension provision—an extremely important report? The Secretary of State for Social Security said that the statement issued today was clear and authoritative. It suggests that at least six in 10 of those going into retirement will find themselves in poverty under present provision. If that is not important to our fellow citizens, nothing is. Why was there no statement in the House this afternoon? Mr. John Humphrys may not be on duty, but we are.

Mrs. Taylor: From the reaction of some Opposition Members, I do not think that there is unanimity about sitting on Saturday for the purpose that the hon. Gentleman mentioned. The Government are keen to make progress on the land mines issue. We signed the Ottawa convention in December. We have made it clear that we intend to ratify it as soon as parliamentary time allows for the passage of the necessary legislation.

The hon. Gentleman is a regular attender at these sessions and he will have heard me say that on several occasions. It is not just a question of hon. Members' views and it is not quite as simple as sitting on a Saturday. There are other responsibilities and there is other business before this House and before the House of Lords.

With reference to a statement on the pensions report, that report is one part of the information that will serve as background for the Green Paper on pensions that will be published later in the year. I see no reason for a statement every time another piece of information is published.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): May I put it to my right hon. Friend that, despite recent improvements, the scrutiny that the House affords the security services

[Mr. Chris Mullin]

has been grossly inadequate? Are there any plans for the House to hold an annual debate on the security services, in the same way as we have annual debates on the armed forces?

Mrs. Taylor: As my hon. Friend knows, I am sympathetic to the idea of debates on the intelligence services. Perhaps we could have regular debates on the subject, although I cannot guarantee that they would be annual. The Intelligence and Security Committee, which, I think, knew that such debates were being suggested, has said that it is not opposed to a debate on its next report. As that report will not be available until the end of July, it may not be possible to have a debate until the spillover period, but I am certainly sympathetic to the idea of regular debates on such topics.

Mr. Peter Brooke (Cities of London and Westminster): I had understood that yesterday was the second day of Committee proceedings on the Human Rights Bill. A further second day on 15 June will be an interesting procedural development.

May I raise a more important issue? When the Deputy Prime Minister made his statement about London Underground some months ago, he was good enough to say that he understood why hon. Members would want to debate the detail of developments. Can the Leader of the House tell us when we might have such a debate?

Mrs. Taylor: I am always open to new ideas and new procedural developments.

I know that there is considerable interest in the proceedings that will take place in London Underground, the agreements that have been reached and the suggestions that have been made, but there is a long list of topics that hon. Members wish to discuss. It is not possible to do everything: we still have a great deal of legislation to get through.

It is always possible for hon. Members to apply for Adjournment debates lasting for an hour and a half, as well as half-hour debates. Many of those debates have provided hon. Members with useful opportunities to raise issues of that kind.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Today is the 50th anniversary of the occasion when the Conservative party voted against bringing the national health service into existence—but let me turn to a different subject. [HON. MEMBERS: "No, go on."] I shall come back to that subject in due course.

Would it not be appropriate to debate the fact that a good part of the earnings of the highest-paid barristers in the country—some earn well over £1 million a year—comes from legal aid fees? At a time when legal aid has been severely restricted for so many of our fellow citizens, is it not shameful, indeed scandalous, that people earning well over £1 million a year should draw some of those earnings from public funds? The sooner that scandal is ended, the better.

Mrs. Taylor: My hon. Friend has made his point about the fact that the Conservatives voted against the NHS. If it were possible to have a debate on the subject, he could make it again.

As for legal aid earnings, my hon. Friend may know that the House of Lords is to hold a judicial hearing to consider the fees that QCs are charging in a number of instances. The Lord Chancellor's Department has been asked to make representations at that hearing, and will be doing so. At this stage, the matter is judicial, and I do not think that it would be appropriate to comment further now; nor do I see any prospect of an early debate.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): The right hon. Lady announced that there would be a debate on the Social Security Committee's report on disability. Will she confirm that, when the Minister concerned replies to that debate, he or she will apologise to the Government for the crass way in which the benefit integrity project was introduced by the Government, which has caused enormous distress to disabled people? In particular, will the Minister apologise for the fact that there was apparently such a lack of control in the Department that the responsible Minister only heard about the project a month after it was introduced, by way of a telephone call at Preston railway station?

Mrs. Taylor: I am always amazed at the selective amnesia suffered by Conservative Members in regard to their own record. It really is a cheek for them to suggest that this issue should be discussed, in view of what happened previously.

One of my right hon. Friends will reply to the debate, and I am sure that that reply will be excellent.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): I once said:

"If I have nightmares, they are about a Pakistani bomb . . . It is for that reason that I go on and on, at Prime Minister's Question Time, about the Khan incident, the Urenco incident at Almelo."—[*Official Report*, 24 January 1980; Vol. 977, c. 726.]

Briefly, its relevance is this. The leader of the Pakistani team was then a research student at the university of Brussels who systematically stole much vital sensitive information from the Urenco project. At the time, all sorts of undertakings were given, outlined after endless written questions from me and others, about the security of nuclear secrets. Is there not a case for having a serious debate next week or some time, at any rate, before the recess, on the follow-up to Monday's statement? Few subjects are more immediate and more potentially catastrophic than the nuclear difficulties between India and Pakistan, and we have some role in the matter.

Mrs. Taylor: Not for the first time, my hon. Friend refers to warnings that he has given about potential catastrophes and dangers that lie ahead, and not for the first time he has been able to show that his warnings were relevant. He is aware of the statement on Monday and of the concern on both sides of the House about developments in Pakistan and India in respect of nuclear weapons. We have to watch the situation very carefully. There is serious concern, but, even with that serious concern, I do not think that it is possible to have an early debate on the matter.

Mr. William Ross (East Londonderry): The Northern Ireland (Sentences) Bill raises some fundamental questions with regard to crime and punishment and law and order. We are having the Second Reading debate next week, but, as yet, no provision seems to have been made

for the rest of the Bill to be taken on the Floor of the House, which we on Ulster Unionist Benches believe is the proper place for the Committee proceedings to take place, so that everyone may be properly informed as to what is going on in that regard. May we have that assurance and be given dates as to when the Bill will come back to Committee on the Floor of the House, rather than being kicked upstairs to a Committee Room and no one knowing what is going on?

May we also be told when the Second Reading debate on the Northern Ireland constitution Bill will take place? It seems monstrous that we should now be engaged in an election campaign for the Northern Ireland assembly, yet we do not know all that that assembly will be able to do, or the rules under which it will operate.

Mrs. Taylor: I have announced Second Reading of the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Bill and nothing further. The business that I have announced for the second week is, of course, provisional. I am happy to say to the hon. Gentleman that I do think it appropriate that the Committee stage should take place on the Floor of the House. We shall have discussions through the usual channels about arrangements for the handling of that Bill.

The hon. Gentleman asked when the Northern Ireland constitution Bill would have its Second Reading debate. He will understand that drawing up that technical legislation is complex and that it is important that we get it right. At this stage, I cannot give him a date for the introduction of that Bill.

Ms Sally Keeble (Northampton, North): Will my right hon. Friend find time for either a statement or a debate about the recent flooding in our constituencies? There are still many problems in regard to benefits, insurance and flood warnings and defences. It has not been possible to raise them properly so far, and they affect more people than could normally be dealt with during an Adjournment debate.

We received the interim report from the independent inquiry just this week, but I think that the final report will come out only in the recess. It is extremely important for those of us who had the worst floods for more than 50 years that we have an opportunity to discuss the wide range of issues on the Floor of the House.

Mrs. Taylor: I can well understand why my hon. Friend is concerned about the impact of that flooding on her constituents. As she says, the preliminary independent report has been published. It identifies some lessons that should be learned from that exceptional event. Ministers are considering follow-up action with the Environment Agency for England and Wales. As she says, the review team will produce its final report later in the year, although we do not yet know exactly when.

My hon. Friend says that it might not be possible to deal with all the concerns in a half-hour Adjournment debate because of the seriousness of the matter and because so many hon. Members are interested. It might be possible for her and her colleagues to apply for one of the one-and-a-half-hour debates. That might be the best way in which to proceed.

Mr. Andrew Stunell (Hazel Grove): Will the Leader of the House arrange for the Secretary of State for Health to make a statement about the projected reorganisation of health authorities in England? May I also draw to her attention the grave concern building up in Greater Manchester, particularly in Stockport, where an effective health authority coterminous with the council feels itself to be under threat and morale is dropping rapidly?

Mrs. Taylor: I cannot see prospects of an early debate, and am not aware of the specific details in Greater Manchester. However, I shall of course ensure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health is made aware of the hon. Gentleman's worries about the prospects there.

Mr. Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury): Will the Leader of the House ask one of the Education Ministers to come to the House to clarify the position of grant-maintained schools? The Labour party has always been a strong opponent of grant-maintained schools, saying that it would return them to council control. However, in a parliamentary answer to me, the Government now deny that that will happen. In the press this week, the Government said that schools would be given more of their own funds to control. Will Ministers explain the exact position, so that schools, parents and the House might be aware of it?

Mrs. Taylor: Education and Employment questions will be next Thursday. The proposals are not about allowing schools to opt out of the local education authority sector but about giving schools maximum scope for self-management within that sector. We have consistently said that we see a vital role for local education authorities, but that they should do their job and, as far as possible, allow schools to get on with theirs. Consultation on the matter is under way and will end on 31 July. However, the proposals have been misrepresented by the hon. Gentleman—not least because he has, presumably, been reading press reports. I repeat that the proposals are not about allowing schools to opt out of LEAs.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): Will the Leader of the House find time in the near future for a debate on corruption in local government? Although we have recently heard a great deal about Scotland, I should like to home in rather closer to home—on serious allegations of local government corruption in Kettering, near my constituency. To assist that debate, will she make available not only internal Labour party documents on Scotland—which have been kept secret—but the internal national executive committee inquiry into corruption in Kettering? Before she answers, I hope that—knowing her to be an intelligent lady—she will not start nattering about Westminster, like some Blairite parrot. We are talking about current corruption, not corruption that occurred long before many of us were elected to the House.

Mrs. Taylor: I am amazed at the cheek of Conservative Members on such issues. Whenever there has been any suggestion of malpractice, the Labour party has acted swiftly and openly—very differently from the way in which the Conservative party has acted. The Conservative party has, of course, not yet even apologised for Westminster.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Is not a debate overdue on the first early-day motion of this Parliament, early-day motion 1?

[*That this House celebrates with joy and hope the election of what will be a great reforming Labour Government; applauds its manifesto declaration that 'all pensioners should share fairly in the increasing prosperity of the nation'; asserts that this can be achieved for the present generation of pensioners only by restoring the link between basic pensions and average earning; urges an immediate start to the promised manifesto review of 'all aspects of the basic pension and its value, second pensions including SERPS and community care' and a renewal of the commitment to retain SERPS.*]

Should not that debate be combined with a discussion of the splendid Ross report—published today—which clearly identifies the 1980 breaking of the link between pensions and earnings as the main cause of pensioner poverty, and states that all basic pensioners are now losing £25 per week because that link was broken? Is it not true that the manifesto on which all Labour Members stood in the general election promised pensioners that Labour would ensure that they shared fairly in the United Kingdom's growing prosperity? Is it not true that, according to Ross and many others, the best way of informing the Government's review of the pensions industry is to ensure that justice is done to pensioners in the fairest and most efficient way—by restoring the link?

Mrs. Taylor: I said earlier that the report was a clear and authoritative statement which will provide an important background for the Government's Green Paper on pensions, to be published later this year. That and other information will be taken into account.

Mr. Michael Jabez Foster (Hastings and Rye): Given the enthusiasm in the House and, more importantly, in the country for progress on my namesake's Wild Mammals (Hunting with Dogs) Bill and the Government's understandable reluctance to give additional time from their important legislative programme, does my right hon. Friend agree that it would be appropriate, as she does not need Saturdays for Government business, to allow voluntary overtime so that progress can be made on the Saturdays that have been pencilled in?

Mrs. Taylor: I have said several times that the responsibility for delaying the Bill rests with the Conservative Members who have tried to frustrate the will of the House. However, my hon. Friend's proposal is not the answer.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Will the Leader of the House find time for an early statement on the Government's review of the roads programme? She will be aware that the statement was originally scheduled for spring 1998, as the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson), told me in a written answer on 29 July last year. This is a serious matter. I recognise that a great deal of work has to go into the review, but for my constituents, particularly the long-suffering people of the village of Aston Clinton, who have long championed the cause of a bypass, an early statement would be welcome. This is not a matter of party politics. People of all political affiliations and of none would welcome an early decision and statement.

Mrs. Taylor: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman acknowledges that a great deal of work has to go into such a complex review. The work is well advanced and I do not think that we shall have to wait too long for further information.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): The Leader of the House will be aware of the thanksgiving service in Lichfield cathedral on Sunday for 50 years of the national health service. May we have a debate on the crisis in the NHS—not only the increasing waiting lists, of which she is only too well aware, but the growing and worrying habit of the positioning of Labour placemen and women in key posts in NHS trusts? Perhaps she will address the House in particular to the problem of Premier Health NHS trust in Lichfield. The tenure of the chairman of the trust was not renewed. She was replaced by a member of the Labour party who has a full-time job, is unable to meet the chief executive of the trust during normal working hours and is available only on Saturdays, some Sundays and occasional evenings.

Mrs. Taylor: I have already commented on the appropriateness of having a 50th anniversary debate, if possible. I must point out to the hon. Gentleman that if the Conservatives were still in power, funding for the national health service would be lower and waiting lists longer. He and his colleagues have quite a nerve complaining about nominees to NHS trusts from this Government.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): Does the right hon. Lady agree that ministerial responsibility is a concept to be prized in the British constitution? Will she call for an early debate on it? Does she agree that it is very important that Ministers extend the courtesy of replying individually to hon. Members' mail rather than having officials sign the mail out, so that we can be convinced that Ministers have at least read our letters? It does not seem an intolerable burden for a Minister to be expected to sign approximately 25 letters a day—I gather that the Financial Secretary to the Treasury has up to 6,000 a year.

Mrs. Taylor: On occasion, the number of letters involved is even greater.

Madam Speaker: It can be 500 a day.

Mrs. Taylor: As you remind us, Madam Speaker, the number is sometimes as much as 500 a day, which is indeed very significant. The issue of Ministers signing letters and the speed of response has been raised before. I have recently described the action that has been taken to try to ensure that the situation is as good as possible. Of course, there will always be some occasions on which Ministers cannot sign letters for reasons of urgency.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): Does the Leader of the House know when World Environment day is? Why are we not having a debate on the environment either on that day or within a reasonable period of it? Has the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions told her what it is doing to mark that day, as it

is being marked in more than 100 countries? When my office telephoned the Department last week, people there could not tell us.

Mrs. Taylor: Such announcements are made at the discretion of the Department; they will be made when the Department feels it appropriate to do so.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): The right hon. Lady may well be a victim of one of the huge piles of correspondence to which you, Madam Speaker, have just referred. In business questions about 10 weeks ago, I asked the right hon. Lady a question, and she said that she would reply to me by letter. I had to ask her again shortly before the Whitsun recess. I am a very patient and good-natured fellow, but I am still waiting for a reply. I hope that it is not too difficult a question to ask her again.

Mrs. Taylor: The specific topic that the hon. and learned Gentleman raises is part of the subject of legislation going through the House. It will be dealt with when we reach the appropriate stage. I am not responsible for such detail in legislation. Until the matter is finally resolved, I cannot give him all the detailed information that he requires.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Following the question of my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh), may we have an urgent debate on the relationship between the House and the Government, specifically the responsibilities of Ministers to give replies to Members of Parliament, and through them, to the public? Surely it cannot be the case that a Minister would allow, as the Leader of the House implied a moment ago—inadvertently, I trust—letters to leave his or her Department unsigned, except in exceptional circumstances. Nor can a very large quantity of letters going out in a Minister's name—committing the Minister and the Government collectively to the reply—be an excuse or an alibi. Can the matter be clarified, please, and in a proper debate? It is an emerging scandal.

Mrs. Taylor: This is not a new issue. When the Conservative party was in government, it was certainly not unusual to receive replies from Ministers signed by someone in the Minister's Department. It was usually said that the Minister had approved the letter. Ministers approve and take responsibility for all letters that go out in their names.

Mr. Leigh: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You said a few moments ago, in a sedentary intervention—*[Laughter.]* I make no criticism of you for doing so. You have said that you conducted some research into the matter that we have just been discussing. You obviously take it very seriously, as we all do. Powers of Members of Parliament are somewhat limited, but we have always been able to ensure that, if our constituents have a grievance, at least they know that a letter about it has landed on a Minister's desk. That is a terribly important part of our constitution and the way in which we conduct politics. As well as doing some research, could you put gentle pressure on the Government, as only you can, to ensure that we maintain the fine and important tradition of Ministers replying to Members of Parliament?

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. Would you also be kind enough to look carefully at the relationship between Members of Parliament and several Government agencies? One of the hazards is not that Ministers are not answering letters, but the increasing incidence of letters from hon. Members being diverted to civil service agencies—created by the previous Government—which have astonishing and nebulous lines of accountability. Frankly, such agencies are not fulfilling their tasks properly.

Madam Speaker: Let me say at the outset that those are not matters for me; they are matters for Government Departments. None the less, I understand the situation and I want to be helpful not only to Back Benchers but to Ministers. I have carried out some research on the matter, and I gave the House a figure today—something like 500 letters per week, I think. That is an inordinate number of letters, which I know that one particular Department has to send. It is not a matter for me, but I am trying to resolve it, and hon. Members will have to be good tempered and have some patience until the Department concerned can find a method of working the problem out to satisfy Back Benchers. I understand that they want to send their constituents letters signed by a Minister, but it is not the Minister who does the work for the Back Benchers; having had guidance from the Minister, they must do a lot of work themselves, too.

BILL PRESENTED

Northern Ireland (Sentences)

Secretary Marjorie Mowlam, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr. Secretary Prescott, Mr. Secretary Cook, Mr. Secretary Straw, Mr. Secretary Dewar and Mr. Adam Ingram, presented a Bill to make provision about the release on licence of certain persons serving sentences of imprisonment in Northern Ireland: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed [Bill 196].

Orders of the Day

Registration of Political Parties Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

4.10 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Jack Straw): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Bill is designed to improve the fairness of our democratic process. Before I deal with the detail, as this is the first occasion on which the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) will respond to a debate in his new place on the Opposition Front Bench, I congratulate him on his further elevation to the esteemed position of shadow Home Secretary. The right hon. Gentleman and I have debated issues several times, although perhaps less often than one might have thought, given the time that we have both spent in the House. I look forward to the future, in which we shall have that opportunity in greater measure.

The Bill will help to prevent the use of misleading candidates' descriptions on ballot papers at elections, thus helping to protect the identity of political parties and, therefore, the integrity of the political process. In addition, the Bill will allow, for the first time, a registered party's emblem to be printed on the ballot paper as a way of helping to distinguish as clearly as possible between candidates from different parties.

The Bill introduces no criminal sanctions against non-registration. It does not make the registration of political parties compulsory, but it creates strong incentives for them to register. Any serious party that intends to put forward candidates at an election would be well advised to register so as to be allowed to do the following four things, which otherwise would not be permitted under the Bill.

First, a party will be able to protect its name from misuse by others. Secondly, it will be able to put forward lists of candidates for the additional member system for election to the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh assembly, and, within Great Britain but not in Northern Ireland, for the regional list system of election to the European Parliament. We have had many fascinating debates on that system, and I am sorry that the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield has missed them.

In view of the Conservative party's new-found attachment to the algebra and algorithms of electoral processes, I shall send him a full briefing from the Home Office on the difference between the D'Hondt divisors, Sainte-Lague pure and Sainte-Lague modified. He may then wish that he had taken on a different job.

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): I bet you do.

Mr. Straw: No, not at all.

The third incentive for parties to register is an important new one—so that a party's emblem can be printed alongside a candidate's name on the ballot paper. I find it relatively easy to vote for the appropriate Labour candidate in parliamentary elections, because, for the last five elections, that has been me, so I have no difficulty spotting the name. However, when faced with a long list in the three-member local government ward in which I live, I have wished for emblems so that I could immediately spot the names of the excellent Labour candidates alongside them.

Fourthly, the Bill will ensure that only those parties that are registered will be eligible, but not entitled, to be offered a party political broadcast—unregistered political parties will not be allowed that benefit.

Any organisation, large or small, will be able to register. The way in which a party is organised—or, as I should say to the Conservative party, whether it is organised—how it selects its candidates and its aims and objectives will remain for each party to determine individually in accordance with its rules or constitution.

The key condition for inclusion in the register is that a party intends to put forward one or more candidates at a relevant election. If hon. Members turn to clause 2(2)—as I am sure that they have in preparation for the debate—they will see set out the relevant elections for these purposes, which include parliamentary and local government elections, and elections to the Scottish Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales, the New Northern Ireland Assembly and the European Parliament.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): What will happen if a registered party does not put up candidates for an election?

Mr. Straw: Nothing, except that the party will have wasted the registration fee, as no benefits from registration could apply unless the party has put forward candidates at an election. Parties may want to register and then not put forward candidates, but we shall certainly not make that a criminal offence—"tough on crime" does not include such behaviour.

We need a register of parties to cope with lists of candidates representing the same party that will be put forward for the additional member seats in the Scottish Parliament and the National Assembly for Wales and in the regional list seats in the European Parliament. As the House knows, those seats will be allocated on the basis of each party's share of the votes in the region. For the system to work fairly, there has to be a simple and effective arrangement to ensure that the voters and the returning officers are clear which list of candidates is being put forward by each party.

Apart from the other mischief with which we want to deal, the Bill's main purpose is to cope with the additional member and regional list systems, whatever their merits—I accept that they are controversial—which require a register of political parties. The Bill spells out the details of the registration scheme required for the new electoral systems, as requested by Opposition Members during the debates on the Scotland, Government of Wales and European Parliamentary Election Bills.

This Bill follows extensive consultation with Opposition parties, so I hope that, although there may be many points to be made in Committee, it will receive support from both sides of the House. I have raised the issues with spokespeople for the other political parties in the House—last summer, in the case of the main political parties. I wrote formally to the Conservative, Liberal Democrat and Scottish National parties and Plaid Cymru on 18 February and again on 23 April, setting out the plans for registration and giving them an opportunity to

comment both orally and in writing. In addition, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has kept the Northern Ireland political parties informed of our proposals on registration.

Mr. Robert Syms (Poole): Under the Bill, if one does not register, one does not qualify for a political broadcast. Does that mean that if Sinn Fein does not register as a British political party—giving its name also in English—it will not qualify for a political broadcast in Northern Ireland?

Mr. Straw: The final clause—clause 26—makes it clear that the Bill extends to Northern Ireland; it applies without exception to every political party putting forward candidates anywhere in the United Kingdom. Paragraph 2 of schedule 1, which deals with the names of parties, requires that, whenever a language other than English or Welsh is used, a party should give a translation of its name. There is not a requirement for the translation to be shown on the ballot paper. The registrar simply needs to know what the words mean. That will not apply to Sinn Fein—the phrase has been used in common parlance for as long as the party has been in existence. Everybody knows what it means.

These days, we are a multicultural, multi-ethnic society. Many of my constituents have a first language that is not English, but Gujarati, Urdu or Punjabi. There are similar groups across the country. If they put forward a name, it is important that there is a translation attached in English so that the returning officer can make a judgment on whether the name is consistent with the criteria in the Bill.

I want to make it clear that the requirements on the translation being given in English have nothing to do with Ireland, because all the names there are well known. They were much more concerned with languages used by minority groups in Great Britain. In some languages, the same word may have different meanings—that is also true in English—and it is important that we know which meaning is being used.

Mr. Alan W. Williams (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): My right hon. Friend mentioned that he had written to Plaid Cymru, which recently decided on a—quite accurate—translation of its name as "the party of Wales". Clause 3(1)(a) refers to a name

"likely to result in the party's being confused by voters with a party which is already registered".

The party of Wales is the Labour party. We have 34 of the 40 Members of Parliament, yet Plaid Cymru chooses—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. This is a very long intervention.

Mr. Williams: I shall try to be brief. Is clause 3(1)(a) relevant to this misleading translation?

Mr. Straw: Under paragraph 2(2) of schedule 1, there is no requirement for a translation when the name is in Welsh. We do not need to argue what Plaid Cymru means—it means what it says in Welsh. Those of us whose knowledge of Welsh extends to a few words, and who do not presume to get involved in Welsh politics, will not require a translation. Welsh is separately identified in the schedule because Welsh is a separate statutory language under the Welsh Language Act 1967.

There are other languages in common use in other parts of the UK, including Gaelic and a number of languages from south Asia. Some might say that more people use Urdu every day than use Welsh. I could not possibly offer a view, but that is not the point. The point is that Welsh is the only language with statutory status, apart from English.

Mr. Adrian Sanders (Torbay): Would the same rules apply to Mebyon Kernow in Cornwall?

Mr. Straw: No. I respect the fact that there is a vibrant Cornish language, but Cornish is not statutorily provided for; Welsh is. If someone wishes to register a name in Cornish, he or she would need to provide the registrar with a translation of the name. The words used on the ballot paper will be the Cornish words, provided they are in Roman script. However, the registration officer might not be versed in Cornish—or Welsh, Scots Gaelic or Irish Gaelic—and will need a translation in English so that he can check the name against the others being used, and against the prohibitions in respect of obscenity, for example. A party supporting Cornish nationalism, or a Gaelic language party, can stand not only in Cornwall or Gaelic-speaking parts of Scotland. They can stand where they like in the United Kingdom. It does not automatically follow that if a Cornish nationalist wants to stand in, say, Scunthorpe, the registration officer will know Cornish all that well.

Mr. Swayne: The Home Secretary has revealed a wide flaw in the Bill. There are bound to be differences of opinion over what constitutes a rightful name for a political party. The Bill has no provision for third party involvement in making representations or appeals against registration.

Mr. Straw: The scheme is similar to that for the registration of company names, although it is not the same. It makes use of the registrar of companies, which has had decades of experience of dealing with similar names and people trying to pass off one name against another. The hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) seems to have volunteered to serve on the Standing Committee, which will surely come as a great relief to the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield. There are many ways to pick through the Bill, saying, "What if this, or that." The ingenuity of people who are interested in British politics knows no bounds. However, I suspect that, in practice, the difficulties will not be as great as the hon. Gentleman expects.

Mr. Anthony Steen (Totnes): Before the Home Secretary leaves that point—I am not quite sure what it was—will he touch on a matter of interest to Members on both sides, which is the number of candidates at the last election, and in recent years, who have been guilty of passing off? They have called themselves Conversatives or Literal Democrats in a deliberate attempt to mislead the electorate. I welcome the thrust of the Bill, but will the Home Secretary explain whether it will assist in the striking out of that sort of candidate? Returning officers have powers now, but do not often use them. In my constituency, at the last election, a man—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has made his point.

Mr. Straw: The Bill deals directly with misleading descriptions of parties. If the hon. Gentleman will bear with me, I shall explain the provisions in detail.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): The Home Secretary referred to the fact that some languages, particularly south Asian languages, have different meanings for the same word. Although the Bill requires an English translation to be published, it does not appear to provide for which English translation that should be. Do the Government intend to make sure that an appropriate and accurate representation of the meaning of names is given?

Mr. Straw: South Asian languages are not alone in having words of the same spelling and different meanings. Invalid and invalid is one example. When people move on from the usual Christmas parlour game of naming 10 famous Belgians—I can help the House with the first name: Victor d'Hondt—they can move on to lists of homophones, homonyms and homographs, with which we have whiled away many a happy hour in my household.

As the House knows, we originally intended to use the Bill to introduce regulations on funding of political parties, as I said last October. At the request of Lord Neill of Bladen, the chairman of the Committee on Standards in Public Life, those provisions have not been included in the Bill. His committee is in the middle of an inquiry on the wider funding of political parties, so I agreed with him that it would be wrong to pre-empt its conclusions. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, Hear."] I am glad to hear that that has the approbation of Opposition Front-Bench Members.

As was spelt out in our manifesto, the Government remain committed to requiring details of all donations to political parties above a set figure to be published and to introducing a ban on the foreign funding of political parties. Therefore, we remain committed to legislation in that area, but will bring forward our proposals only in the light of the Neill committee's recommendations.

Dr. Tony Wright (Cannock Chase): On further and wider legislation, is it also the Government's view that we need to bring all aspects of the conduct of elections, including funding, together under some sort of electoral commission, as is often proposed outside the House? The Bill will clean up particular problems, but are we finally moving in the direction of such a commission to pull it all together?

Mr. Straw: The Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, North and Sefton, East (Mr. Howarth), is chairing a working party that includes representatives of all the main political parties and their organisation departments, to look into electoral practice. For many years, an electoral commission has been proposed, which could merge the work of the two boundary commissions—parliamentary and local government—with some of the work currently undertaken by the Home Office. I understand the arguments in favour of such an electoral commission and we are certainly open to argument about such an idea, but we have no proposals to put before the House for the moment.

The Bill provides for the register of political parties to be maintained by the existing Registrar of Companies for England and Wales based at Companies House in Cardiff. I am sure that the House will agree that it is much better to base the register on an existing tried and tested organisation, which is used to providing a highly efficient service both to companies needing to register and to members of the public seeking information from the register.

The register of political parties will be quite separate from the companies register and much smaller. More than 1 million companies are registered at Companies House, whereas we expect that no more than 100 or so parties will seek to register, although that, of course, is a matter for the parties that choose to do so and it is only our guess.

The expertise of Companies House staff in providing public access to the register and deciding whether a company may use a particular name will prove invaluable and the Government believe that it is right, therefore, to have a single register of political parties for the whole of the United Kingdom.

Before a party can be registered, the registrar will need to make sure that its name is not likely to be confused with a name that is already registered. That would mean, for example, that if the "Conservative Party" were to be registered, the registrar could refuse to allow another party to register the name the "Tory Party", in case it was confused with the party led by the Leader of the Opposition.

Under the Bill, the name of a registered party will have to be six words or fewer, to ensure that it meets the existing rules governing the candidate's description for nomination and ballot papers. The Bill provides that the party's name should not be obscene or offensive and must not include words that would be unlawful, in the sense, for example, of an incitement to racial hatred.

The Bill also contains an order-making power in clause 3(1)(f) to allow any word or expression to be prohibited. In case hon. Members are worried about that, I should explain that it is there to prevent certain words, such as "Royal", from being used in the title of a party. It will also help ensure that certain generic words or phrases, such as "Independent" or "Residents Association" are not registered by a single party so as to prevent their being used widely by individual candidates. It would be possible to use that power to require any party wishing to use such a term to qualify it with a geographical area, for example—choosing one entirely at random—the "Blackburn Residents Association Party", or the "Revidge Independents". That is the ward in which I live in Blackburn.

Clause 9 requires each party to provide the names of two "responsible officers" as the "registered leader" and "registered nominating officer", who, together, will be responsible for authorising any change to the registered details of the party. In addition, the nominating officer is to be responsible for authorising use of the party's name by candidates at elections, either directly or by someone acting on his or her behalf.

To keep the register up to date, parties will have to confirm their registration annually. There will need to be a fee, set by regulations, both for initial registration and for the annual confirmation of registration. Although the exact amount has yet to be determined, we think that it

will be about £100 for initial registration. That is not likely to be onerous, even for the Conservative party. Parties will be able to register an emblem.

Mr. Sanders: Would the £100 figure apply to a local council candidate standing for, say, the Redbridge residents association?

Mr. Straw: Yes, but only if he or she decides to register. There is no requirement to register. If such people decided to register, they would have to pay a fee, but I do not think that it is onerous.

Mr. Steen: As I understand it, there is nothing to stop a local man standing in a general election as a Local Conservative or Loyal Conservative, even though he would be misleading the electorate into thinking that he is the official Conservative candidate. The Bill does not deal with that, so he could stand—just as at present. Are the Government thinking of adding something to help in those circumstances?

Mr. Straw: The Bill provides for precisely that. In paragraph 2 of schedule 2, we have reworded rule 6 of the election rules. Rule 6A states:

"A nomination paper may not include a description of a candidate which is likely to lead voters to associate the candidate with a registered political party unless the description is authorised by a certificate—

(a) issued by or on behalf of the registered nominating officer of the party, and

(b) received by the returning officer during the period for delivery of nomination papers set out . . . in rule 1."

If a party's description is registered, a non-registered party cannot use a name that seeks, or is likely, to mislead voters about the identity of a party. We anticipate that the use of names such as Literal Democrat or Conversative or Conservatory party, all of which have been tried, or, just possibly, New Labour will not be permitted for a non-registered party.

Mr. Steen: As I read it, rule 6A merely clarifies something that was not too clear, while leaving the onus on the returning officer during a general election to make a decision. If he decides against someone, that person would have go to the High Court, and the whole thing would become so extended that the general election would be over. Is there any new procedure whereby the returning officer would not have to go down that track if someone does not agree with his finding that a new or alternative name is not misleading?

Mr. Straw: With great respect to the hon. Gentleman, whom I have known for a long time, I do not believe that he has quite followed the true meaning of the provision.

Mr. Steen: Quite likely.

Mr. Straw: It is generous of the hon. Gentleman to say that. He has not followed the true meaning of the reworked rule 6A. It is possible, in extremis, for electors to challenge a decision of the returning officer and to seek judicial review of decisions. That is important for any person exercising such a key function in our democracy. Returning officers carry out their jobs to a high standard of integrity and professionalism, but there are sometimes controversial decisions. It is important that there should be a safety valve of supervision by the courts, which will examine only the reasonableness of a returning officer's decision. They will consider whether the Wednesbury test applies: that is, whether the decision is manifestly unreasonable, rather than considering its positively reasonableness.

The Bill does not deal directly with the issue of misleading candidates' names. It is a matter of record that, at the last general election, the courts showed themselves ready to grant injunctions to prevent that sort of passing off. That was the case in respect of the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Sir N. Lyell) and of my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon). The right hon. and learned Gentleman was faced with a candidate who had adopted the name "Sir Nicholas Lyell" and, in the same vein, my hon. Friend was faced with a candidate calling herself "Alice Mahon". [HON. MEMBERS: "Himself."] As I recall, there is provenance for men calling themselves Alice, but that is a very different point. We believe that there are remedies already available in law to deal with such cases.

Mr. Mark Oaten (Winchester): Having lived through such an experience twice in the past 12 months, I know that one of the difficulties is the period of time in which one is allowed to challenge these processes. What the Home Secretary suggests is fine, but what is not fine is the period of time in which the controls can be put in place. Has he any plans to extend that period from the current rather hurried 24 hours and so ensure that proper legal process can take place?

Mr. Straw: The process of registering will take place in a relatively relaxed period, as any sensible political party—which category will, in my judgment, include all those that are currently represented in the House—will register at the first opportunity after the Bill becomes law. Once that happens, Liberal Democrats will be protected from, for example, people trying to apply the description "Literal Democrat", which produced a quite undemocratic result in an election during the 1994 European elections; and the Conservative party will be protected from the twist of using the words "conservatory" or "conversative", which has also caught out electors and tricked them into voting for one candidate when they wanted to vote for another.

No one should underestimate the huge difference that the use of emblems on ballot papers will make. The Bill will ensure that, for the first time, emblems will be included on ballot papers. There is an illustration in the appendix on page 10 of the Bill. Only parties that are registered and have registered their emblem as a trademark, as it were, will be able to use that emblem. Given that party emblems are so widely known these days, that in itself will provide a major protection.

In order to ensure the smooth introduction of the register, there will be two transitional registration phases, each lasting six weeks. The first phase will apply to all parties that have at least one Member of the House of Commons. The second phase will apply to any other party, but will require the registrar to defer any registration until the end of the period, so that he can consider any competing claims for the same or similar party names or emblems. In making a decision at the end of the second phase, the registrar will be able to take account of the history of parties with competing claims.

[Mr. Straw]

In making decisions on similar names, the registrar will need to ensure that voters are not likely to be confused. In case of doubt, clause 10 allows the registrar, before deciding an application, to seek advice from a Committee of Members of the House of Commons, appointed for that purpose by the Speaker. We thought long and hard about how we could best ensure that the registrar would not be left in the awkward position of having to make a judgment in an area where his expertise currently does not lie. We decided that the best approach was for him to be advised by a Committee of the House appointed by Madam Speaker.

We initially took into account the remote possibility of the advice from the Speaker's Committee being unclear, confusing or contradictory. Therefore, clause 10(2) provides that if the registrar disagrees with the advice of the Committee, he must give the Committee his reasons in writing. However, there is no question but that the registrar will be expected to follow the Committee's advice.

I recognise that there is a degree of impertinence in expecting a Committee under Madam Speaker to make a decision but allowing for the possibility of that decision being overturned by the registrar. Having considered that question further in consultation with Madam Speaker, I now think that the most appropriate course would be for the registrar, in circumstances where he is unhappy with the advice received from the Committee, to go back to the Committee for further clarification, but then, in the final analysis, to follow its advice. Therefore, in my judgment, there is no need for the final part of clause 10, and I propose to table amendments on that point in Committee. Once the two transitional phases are complete, any application to register a new party will be considered simply on its merits.

Clause 14 deals with party political broadcasts. Once that provision comes into force, any party that is not registered will not be able to benefit from the opportunity of having a party political broadcast. That does not affect the existing arrangements for the allocation of party political broadcasts. In particular, it will not entitle registered parties to broadcasts, but will merely bring them into the group of parties that may be eligible.

Schedule 2, which we have already discussed at some length, amends the parliamentary election rules to enable returning officers to refuse a nomination with the name of a registered party, or with any description that is likely to lead voters to associate the candidate with that party, unless the nominating officer has authorised the use of the party's name. As I have explained—I hope to the satisfaction of the House—I believe that that will deal with the long-standing problem of misleading candidates' descriptions.

The Bill will return some of the sense and fairness to our democratic system by removing the anomaly of candidates who are able to exploit loopholes in the current electoral rules and who use such clearly misleading labels. The Bill may be a technical measure, but it is an important one. It introduces for the first time provisions allowing parties' names to be registered and party emblems to be shown on ballot papers and prevents misleading candidates' descriptions. I hope that the House will agree that the Bill is a positive step forward, and I commend it to the House.

4.45 pm

Sir Norman Fowler (Sutton Coldfield): Listening to the Home Secretary, it seems to me that, in some ways, we have regressed on the question of rules for elections. In the debate on proportional representation, the right hon. Gentleman mentioned a former Member of Parliament for my home town of Chelmsford in Essex, the late Sir Hubert Ashton. He reminded the House of Sir Hubert saying that his job was to represent Chelmsford at Westminster and not the other way around.

As the Home Secretary revealed, we are both Essex-educated men: I at the local grammar school; he, rather more grandly, at the posh public school down the road, but I do not hold that against him. He will know from those earlier days that, for many years, there was no description of party at all on the ballot paper. In Chelmsford, one voted for Ashton or for Millington—the Liberal candidate did not really count; nothing really changes in Chelmsford. In those days, when class sizes could be more than 40, let alone 30, the people were sufficiently politically aware to work out for whom they should vote: they had received the election address; they had seen the posters; they were capable of remembering the allegiances.

Now, with the Bill, the Government are introducing a system whereby not only will the party of the candidate be set out on the ballot paper, but symbols will be printed on it, so as to make even clearer the party position. In his press release announcing the Bill, the Home Secretary said that casting one's vote will become even "simpler" as a result of the Bill, but I am not sure whether the illustration on page 10 of the Bill proves his case. My feeling is that the net effect of the symbols is to make a more crowded and rather bizarre ballot paper that is more likely to confuse than to inform. I remain deeply sceptical as to whether that change is necessary.

Mr. Swayne: Does my right hon. Friend agree that that complexity arises out of the electoral changes that the Government either have already initiated, or have in prospect, which will make the whole business of voting and the ballot paper so much more complicated that we might require such symbols in order to find out where we stand?

Sir Norman Fowler: My hon. Friend takes me, in an almost seamless flow, on to my next points.

We have moved on a long way from the 1947 committee report on electoral law reform, which said,

"we think the nomination paper should describe the candidate and not the cause".

The Home Secretary set out some of the events that have led to confusion among the electorate and, at times, deliberate attempts to deceive them. That is the one good reason for supporting the Bill on Second Reading, and that is why we shall not be pressing for a Division.

There is no question but that confusion has been caused by candidates deliberately seeking to deceive and take advantage by getting on to the coat-tails of a well-recognised party or personality. I shall come to that later. The Bill is at least an intention to improve the position concerning the name of the party.

At the last general election, my former colleague Rod Richards, was opposed by a candidate who stood not only as Rod Richards, but for the so-called Conservatory party.

Although Rod Richards obtained an injunction on the misleading person or name, the candidate was still able to stand for the Conservatory party under his real name. There have been other well-known cases, including the case in the European elections in which a Literal Democrat stood. All parties have suffered as a result of those deceptions. I am on record as having sought a change in the position, which is why I give one cheer, at any rate, for the Bill and welcome its intention to prevent the confusion of the electorate.

However, we should be in no doubt about why the Bill is being introduced. It is not, first and foremost, to prevent the confusion that we have had in the past. The Home Office has seen many such problems. The Bill is being introduced because of the demands of proportional representation and, in particular, of a list system whereby parties, not candidates, are voted for. In the first sentence of the press release announcing the Bill, the Home Secretary said:

"A formal register of political parties is essential for the smooth operation of the proposed PR systems for the Scottish Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales and the European Parliament."

The Bill has been introduced for the wrong reasons: to enable the introduction of a list system and an additional member system, which I and, I suspect, the Home Secretary find objectionable.

In Scotland, there will be 73 members elected by first past the post and 56 additional members. In Wales, there will 40 members elected by first past the post and 20 additional members. The additional members will be based on the old European constituencies, which will, in any event, disappear next year. We shall then have a new regional system of members without constituencies for the European elections. If ever there was an example of the Government making it up as they go along, it is this. The position may be bad enough already, but it would be worse if such a system were adopted for Westminster. On that point, I have hopes of making common cause with the Home Secretary.

Up to now, as the Home Secretary said, we have had a rather vicarious political relationship that dates back to the last time that I was in the shadow Cabinet. That was in Margaret Thatcher's first shadow Cabinet, when I was shadow Secretary of State for Social Services. I know that I do not look that old. The Minister opposite me was the then Barbara Castle, a left-wing, self-avowed socialist—all the words that today induce a collective wince on the Government Benches. The Secretary of State's special adviser at that time was none other than the left-wing, socialist gentleman who is now the Home Secretary, the right hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw). Politically, they were so close that he inherited her seat.

The reason that I mention that—apart from being gratuitously offensive—is that in my first debate on pensions, which the Home Secretary may remember, the then Secretary of State, supported, I presume, by her adviser, hastened away from the Chamber for a press conference on the referendum on Europe. She, perhaps with the right hon. Gentleman's support, was passionately opposed to entry into the European Community. Never mind the single currency—they did not want to go into the Community at all.

Mr. Swayne: Hear, hear.

Sir Norman Fowler: I know that I am carrying at least one of my hon. Friends with me.

At that time, the Cabinet had decided that Ministers could campaign on either side of the question. As we look ahead, therefore, we know that with the right hon. Gentleman's experience and his influence in Cabinet, he will be able to persuade his colleagues that if there is to be a referendum on proportional representation, Government Ministers will be able to follow their conscience. I look forward to the Home Secretary campaigning with us on that issue in favour of first past the post. I have waited 25 years to be on the same side as the right hon. Gentleman, and that is the fairest offer that I can make him, although I see that his natural discretion keeps him very much in his seat at this point.

Irrespective of whether that referendum happens, there are basic questions to be asked about the Bill. The first arises straight from the additional member system that the Government are introducing and has been raised by Michael Dyer, a lecturer in the department of politics at Aberdeen university. He raises the question whether political parties that are likely to receive few additional members should not create or foster surrogate parties. He uses the example of Scotland at the last general election—not, I emphasise, the next election. On that basis, Labour would have had such a high number of first-past-the-post victories that it would receive no additional members, or almost none.

Mr. Dyer goes on to offer a number of solutions. One, which he calls "a greater prize", involves Labour forging a pact with another party and delivering its list vote to that party. That would leave that party heavily dependent on continued Labour good will, rendering it less likely to desert a Labour-dominated coalition in difficult times.

The point that relates directly to the Bill is a further example that involves Labour, or its voters, forming an understanding with a so-called Independent Labour party that had received no first-past-the-post votes. Mr. Dyer estimates that if all Labour voters supported the ILP list, no fewer than 35 of the 56 additional members would be elected and, of course, the majority would be overwhelming. Equally, the spirit and principle of the change would be utterly defeated.

The question is, what can be done to prevent such a situation from arising. I am aware of the assurance given by a Minister in another place, but the question is not simply what is the Government's intention or even what is the Labour party's intention. We are making law. Doubtless we could create other scenarios in which other parties took similar actions, but the question is how abuse can be prevented.

The second question is even more relevant. The 1947 committee said that

"the nomination paper should describe the candidate and not the cause".

but there have been well-known examples of attempts to deceive the electorate. I mentioned the case of Rod Richards, and the Home Secretary mentioned that of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Sir N. Lyell), when Peter Rubery-Hayward decided to rechristen himself Sir Nicholas Lyell. As it happened, injunctions were granted on both occasions.

In the 1983 general election, there was the famous case of a man who changed his name by deed poll to Margaret Thatcher and declared the address of his flat to be henceforth Downing Street mansions, while an associate changed his name to Ronald Reagan in order to act as his

[Sir Norman Fowler]

agent. In that case, the returning officer declared the paper invalid, on the grounds that it was an abuse of the right of nomination, and was an obvious unreality.

A more difficult case was that of Roy Jenkins. Unlikely as it may seem, someone had the temerity to seek to impersonate that grand figure.

Mr. Straw: Impossible.

Sir Norman Fowler: Almost impossible, but perhaps not in name.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): A good Welshman.

Sir Norman Fowler: If he is a good Welshman, I am a Dutchman.

In 1981, an artificial Roy Jenkins attempted to fight the Warrington by-election, but the returning officer ruled that his nomination was invalid. However, in November 1982, in the Glasgow, Hillhead by-election, the artificial Roy Jenkins was allowed to stand, on the grounds that the returning officer there felt that the name Jenkins had been used for some nine months and no objection was received in time from the real Roy Jenkins.

As I understand the Bill, we shall legislate to make it more difficult for political parties to be confused, but there is no similar provision for individuals. We intend to leave it to the existing processes, whether the returning officer or the courts. In other words—the Home Secretary should take this point to heart—if legislation closes the door on political party deception, there is a danger that all attempts will move to personal candidate deception. We shall have turned the position of the 1947 committee on its head.

However, that position raises a further question about the position of individual returning officers. Self-evidently, different returning officers have made different interpretations of the law. The Bill is intended to set general rules to prevent the public's being deceived. However, what is being done to ensure that the policy of individual returning officers is the same as that of the registrar of political parties? How do we ensure a uniform policy throughout the country?

The detail of many Bills is crucial; never has that been truer than of the Bill before us. The Bill is presented as a voluntary system of registration, but, as the Home Secretary freely admitted, it is voluntary only if a party wants to forgo the advantage of party political broadcasts and the help that it can receive for the costs of security at party conferences. If it wants those advantages, it must register.

Equally, there is the question of appeal from the registrar's decision—the point rightly raised by my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, East.

Mr. Syms: West.

Sir Norman Fowler: I beg your pardon; I meant my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne).

The registrar grants an application for inclusion in the register unless the proposed registered name would be likely to result in the party being confused by voters with a party already registered. What does that mean? I do not make a party point, but one could make a sensible case that a candidate who stands as "Old Labour" is distinguishing himself from the present Administration. Equally, one could make a sensible case that a person who wants to stand as an "Independent Conservative" is giving himself a sensible description. From experience as party chairman, I can vouch for the presence of many independent Conservatives in the mid-1990s—and Independent Conservatives is only one of the descriptions that I gave them at the time. Probably, however, none of those descriptions would be allowed under these rules.

Who will settle these disputes, and who will settle the question of symbols? I really want to know that. I am deeply sceptical about the need for symbols; disputes are bound to break out as a result. The Home Secretary looks forward to our having 100 parties; the mind boggles as to what they will be. If we have 100 political parties jostling around, some will tend to push to make their symbols as provocative, or outrageous, as they possibly can. Who settles those disputes?

In short—this is a short debate—we shall want to explore a range of questions in Committee. My hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) raised another important point during the Home Secretary's speech. I have said that we shall not oppose the Bill on Second Reading because, obviously, we support the principle of trying to reduce confusion among the electorate—deception of the voters. However, we wish to reserve our Third Reading position, depending on the answers that we receive. By definition, we do not want legislation that makes the position worse or produces glaring loopholes in the law.

That apart, it would be wrong of me not to warn the Home Secretary that, in my belief—which, I suspect, he substantially shares—we are embarking on a dangerous electoral journey. This is but one small part of a much bigger picture. My greatest worry is about the way in which, step by step, we are moving away from the constituency basis of our democracy. In my view, the constituency link, which enables constituents to hold individual elected representatives to account, is right in principle and has served the country well.

I find the list system—whereby the public are asked to vote for parties, not individuals, and where control can easily pass to the centre and not be held at the local level—objectionable. I suspect that the Bill will raise some of the questions that will become part of the national debate in months to come, and I suspect that, when the issues have been properly exposed, the public will deplore the direction in which the Government have chosen to take the country.

5.6 pm

Mr. Martin Linton (Battersea): I am the representative of the constituency that is, in many ways, the cause of all the trouble. In Wandsworth, in 1967, when each party had four vacancies to fill, a Liberal candidate named Pritchard stood against a distinguished Labour councillor in the area, Sir Norman Prichard, and received 4,000 votes more than the three other Liberal candidates. As the Labour candidate named Prichard was distinguished and popular, it was an inescapable conclusion that the confusion over names had misled 4,000 voters. As a result, the Representation of the People Act 1949 was amended by the Government of the day, to allow a six-word description of candidates.

That reform was very reasonable, but, in many cases, the description has become not as much a description as an advertisement, a form of abuse, a campaigning message or an attempt to confuse. Last year, my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore) spoke about the terrible distress caused to some of his constituents when they discovered that when they voted "New Labour" they had voted, not for him, but for an unofficial candidate—so much so that one of his constituents burst into tears, and another ate her ballot paper rather than put it into the urn.

I very much welcome the Home Secretary's assurances about the meaning of the grounds—set out in clause 3—on which names can be refused, especially his explanation of clause 3(1)(d), which, as I understand it, refers mainly to words likely to stir up racial hatred, and the expression "prohibited by order" in clause 3(1)(f), which refers mainly to words such as "royal". I assume that the main casualties of this clause will be those parties that set out deliberately to confuse. At the last election, some candidates stood as Liberal Democrats, Conservatories, and Conversatives, and many others stood under the inaccurate title of New Labour. Many other categories of parties may or may not be affected by the measure, and I would appreciate further explanation from the Minister.

If candidates are allowed to use a six-word description without registering as a party, will they be allowed to give themselves party names although they are not registered? I refer not to the Monster Raving Loony party—which I have no doubt will register as a fully fledged political party—but to parties such as Happiness Stan's Free to Party party, the Juice party, the Rizz party, the Ronnie the Rhino party, the Sub-genius party and the Teddy Bear Alliance party.

Mr. Swayne: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, in reality, what constitutes a political party is democratic legitimacy? Having members elected to Parliament is what designates a political party. Under this legislation, anyone may be the leader of a political party in much the same way as anyone can buy a company off the shelf and become a company director.

Mr. Linton: I do not think that one must win an election in order to qualify as a political party. The hon. Gentleman cannot seriously believe that—if he does, I take it that he will stand at the next election as a candidate for the Sub-genius party.

At the last election, we also encountered the problem of candidates using their six-word descriptions as forms of advertising. I do not know whether that is covered by the Bill. For example, the Mongolian Barbecue Great Place to Party party strikes me as being a commercial message rather than a party description. The West Cheshire College in Crisis was clearly an attempt to use six words to make a point—I do not know whether it is correct. There were also a few lonely hearts-type candidates. One candidate described himself as Black Haired Medium Build Caucasian Male and there was also an Independently Beautiful party candidate. I look forward to hearing whether those examples will be affected by the Bill.

There is also the question of the commission of an offence. Several parties, such as the Legalise Cannabis party and the New Millennium New Way Hemp party, could, on a strict reading of the legislation, be in jeopardy. Several parties at the last election used descriptions that some people may consider offensive. Most of them were what might be called anti-political parties whose titles were attempts to deride other candidates on the ballot paper. Some examples were the Common Sense Sick of Politicians party, the Lord Byro versus the Scallywag Tories party and the People in Slough Shunning Useless Politician party—whose name I think was chosen mainly for its potential as an acronym. One candidate, whose surname must have begun with "W" or "Y", stood as a candidate for None of the Above Parties party.

I do not imagine that the Government want to use the legislation against such parties, but it would be useful to have a better idea of what the word "offensive" is intended to mean to acting returning officers. I hope that the tradition in this country of having not entirely serious electoral candidates, such as Screaming Lord Sutch and the Monster Raving Loony party, will not be lost. It may give our democracy a bad name sometimes when people from overseas see the joke candidates standing behind the serious ones, but I would hate to think that this Bill could be used to limit people's freedom to such an extent that they were prevented from standing in elections.

5.13 pm

Mr. Bob Russell (Colchester): I should like, at the outset, to offer the apologies of my right hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), who has had to return to his constituency because his son has been taken to hospital. I am pleased to say that he is now recovering.

It is difficult to see how any democrat could object to the principles behind the Bill. It is obvious that the details must be discussed, but there is nothing of substance to which we can object. The Liberal Democrats welcome the Bill, which we believe will allow political parties to register and protect their names and logos. My party, above all others, has reason to support such legislation.

The Bill relates also to the proportional systems that will be used for elections to the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh assembly and the European Parliament next year, and it will allow registered parties to provide lists of candidates. I agree to some extent with the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) in that it is disappointing that voters in those elections will not be able to select candidates from within the party list or across the parties, but the Liberal Democrats nevertheless welcome the new systems as an improvement on the unfair first-past-the-post system. We look forward to seeing further improvements.

It is pleasing to see that the Bill extends to local government elections, although they will use first past the post. The debate so far has concentrated on Westminster, but I believe that local government will also benefit greatly from the proposals. Elections to this place will also use first past the post. Let us hope that the experience of using fairer voting systems in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and Europe will encourage people to vote in the promised referendum to change the system that is used here.

The use of the registrar of companies to avoid creating a separate registrar of political parties is appropriate, but the Bill leaves to local returning officers the important decision whether a candidate not representing a registered

[Mr. Bob Russell]

party can use a description on the ballot paper. Unlike the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Linton), I shall not give an exhaustive list, but we have heard of and seen such candidates. I wonder whether they help the democratic process—although they certainly liven things up. The arrangement is likely to lead to inconsistent use of names on ballot papers in different parts of the country and will almost certainly cause disputes and legal action. As the Bill progresses, I hope that those matters can be examined afresh and, perhaps, resolved.

The Liberal Democrats have two particular reasons for welcoming the Bill. My hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders) knows only too well the problem caused by candidates using misleading names. I do not think that any democrat would approve of what happened in my hon. Friend's constituency. My hon. Friend stood as the Liberal Democrat candidate in the 1994 European elections for the seat of Devon and East Plymouth and lost to a Conservative candidate by 800 votes. A previously unknown candidate stood as a Literal Democrat and got 10,000 votes.

I think that hon. Members will agree that it is extremely unlikely that 10,000 people chose to vote for a candidate who had done no campaigning and had no published principles. The Liberal Democrats were thus deprived of our third Member of the European Parliament. However, it was good to see my hon. Friend go on to defeat the Conservative Member of Parliament at the general election and win a seat in the House—Europe's loss is our gain.

The same Literal Democrat candidate who defeated my hon. Friend in Devon almost cost my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten) his seat. At the 1997 general election, my hon. Friend won by an impressive two votes. A court later declared the result null and void and my hon. Friend went on to win a by-election this year with one of the largest majorities in Parliament—there may be a moral in that story. The Literal Democrat from Devon stood in Winchester in 1997 as the Liberal Democrat Top Choice for Parliament and won 640 votes—most of which were almost certainly intended for my hon. Friend.

The Bill would not allow parties with names similar to registered parties to register, but there may be confusion when unregistered candidates seek to use names similar to those of registered parties. That needs to be clarified. The Bill does not deal with the problem of candidates using a name that is likely to confuse voters. We have already heard several examples of confusion deliberately caused by candidates. Each involved parliamentary elections. There is only one Andrew Mackinlay, but as has been pointed out there have been several Margaret Thatchers and Roy Jenkins. Such confusion is not dealt with in the Bill.

The Bill would not prevent candidates from using terms that may cause confusion with registered parties in their election literature; it regulates only the use of names on the ballot paper. However, confusion occurs not just in parliamentary elections, but in local elections. Two years ago, in the borough of Colchester, four candidates stood as Conservatives in a deliberate attempt to undermine the Conservative party campaign.

Mr. Straw: With respect to the hon. Gentleman, the Bill applies to local government elections, just as it applies to national elections.

Mr. Russell: I welcome that clarification. The example that I shall give may have cost the Conservatives control of Essex county council, for which a by-election is taking place today. At the county council elections last year, a rogue Conservative—I think that Conservative Members will agree with that term—stood, and split the vote, and a Liberal Democrat took the seat. With Essex county council being finely balanced, the result of today's by-election could well alter the political control of the council.

It was expected that the Bill would include provisions on the funding of political parties. We support the Home Secretary's decision to await the report of the Neill committee before such legislation is introduced.

We welcome the use of party emblems on the ballot paper and the fact that Welsh parties will be able to register both a Welsh and an English name and to use both on the ballot paper. Registered parties should also be allowed to register regional variations of emblems to allow bilingual emblems in Wales and, for example, to allow parties in Scotland to have a different emblem from their emblem in another part of the UK. That may be useful for the Conservatives north of the border.

Can the Home Secretary tell us whether the emblems will be printed in the party colours? If so, perhaps there could be variations in tone to indicate where candidates stood in the various political parties, especially under the list system. I congratulate the person who designed the ballot paper on the good sense and humour that it reflects—the good sense to put the Liberal Democrat candidate at the top and the Conservative at the bottom. Typically for new Labour, its candidate has a hyphenated name. The Conservative emblem seems to be flopping over more than usual—misrepresentation?

Mr. Sanders: It is leaning too far to the right.

Mr. Russell: Perhaps the Conservative emblem is up to date.

Another issue that is not covered in the Bill is the gender balancing of candidates on lists in proportional systems. Liberal Democrats are using a system known as zipping for the European elections; across the UK, half of the Liberal Democrat lists will be headed by a man and half by a woman. That is equality. On each list, men and women will alternate. The gender at the top of each list has been chosen according to electoral prospect, which should ensure that one half of Liberal Democrat MEPs are women. I should have thought that the Government would welcome that.

A system of gender balance was agreed with Labour in November 1995 for elections to the Scottish Parliament but, because of the legal uncertainties and the lack of exemption from sex discrimination legislation in the Scotland Bill, it is unlikely to go ahead.

Legal opinion on gender balance is inconclusive. We had, therefore, hoped that the Bill would include a widening of the existing exemptions under sex discrimination legislation to include party lists in elections under the proportional representation system. The Government seem reluctant to do that, despite the 1995

electoral agreement between Labour and the Liberal Democrats in Scotland. It would be possible to exempt political parties only for the first proportional elections, to give women a good opportunity to achieve fair representation.

The Bill is another part of the constitutional reform of the United Kingdom. It will improve democracy in elections by preventing spoiler candidates from distorting results. It will allow party logos to appear on the ballot paper, which will assist voters in placing their votes for the party of their choice. I am disappointed that my former Essex man colleague—the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield—cannot see the sense of that.

Liberal Democrats want an independent electoral commission to be established to oversee the running of elections and election campaigns. The commission would also have control of boundary reviews, the monitoring of election expenses and the allocation of broadcasting time, and would remove the regulation and control of elections from politicians. The Bill is only a first step towards the fairer management of elections. I hope that the momentum for reform will extend to the electoral system for this place to provide for a fairer distribution of seats.

5.25 pm

Mr. Robert Syms (Poole): I am one of those odd individuals who collect election results. I have the various volumes of F. W. S. Craig going back to 1832. They usually contain a health warning that, although he has put down the results, he has added a description of the parties that may not have been recognised by the candidates. For example, following the split in the Liberal party in the 1880s, some candidates are listed as Liberals and some as Liberal Unionists. The distinction required historical research.

We are unusual as a nation in that Parliament developed earlier than strong political parties, so there has always been a strong element of individualism in our political process. People have always been able to vote on a geographical basis, for individuals whom they trust with the description or political label sometimes worn quite lightly, certainly in earlier years. As time has gone by, the political process has become more intrusive.

The debate in the 1960s, as the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Linton) said, concerned political descriptions, which Sir Richard Sharples pointed out could be used to mislead people. We have heard several examples today. Nevertheless, I believe that a description of the political party for which the candidate is standing is a positive development. For example, in local government elections in multi-member wards, if one of the candidates is stupid enough to state that he is a farmer or a company director rather than use his political label he usually runs well below the other candidates with a political description.

A description helps voters to make a decision. We in political life like to think that every elector has had a leaflet or two and has been canvassed, but, in reality, people turn up at the polling station with little idea who the candidates are until they read the ballot paper. At least that gives them the comfort of knowing that they are voting for the candidate who best suits their political views.

I welcome the Bill as an opportunity for us to deal with abuses—Literal Democrat is the one on which we focus most—but it is no panacea. In Committee and in later stages, we shall have to test many of the propositions in it to ensure that we get it right.

The requirement that a description be no more than six words long is important, but when a party registers perhaps it should register all the other terms or uses of its name. For example, we are not only the Conservative party, but the Conservative and Unionist party, the Tory party, we can be Scottish Conservative or Welsh Conservative, and some people tell me that we are even the European People's party on occasions. It is important that registration should cover all those terms. I know that there is a party allied to the Labour party called the Co-operative party. Would that party register separately, or under the umbrella of the Labour party? All those matters need to be tested.

The registrar's worst difficulty will probably lie in determining which party can use the term Unionist. In Northern Ireland, the majority community uses numerous versions of that term, with prefixes or suffixes. That causes a good deal of confusion.

I mentioned earlier the issue of registration depriving people of broadcasting rights, and the issue of Sinn Fein. I am pleased that there is to be a Committee under the Speaker to give advice. Whatever we may say about looking ahead, circumstances will arise that no one will have anticipated, and it is sensible to establish a Committee that enables political parties to give their views to the registrar.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) referred to the difficulties of the additional member system and pointed out that, under a list system—as has been suggested by one or two academics—it may be possible to mislead people into voting for the alter ego of a major party, particularly one that wins all the first-past-the-post seats. I was reassured by what the Home Secretary said about disqualifying candidates using names very similar to those of existing political parties. It is important that people who have voted initially under the first-past-the-post system and then under the list system are not misled into voting for what they mistakenly believe to be an official party. How the electoral system that will be used in Scotland, Wales and indeed London is received will depend largely on whether people feel that it has operated fairly and has not deceived the electorate.

I want to raise a couple of issues that I raised when we debated the European Parliamentary Elections Bill. The nomination of nominees for the European parliamentary elections will stand from one election to the next: for five years, until 2004. There will be no by-elections; if someone dies or resigns, the next person on the list will inherit the seat.

It is one thing for someone who has been sworn in and has become a member of an assembly—particularly a European assembly—to decide after a few years to switch to a different party. Three years after an election, however, the first reserve on the list might decide to stop being a Liberal Democrat and join the Labour party. When a vacancy occurred, under the European Parliamentary Elections Bill, the returning officer would have to offer the post to the next available candidate. I assume that the system would give the candidate the

[Mr. Robert Syms]

right to refuse, but it would not discriminate against someone who had left the political party involved. It is possible that the first reserve on a Labour, Liberal or Conservative list could inherit a seat without being a member of the relevant political party.

Given a proportional list allowing people to vote Conservative, Liberal Democrat or Labour—a system in which proportionality is intended to be the key—it would be very odd if someone who had resigned or been expelled from a political party could still inherit a seat. Five years is a long time in this context. We should not forget that such an arrangement is entirely outside our experience: under the British political system, a candidate is elected or ceases to be the candidate. An ex-candidate—which many of us have been—is very much an "ex". What happens if, four years after an election, someone who is no longer a member of a political party—perhaps owing to expulsion from it—inherits a seat? Will that person have the right to take the seat?

In New Zealand, which has a system of mixed member proportionality, some of those elected under a list system have switched parties, having given undertakings to their respective parties that they would not do so. In a famous case, a member of the Alliance became an independent. An electoral registration Bill promoted by the Labour party in New Zealand proposes that someone elected under a list system who switches to another party ought, in effect, to be resigned from Parliament. I do not think that that Bill will become law, and the issue is controversial, but we should ask whether, if people are voting for a party rather than an individual, the individual has the right to switch. Such action entirely destroys the purpose of proportionality.

There are problems with the European parliamentary system that we have implemented. There may be problems with the additional member system—that will depend on how well the Bill works—but I welcome the broad thrust of the Bill. Unlike my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield, I also welcome the introduction of symbols or emblems.

Before I was a candidate in Poole, I was a candidate in Walsall, North and encountered a difficulty that was outside my experience, as I came from Wiltshire. There were wards with a high proportion of Asians who did not speak English. In such circumstances—especially in local elections, which involve multi-member wards—ballot papers have to be produced saying "Vote for 7, 9 or 14". Symbols or emblems would enable those who do not speak English to exercise their democratic right. Blackburn may be similar, but it is certainly true of parts of the midlands. Politicians who wish to mislead people may do so by messing up the order on the ballot paper: it has been done. Emblems may well prove beneficial, especially for ethnic minorities.

Overall, I welcome the registration proposals, although it is rather sad that we have reached this stage—it is an inevitable consequence of the dreadful PR systems that we are introducing. We have an opportunity to make politics more transparent and honest and to rid ourselves of some of the discrepancies from which members of all parties have suffered.

There has already been one volunteer for the Standing Committee; another may be standing here.

5.36 pm

Mr. Adrian Sanders (Torbay): There is a long and not entirely dishonourable tradition in British politics of candidates using descriptions on ballot papers to make a point. My favourite is the description used by one by-election candidate—"Reclassify Sun Newspaper as a Comic". Other candidates have formed their own parties or pressure groups to promote issues or highlight causes: the late Bill Boakes and Sir James Goldsmith come to mind, as do the numerous stop this or stop that campaign groups formed at both local and parliamentary level.

Candidates who have fallen out with their parties, either locally or nationally, have stood as independents in the Conservative, Labour or Liberal Democrat interest. Others have disputed a change in a party's constitution and claimed to be members of that party's heir or successor. Social Democrat and Liberal candidates have done that in recent times.

I understood that the Bill's purpose was not to outlaw any such legitimate descriptions, but to prevent people from deliberately frustrating the democratic process by confusing voters with lookalike descriptions. Having read the Bill, however, I fear that its effects could go much further than was intended. I have a number of questions to ask the Minister. I hope that he will be able to reassure us that the specific problem of spoiler candidates is the Bill's only target.

Spoiler candidates are thieves: they steal people's votes. They violate our democracy, and legislation to outlaw them is long overdue. I know from personal experience in the 1994 European election how it feels to be a candidate for the party for which a majority of the votes were intended.

My loss, however, was not as great as that of those who filled in their ballot papers and left the polling station believing that they had voted for a Liberal Democrat rather than a Literal Democrat. The descriptions sound different, but they look the same to someone who glances quickly at a ballot paper.

The loss felt by those 10,000 voters was expressed in letters and radio phone-ins at the time, in terms used more often by people who have been recently burgled or assaulted. They felt violated—that something intangible had been taken from them without their permission. For them, it was not only that someone they had specifically voted against was going to represent them for the next five years, but that their rights had been taken away. They will be among the first to welcome legislation that prevents such a situation—as will I—but my concern is with the scope of the Bill and whether it would prevent someone from standing as a Unionist, Liberal or Co-op candidate if the Conservative, Liberal Democrat and Labour parties registered those titles as their own.

What will happen in Northern Ireland in relation to the competing claims on the Unionist description? Would the Bill prevent a person from standing as an independent Conservative, an independent Liberal Democrat or an independent Labour candidate? Could an organisation register as the Independent party? If that were to happen, perhaps prospective council candidates would have to approach the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Bell) for their voucher, although the Home Secretary made it fairly clear that he felt that there would be one generic term for independents—but what if there were a dispute between independent candidates?

I am concerned about the fate of residents or ratepayer candidates. We may get both a Redbridge residents association and a Redbridge tenants and residents association wishing to register. What would be the adjudication then?

Is it right for someone to stand as an independent and suffix their leaning or political affiliation to their description? It is extraordinarily dishonest for people to stand as independents when they are from a political party and often align with it in a council chamber after the election.

Mr. Swayne: Does the hon. Gentleman accept—I entirely support him in his grievance—that that is effectively dealt with in schedule 2? Schedule 2 is all that is necessary to meet his principal grievance.

Mr. Sanders: I am not sure that the hon. Gentleman quite understood what I was saying. I was saying that independents should be able to use a suffix to show their leaning or political affiliation and I ask the Minister to clarify whether they will be able to do so. I do not believe that right hon. and hon. Members have the exclusive right to determine the legitimacy of those in dispute with a party that is represented here—no matter that, under the Bill, I would have benefited from more than 1,000 Liberal votes when I have a majority of just 12. People have an inherent right to describe their politics as they wish, and I fear from my reading of the Bill—I hope that I shall be put right—that that right will be taken away.

If the Bill could be misused by Westminster-based parties to prevent what I view as the strength of our pluralistic democracy, it is a bad Bill which, rather than clarifying choices for electors, will reduce their choice. I seek the Minister's reassurance on that and the other points that I have raised.

5.42 pm

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): I do not intend to detain the House long. Indeed, I do not believe that the Bill deserves to detain the House long; I am afraid that my view of the Bill is different from that of my hon. Friend the Member for Poole (Mr. Syms).

There seems to be something sinister about a Bill that describes itself as the Registration of Political Parties Bill. There is something vaguely totalitarian about the notion of registering a political party. Of course, the Home Secretary has told us that it is not like that at all—the Bill is in fact a mouse and the kernel of the Bill is schedule 2; that is really what it is all about.

I accept the necessity of schedule 2 and entirely agree with the thrust of the remarks by the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders), including those on the particular grievance that has arisen. I accept entirely that schedule 2 is necessary. We need to amend the Representation of the People Act 1990 in that way. I hope that, when we come to Third Reading, schedule 2 will be all that is left of the Bill, although I somehow doubt it. The real agenda behind the Bill was revealed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler): this Bill is all about the party list system.

We have relatively few political parties in this country. I know that the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Linton) rehearsed a great long list of political parties, but I reject the notion that they are political parties at all. As I said to him, in this country, what constitutes a political party is democratic legitimacy. It is having Members of Parliament.

Jackie Ballard (Taunton): I am shocked that the definition that the hon. Gentleman gives of a political party is that it has Members of Parliament. Would he not say that the Green party, for example, is a political party?

Mr. Swayne: I am a reasonable man and I realise that I have overstated the case. I am prepared to accept that the Green party is a political party and to adjust my definition. There are other political parties, but those on the list that was rehearsed by the hon. Member for Battersea do not constitute political parties. We have, and I stand by this, relatively few political parties. I accept that there is a Green party and a United Kingdom Independence party, but such parties are relatively few. We do not need a mechanism for the registration of political parties in the same way that we need a mechanism for the registration of companies.

We need a mechanism for the registration of companies because there are so many. There are not so many political parties. Are we anticipating a great influx of political parties? I suspect that that is the reality. Party list systems give rise to a plethora of political parties. I fear that there is something in the fact that the companies registration mechanism has been selected as the mechanism for the registration of political parties.

Mr. Syms: Part of the problem of modern politics in the television age is that frivolous candidates are increasing. That is far more of a factor since television, satellite and everything else came into being.

Mr. Swayne: I accept that entirely and I hope that schedule 2 will ensure that such frivolous candidates will not be able to abuse our procedures so as to usurp the votes that were intended to be cast for serious candidates, but there is no mechanism that can rule out frivolous candidates standing at an election. In a moment, I shall say a few words about frivolity, of which my hon. Friend may care to take note.

The selection of the mechanism for the registration of companies as the mechanism for the registration of political parties strikes me as unfortunate. As I said in an intervention, there is something unsavoury about meeting a citizen of the United States to be told that he is vice-president of a particular company. Anyone, it seems, can be a vice-president of a company, much in the way as, increasingly, anyone in this country can become a company director, having paid £100 and bought the title off the shelf.

As a consequence of the Bill, anyone can be a leader of a political party.

Mr. Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): It may come to that.

Mr. Swayne: Indeed.

The purpose of my intervention during the Home Secretary's speech was to highlight that. I asked him what would happen if a political party registered and then fielded no candidates and acquired no votes. He said, "That is entirely proper. Nothing would happen at all." One would therefore be able to become the leader of a

[Mr. Swayne]

political party, and acquire the—quite false—authority of sitting on the "Today" programme and being interviewed as the leader of a political party, without having any intention of securing any political legitimacy. Allowing that to happen seems quite unnecessary.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. George Howarth): Will the hon. Gentleman help the House? As the hon. Member for Cheadle (Mr. Day) has just held up a note up for the hon. Gentleman to read, does that mean that he is in imminent danger of becoming leader of his own political party?

Mr. Swayne: The note concerned a domestic matter that my hon. Friend and I discussed earlier.

I come now to the matter of frivolity, as there seems to be a measure of mirth in the House.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Before my hon. Friend moves on to frivolity—a subject close to his heart—will he tell us whether he agrees that the Bill contains not only a sinister element, which he rightly pointed out, but a deeply patronising one? Does the Bill not assume that voters are so dim, undiscriminating or unable to make up their own mind on the legitimacy of candidates or political parties that they need to be spoon fed and nannied throughout the electoral process? Does he agree that that is a most unfortunate development, which we hope will be resisted at all costs?

Mr. Swayne: My right hon. Friend is entirely correct. However, the problem is even worse, as the trend that he mentioned will be assisted by the Bill.

A principal difference between myself and my hon. Friend the Member for Poole is that I can think of nothing more dispiriting than logos appearing on the ballot paper. It is the dumbing down of British politics, in which candidates are to sell themselves in much the same way as they might sell soap powder. Only one symbol should legitimately appear on a ballot paper: an "X" marked against the name of one candidate. In the case of New Forrest, West, that name is mine.

My hon. Friend the Member for Poole was strenuous in attempting to be in line with the new politics—the consensual attitude that is engendered by proportional systems, four of which we have already legislated on. I was therefore struggling for something complimentary to say about the Bill. However, the hon. Member for Colchester (Mr. Russell) has assisted me, as I now realise that I welcome in the Bill what is not in it. The hon. Gentleman wished that the Bill would empower the Liberal Democrats to circumvent the United Kingdom's very proper anti-discrimination and equal opportunity legislation, to persist with their extraordinary agenda of political correctness.

Mr. Sanders: Will the hon. Gentleman define his comment, at the very beginning of his speech, about not wishing "to detain the House for very long"?

Mr. Swayne: I have been fairly reasonable, so far, and certainly do not intend to detain the House for much longer. Were the hon. Gentleman to remain in his seat, I should be quicker.

The demand of the hon. Member for Colchester for a system allowing his party to circumvent equal opportunities legislation is rooted in the Liberal Democrats' attitude—their political correctness—which itself seems to be rooted in an attitude that pervaded the councils of the early Church—that men and women, the male and the female, are effectively two species that have antithetical interests and cannot be represented one by the other. The logical conclusion of such a system is that there has to be an equal number of male and female candidates to secure proper political representation. Nothing could be further from the truth. It is a most ridiculous argument, and I welcome the fact that the Bill does not endorse it.

The Home Secretary seemed to volunteer me for the Standing Committee that will consider the Bill, but I should certainly not relish the work that the Committee will have to put into it. The Bill seems to have been a very rushed job, and the Committee will have to do a great deal of work to sort it out.

Mr. Forth: I hope that my hon. Friend is not suggesting that the only hon. Members who should serve on Standing Committees are those who are fawningly in favour of some ghastly consensual Bill. I hope that he accepts that the essence of the House includes Standing Committees scrutinising Bills with a proper degree of criticality. If so, does he not agree that—if he can find it within himself—he should offer himself—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I do not think that we want to get into a debate on the operation of Standing Committees.

Mr. Swayne: For precisely the reason given by my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth), I was not volunteering myself for the Standing Committee.

The Committee will have so much to do, because the Bill contains so little that is necessary to make it workable. I have already mentioned to the Home Secretary the fact that the Bill contains no mechanism for third parties even to be notified that applications for registration are in prospect. It provides no means by which an application can be published, and therefore brought to the attention of other political parties that might wish to make representations. Nor does it contain an appeal procedure for those whose applications might be refused. All those matters will have to be dealt with.

The Bill is quite inadequate. In clause 10, for example, the question arises whether the "Committee of Members of the House of Commons" will be a Committee of the House. Will it enjoy parliamentary privilege? That matter will have to be sorted out.

I return to the point with which I began my speech. I wish that the Bill consisted of nothing more than schedule 2, which deals with the quite proper concern of the hon. Member for Torbay. The rest of the Bill is necessary as a consequence not of any inadequacy in our current electoral arrangements but of the awful systems that those on the Treasury Bench have in prospect for us.

5.57 pm

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): This has been a short but interesting debate. When he was Home Secretary, James Callaghan said:

"I would hope that most people who stand for election would have a proper sense of responsibility. I agree that one cannot wholly rely on that".—[*Official Report*, 18 December 1968; Vol. 775, c. 1404.]

In "*The Times* Guide to the House of Commons", when describing the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Bell), Neil Hamilton and others at the count in Tatton at the general election, Matthew Parris said:

"Behind both, towering above them and swaying from side to side in a weird dance, writhed a 7ft being. A 6ft transvestite in 12in platform heels, wearing a birdcage on her head, her face painted with wild shapes and red and green colours, dressed in royal robes, covered with glitter and plastered in £5 notes, 'Miss Moneypenny'—in reality Burnel Penhaul, 32, from Birmingham—was standing for the Miss Moneypenny's Glamorous One Party. Campaigning on the slogan 'Put the tat back into Tatton' she won 128 votes."

I think that that shows how wrong James Callaghan was in 1968. The fact is that, at the most recent general election, a record number of candidates stood, and a record number of candidates lost their deposits.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) said, it was not so many years ago that candidates stood without any label on ballot papers. The changes that are occurring in the United Kingdom electoral system—especially the list system in European elections—make it is absolutely necessary that the registered names of political parties should be protected. Next year, for the first time in this country, people will vote for a political party. That will be their wake-up call on the consequences of proportional representation and the list system.

Not so many years ago, it was important for candidates to get their name known around the constituency. Now it is important for the party name and emblem to be known around the constituency, because that is what people will be voting for. That is not progress for politics in this country.

We have heard about the d'Hondt system. The Home Secretary said that d'Hondt was one of 10 famous Belgians whom he knew. Unless Mr. d'Hondt had nine other family members, I would struggle to name 10 famous Belgians. The d'Hondt system is simple compared with how the Liberal Democrats will select their lists.

The debate is about correcting a problem that we know exists because there have been a few Adjournment debates on it since the election. The problem is the spirit of fighting elections and allowing electors to choose clearly between candidates, individuals and clearly defined political parties. The arrangements have been flouted and, unless we do something, they will be flouted again.

I was once told that politics is not cricket. I guess that it is not. Some people will not play the game as it is intended. Deception is the clear intention of rogue candidates. I am not referring to any of the genuine articles in the House of Commons today. In a less generous mood, I could say a lot about deception and rogue candidates, but I am a generous person.

The speech of the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten) before the Christmas Adjournment reminded me of a typical "EastEnders" episode—it was depressing and without hope to start with and then it got worse. We have an opportunity to end that soap opera. The Bill is not a cure-all and there will still be judicial appeals because of the problem of people changing their names rather than passing off political parties, but it is a step in the right direction.

A quick review of "Dod" or "*The Times* Guide to the House of Commons" shows why we need to act. There were 3,717 candidates in 659 seats at the 1997 general election. "Dod" lists no fewer than six legitimate left of centre parties: Labour; Labour Co-operative; Scottish Socialist Alliance; the Socialist Labour party; the Socialist party of Great Britain; and the Workers Revolutionary party. That does not even include new Labour, which we all know to be a deception, whichever party uses the description.

In Camberwell and Peckham, the Labour party, the Socialist Labour party, the Socialist party and the Workers Revolutionary party all appeared on the same ballot paper. In Cardiff, South and Penarth, the New Labour candidate, who stood against the Labour candidate, scored 3,942 votes—three times more than the Plaid Cymru candidate. In Blackburn, a Common Sense candidate stood against the Home Secretary. As we know, the electors turned their backs on common sense and voted Labour—we can see the Home Secretary in his place.

A distinction has to be made between the more eccentric candidates—such as the Monster Raving Loony party, the Sub-genius candidate, the Glow Bowling candidate and the Independent OAP—and others with more sinister intentions to deceive, such the Conservatory candidate and other examples that we have heard this evening. I spoke to Rod Richards earlier today about the exercise that he had to go through. We have heard about it many times. A gentleman called David Neal, who did not even change his name by deed poll, gave the returning officer a nomination form filled in under the name Rod Richard. He dropped the letter "s" so that he would appear above Rod Richards on the ballot paper and called himself the Conservatory candidate.

The hon. Member for Winchester mentioned the problem of the 24 hours available for an appeal. In many cases, the candidates have less than 24 hours because they do not find out about the problem immediately.

Mr. Sanders: What is the hon. Gentleman's opinion of changing the order of the candidates for elections by pulling a letter out of a hat to start the list off so that those names beginning with "A" are not guaranteed to be at the top? That would stop the pre-emptive spoiler, whose name is guaranteed to come above the candidate from whom they are trying to steal votes.

Mr. Evans: That would stop me from changing my name by deed poll to Aaron Aaronovitch, so I am not too sure about the idea. The Home Secretary says that a committee is considering the problem. It is one of many issues to be taken account. The hon. Member for Winchester mentioned several in his Adjournment speech, including the time available for postal ballot forms to be submitted, which is ridiculously long in these days of computers.

The problem of changing names—not even by deed poll—such as that Rod Richards faced, desperately needs to be solved. It is a definite problem which is not covered

[Mr. Evans]

by the Bill. Even after the judicial review, in which the judge told the impersonator of Rod Richards to stand as David Neal, he was allowed to stand as the Conservatory candidate. He gained almost 600 votes, having changed his name just for the election and without campaigning or being well known in the area. We need to change the situation as soon as possible.

We welcome the Bill, but it is not perfect. We shall table amendments in Committee, as will other parties—perhaps even the Government will do so, remembering the Government of Wales Bill.

I am reassured by the Home Secretary's comment that nobody will be able to register the word "independent". I had thought that the hon. Member for Tatton might be able to register the word in the first round and that people would need to seek his permission to stand under that banner. We need clarification on whether a Conservative party member who was disgruntled with the Conservative party could stand as an Independent Conservative. He would be both a Conservative and independent. The Library has produced figures for the number of people who stood at local elections using the word "independent" before the party name—Labour, Liberal Democrat and Conservative. There were no figures for the 1998 elections, but in 1996, there were 51 candidates listed as Independent Labour, 30 as Independent Conservative and four as Independent Liberal Democrat. There were also 49 Militant Labour candidates and one Independent Green. We would welcome clarification on that.

We have heard of the Liberal Democrats concerns about the protection of their party's name. There is also the problem of the Liberal party, which had candidates at the general election. The Liberal party is older than the current Liberal Democrats. It has no Members of Parliament, so it would not be able to register the word Liberal in the first round of registration, but I am sure that it would be keen to seek protection for its name. Would that be possible under the Bill?

I should like to go into a little more detail on one issue that has been mentioned. It is not covered in the Bill, but it is important. It relates to the spirit of voting and to the Government of Wales Bill and the Scotland Bill, which are both in another place. My right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield said that there will be 40 first-past-the-post candidates and 20 additional members in the Welsh assembly, and 73 first-past-the-post candidates and 56 additional members in the Scottish Parliament. Under the d'Hondt system, people will be able to vote for a constituency member and use their second vote for the list system.

The great worry, which was addressed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) in Committee on the Government of Wales Bill, is that the split ticket will be abused. Alter ego parties could stand, and the spirit of the d'Hondt system would be totally destroyed. In reply to my right hon. Friend, the Under-Secretary of State for Wales, the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths), said:

"I thank the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) for advancing new clause 35 . . . We acknowledge the points that he has made and I concede that there may be scope for collusion between and within parties to exploit the two-ballot structure of the additional member system in the manner that he described. Such cynical manipulation . . . would be an affront to the electorate and would undermine the democratic credibility of the elected body . . . If that were to happen in Wales, it would not reflect well on the guilty parties."—[*Official Report*, 2 March 1998; Vol. 307, c. 804-05.]

To return to the quote of Jim Callaghan, we might all hope that people standing for parliamentary elections would play the game, but it does not always work that way. We cannot say what will happen to political parties that might try to use and abuse the system.

For instance, in Scotland, the Labour party sometimes stands as the Labour Co-operative party. What is to prevent the Labour party from fighting constituencies as the Labour party and list-system seats as the Labour Co-operative party? The Labour party would not be the only party able to do so. We have heard that Plaid Cymru is also to be known as the Party of Wales. It could stand as Plaid Cymru for constituencies and as the Party of Wales under the list system.

When we argued against the d'Hondt system in the first place, we were told to be quiet and to be grateful for it, as the Government were being extremely generous because no Conservative Members represent constituencies in Scotland and Wales. We can hardly be grateful if the system is open to such abuse. Fine words from the Government are well and good, but we need guarantees to ensure that loopholes are closed. We shall have to return to that matter in Committee.

I recently spoke to members of Charter 88 about their attitude to the Bill. They have major concerns about the fact that there is no appeal structure. We know that the registrar will be able to seek guidance from the Speaker's Committee, and that he can accept, ignore or overrule such guidance as he thinks appropriate. However, someone representing a potential political party has no right of appeal. Are the Government prepared to consider that matter in Committee, so that anyone who feels any grievance has a proper right of appeal? That is very important.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield also mentioned the importance to be given to electoral returning officers. Time and again, we have heard how returning officers did not want to become involved in making adjudications. Once nominations were submitted, and they were valid, that was it. They did not want to get involved in whether a candidate was really whom they claimed to be; a name is submitted and it is accepted. That is why there has been so much recourse to the courts. Going to court is expensive and stressful for individuals, political parties and local authorities, which must defend the adjudication. Are we to be assured that the 659 electoral returning officers will be properly guided to ensure uniformity, so that, if somebody is turned down as a candidate in one area, it will be extremely unlikely—indeed, rare—that that person will be able to stand elsewhere or that somebody else will be able to stand under exactly the same name?

The hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Linton) mentioned some of the strange, weird and wonderful parties that stood at the general election. We know that the Secretary of State will have powers under the Bill to ban certain words from ballot papers. If, for instance, somebody tried to stand for a Legalise Cannabis Now party, would he be able to take a view on that, given that the message is in the party name? We know that, once the election campaign starts, people may campaign on all sorts of issues, but we should bear in mind the fact that, under

clause 3(1)(f), the Secretary of State, by order, will be able to ban all sorts of names. Does he expect to use that power a great deal? If so, in what circumstances?

We welcome the Bill. I know that many of us are keen to serve on the Committee because we want to improve it. We are absolutely certain that change is needed, to protect not only candidates and political parties but the people, who genuinely treasure their votes. They have the opportunity to use their vote in a general election only once every four or five years, and the last thing that they want is to be deceived. People were deceived at the last election by candidates standing under fraudulent, rogue party political names. We welcome the fact that that will change. We are interested to hear the Minister's response to the questions that have been posed in the debate.

6.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. George Howarth): This has been a very positive debate. Although there may have been slight echoes of dissent here and there, the general thrust of the Bill and its proposals have been welcomed by the whole House.

The measure is essential, particularly if, it must be conceded, we are to deal with new electoral systems, such as those for the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh assembly and the European Parliament. As the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) and the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) acknowledged, the Bill does not uniquely address that aspect. It deals with other problems which, as I think hon. Members accept, need to be addressed irrespective of views on proportional representation or any other electoral system. I assure hon. Members who do not support proportional representation for election to this House or anywhere else that there will be an opportunity in due course to consider whatever proposals the Jenkins commission makes on voting systems. The Bill concerns distinct issues relating specifically to the problems that have been mentioned in the debate.

The setting up of a register for political parties is sensible, concerning as it does the means to combat deliberate attempts cynically to mislead electors. We have heard many examples of that. I was going to say that I would hope to reassure the hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) on the matter, but, on mature reflection, I am not sure whether anything that anybody said in the House could ever reassure him a great deal, such is the nature of his political approach. I shall return to the hon. Gentleman's comments.

I ought to spend a little time dealing with several of the issues that have been raised. The right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield mentioned the importance to the Westminster Parliament of the constituency link. I do not want to labour the point, but if he reads what my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary said in debates earlier this week and looks at the terms of reference of the Jenkins commission, he will—I hope—agree that we accept the important role of the constituency link in the House of Commons, and hope that, by whatever means we end up resolving the issue, it will be preserved.

The right hon. Gentleman seems to be on the edge of his seat, but, as a constituency Member myself, I reaffirm everything that the Secretary of State said. Not only is that link a source of a great deal of information that makes us better at taking decisions in the House, but it means that those whom we represent in the Westminster Parliament know clearly who represents them because there is a defined geographical area that sends us here. Those points were well made by the right hon. Gentleman, and we accept them. Does he want to intervene?

Sir Norman Fowler: The question that I wanted to ask was whether the Minister would therefore give an assurance now that if there is a referendum on proportional representation, Ministers will have absolute freedom to campaign in favour of the first-past-the-post system.

Mr. Howarth: The right hon. Gentleman spent a long time in government himself, and knows that it would be premature for me to give any such assurance now. At the appropriate time, the Prime Minister and the Cabinet will make that decision, and when the matter is decided, we shall be able to enlighten the right hon. Gentleman. In the meantime, he must exercise his customary patience.

The right hon. Gentleman asked whether registration would prevent parties from colluding to exploit the additional member system—a question which was also raised by others. Any party that wants to contest the list part of the elections to the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh assembly or the Greater London assembly will need to be registered. The registrar will not be empowered to refuse a registration application merely because he believes the party to be a bogus one set up purely for the purpose of manipulating the electoral system.

However, any party set up as an "alter ego" party to try to win additional member seats would obviously be exposed by the media. That would become clear from the way in which it was campaigning, and I am sure that the voters would seek to punish it. Furthermore, the registrar would not register a supposedly new party if its name were too similar to that of an existing registered party.

The Under-Secretary of State in the other place, Lord Williams of Mostyn, as the right hon. Gentleman acknowledged, gave an assurance during the passage of the Government of Wales Bill through another place that the Labour party would not attempt to use collusion to deceive the electorate, and I hope that any responsible party would take the same view. No doubt such matters will be further debated in Committee, but it was important to get that point on the record now.

The right hon. Gentleman and others asked why there was no appeal against decisions by the registrar. It will be for the registrar to decide whether in his opinion a name does not meet the tests in clause 3. As has been acknowledged, if he is in any doubt, he will be able to refer for advice to the Speaker's Committee established under clause 10.

It is important to reiterate what my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary said—that, as part of the process, the registrar will examine the history of any political party, and how that may have led to the development or evolution of a name. For example, the relationship between the Liberal party and the Liberal Democrat party could be considered in that context—I would not like to predict the outcome, but it should be fairly obvious. The registrar would determine which was the successor party to the original Liberal party. I must admit that I do not envy him that task.

[Mr. Howarth]

The process is not as sinister as the hon. Member for Ribble Valley made out. Perhaps, on reflection, he did not mean to make it sound sinister, but that is the impression that he may have created. I believe that the registrar will operate the system in a sensible way, and there is no reason to suspect any compromise of independence or any favouritism. We should wait and see how it works, but I am confident that a lot of thought went into the most appropriate methods. I am confident, because those methods work well in many other contexts.

Mr. Brady: I apologise if I am pre-empting something that the Minister was about to deal with, but I am interested in the question raised by the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders) and by my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) about the legitimacy of calling oneself an independent Conservative, Labour or Liberal candidate. It is important that people should be able to do that. Does the Minister agree?

Mr. Howarth: The hon. Gentleman is right; he did anticipate an issue that I intend to deal with later. The right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield made a number of points, and I shall try to cover the remainder of those first.

The right hon. Gentleman asked how misleading candidate descriptions are to be prevented. Any candidate standing on behalf of a registered party will require a certificate authorised by or on behalf of that party's registered nominating officer before the party's name or any form of words that voters are likely to associate with the registered party can be included on the ballot paper.

The right hon. Gentleman and other hon. Members also asked why the Bill did not deal with misleading names of candidates as well as of parties—names such as "The Bogus Roy Jenkins". The Bill does not deal with candidates' names, as has rightly been said, but, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said earlier, at the general election injunctions were successfully granted in the High Court against spoiler candidates using the same or a very similar name to stand against the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Sir N. Lyell), my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) and Rod Richards, the former Member for Clwyd, North-West.

Mr. Evans: Is the Minister saying that for somebody to stand as an independent Labour candidate, whether at local elections or otherwise, he or she must seek permission from the leader of the Labour party to use the word "Labour" in that context?

Mr. Howarth: I shall deal later with who is and who is not an independent candidate, but that is a separate issue. I am talking about names now.

The Bill gives protection to the names of registered parties, and the possibility of including the party's emblem on the ballot paper should reduce any confusion arising from the use of misleading candidates' names.

The right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield, a little ungenerously, raised the possibility of emblems causing confusion and being used humorously. I think that emblems are a good thing. The hon. Member for Poole (Mr. Syms) made a strong point about how the emblems could help people whose first language was not English. I ask the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield to accept another point: emblems could be useful in helping people with poor vision. There is evidence from the general election that disabled people in general, but especially partially sighted people, sometimes had difficulty in voting. A well-placed emblem on the ballot paper would be easier for somebody with dim sight to make out than the name of a political party, so the emblem would be helpful.

The right hon. Gentleman asked what there was to prevent inconsistency in decisions between different returning officers about what is misleading. That is a valid and important question. Different decisions will indeed be possible, because it will be up to each returning officer to decide whether a candidate's description is misleading when it is not supported by a registered party.

However, by and large, the returning officers do their job well, and we expect them to make reasonable decisions. I do not therefore expect any great variation between decisions. All of us here have stood for election, so we know about the good sense of returning officers. They are often put under pressure by people such as ourselves, and they usually make reasonable decisions in line with common sense and the requirements of legislation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Linton) raised several points, and asked whether non-registered candidates would still be allowed to use party names on the ballot paper. He is right that the Bill will not prevent the continuation of so-called joke candidates with party descriptions, so long as, in the opinion of the returning officer, those would not lead voters to associate the candidate with a registered political party.

My hon. Friend also asked how the registrar of political parties would decide whether a proposed party name was offensive. That is up to the registrar to decide. If he is uncertain, he may seek advice from the Committee to be appointed by Madam Speaker under clause 10. Those are sensible arrangements. I do not want to be drawn into a debate with my hon. Friend as to what is and what is not offensive—first, because I detect some eagerness among hon. Members to get away tonight, and secondly because it might be slightly dangerous.

The hon. Member for Colchester (Mr. Russell)—part of whose speech greatly upset the hon. Member for New Forest, West—asked why the Bill should not contain provisions to allow parties to adopt all-women shortlists. The Government share the aim of increasing the representation of women and minority groups in Parliament and the devolved legislatures, but we do not believe that it would be possible or, indeed, appropriate to use the Bill to enable political parties to introduce measures such as all-women shortlists.

As has been made clear during discussions on the Scotland Bill, our legal advice is that, even if political parties were to be given a general exemption from the provisions of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975, all-women shortlists would still fall foul of the European Union equal treatment directive. We could not have used the Bill to overcome that difficulty even if we had wanted to. We hope that political parties will do all that they can within the existing legal framework to encourage women candidates and to ensure that their selection procedures are not inadvertently discriminatory. I hope that the House

will agree that the huge increase in the number of women Members of Parliament following the general election last year has improved the way in which we conduct business.

The hon. Member for Poole—I am about to damage his reputation, possibly beyond repair, and certainly in the eyes of the hon. Member for New Forest, West—made a typically thoughtful speech; I think that it was the second or third speech that I have heard him make this week. I apologise if I am damaging his prospects, but he asked some useful questions, including whether a party would be able to register variants of its name, such as Conservative and Unionist, and who would be able to use words such as "Unionist" in their party's name. The Bill provides for each party to register one principal name, with an option, as was said earlier, for a Welsh-language name. It already provides protection for variations in a party's name. For example, if the Conservative party is registered, we would not expect the registrar to allow another party to register its name as Tory, Scottish Conservative or Young Conservative, as those names are associated with the Conservative party.

There is nothing to prevent a party from advising the registrar of the alternative names or variants that it uses—although they would not be registered separately—which could be misleading if registered by another party. The test is whether, in the registrar's opinion, voters are likely to be confused. That means that more than one party could use the same word in its name—such as "Liberal" or "Unionist"—provided that it was clear that voters could distinguish between the parties; if there were any doubt, the Speaker's Committee would be able to advise. Again, the history of those political parties would be taken into account. I recognise that, because of the way in which the Conservative party has developed over the years, there is some difficulty in the use of the word "Unionist", but we would not in any way seek to exploit that.

The hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders), who described his rather sorry experience of misleading party names, asked about the use of the title "independent"—the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) intervened somewhat prematurely to raise the same issue. The order-making power under clause 3(1)(f) allows any word or expression to be prohibited. That will prevent some words, such as "royal", from being used in the title of a party. It will also help to ensure that some generic words or phrases, such as "independent" or "residents association", are not registered by one party so as to prevent their being used by individual candidates. The power can be used to allow a party to use the words "residents association" in its registered name only if it is qualified to do so within a geographical area—in other words, a party would not be able to operate nationally using the name Residents Association. As has been said, it would be open to the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Bell) to remain an independent or to register under any name that he chose—perhaps the Martin Bell party or the Anti-Corruption party—

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): The White Suit party.

Mr. Howarth: Or, indeed, the White Suit party. He could use one of those names, provided that it could not be confused with that of another party and that it met the tests of the Bill. People will be able to continue to stand as independents provided that their use of the name is not intended to cause confusion through identification with a legitimate registered party.

Mr. Brady: I fear that the Minister is missing the point. Our concern is not the permissibility of using the name "independent", but whether it is permitted to use the names Conservative, Labour or Liberal Democrat in conjunction with it. The use of the word "independent" must surely be sufficient to make it clear that there is no intention to deceive.

Mr. Howarth: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. The conjunction of the words "independent" and "party" is probably a tautology, so perhaps we should not be drawn down that road—we can have that debate at greater length in Committee.

As my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary said at the outset, the Bill is largely a technical measure, but it is none the less important. Once it has been enacted, there will be proper protection at elections for the names of political parties from spoiler candidates who use deliberately misleading descriptions. The electorate will have a much greater certainty that whoever they vote for represents the party that he or she claims to represent—I know that the House will welcome that.

We believe that it is vital that, for the purposes of list-style elections, the political parties have a simple and straightforward means of putting forward their candidates. The Bill is also right for the other reasons that I have mentioned, and it meets all the challenges that were set for it. I commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 63 (Committal of Bills).

REGISTRATION OF POLITICAL PARTIES BILL [*MONEY*]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 52(1)(a),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Registration of Political Parties Bill, it is expedient to authorise—

(1) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable out of money so provided under any other enactment, and

(2) the payment of sums into the Consolidated Fund.—*[Mr. Allen.]*

Question agreed to.

House of Commons (Modernisation)

6.36 pm

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mrs. Ann Taylor): I beg to move,

That this House approves the Third and Fourth Reports from the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons on Carry-over of Public Bills and Conduct in the Chamber (HC 543 and 600).

First, I welcome the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young) to the debate. He has had to deal with business questions and a debate on modernisation on the same day, so I hope that he will soon feel truly initiated into his new role.

The purpose of the debate is straightforward—to seek the approval of the House to the changes proposed in the third and fourth reports of the Select Committee on the Modernisation of the House of Commons.

The Committee's first report, which dealt with the legislative process, recommended that, in appropriate cases, carry-over could be used as a positive means of improving the quality of legislation—the report was agreed by the House on 13 November last year. Our third report brings the attention of the House to a memorandum by the Clerks of both Houses on how the carry-over procedure could operate in practice. I should make it clear that the Government do not yet have any specific Bill in mind that should be subject to the procedure. Moreover, no change to Standing Orders is required at this stage. However, we should be clear about the process and the restrictions that would be placed on its use.

The basic reasons for having some end-of-Session flexibility were laid out in our first report, but it may be worth reiterating them. It may mean that, in time, we can move towards spreading legislation more evenly throughout a parliamentary Session. We may be able to avoid Bills having to be rushed through just before the end of the Session to avoid the cut-off. As the Modernisation Committee pointed out, introducing this flexibility gives the Government some assurance that any extra time that might be necessary for extra scrutiny—such as by means of a draft Bill, or by using the mechanism of a Special Standing Committee—would not put a Bill at risk.

Essentially, the carry-over procedure would be used in co-operation through the usual channels and between the two Houses. The Committee has suggested first that the Government Bills to be carried over should not have completed their passage through the House in which they originated—that is, not sent to the second House—although, presumably, they will have been advanced as far as possible. Secondly, it is suggested that they should be carried over by specific ad hoc motions and not by any easy change to Standing Orders. Thirdly, they should be Bills whose eligibility for the carry-over has been agreed through the usual channels. Those are important safeguards which should be mentioned.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): This is a very important point. Am I to take it that it will be made clear that this will be allowed to happen only on the basis of total agreement and on non-controversial matters, because, frankly, should this become a habit, it could become an extremely dangerous precedent in the hands of some Governments?

Mrs. Taylor: I am happy to reassure my hon. Friend. I and Committee members with ministerial experience in previous Governments pointed out that worthy Bills can be squeezed because other measures have a high level of political priority. If certain measures could be introduced towards the end of a Session, it might be possible to deal with some of the important issues for which there is cross-party support. Those could be dealt with in a more measured way than is sometimes the case when we have the cut-off.

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): I fully accept my right hon. Friend's point, and she has done some good work on both reports. I am not sure whether we would need a motion on each of the matters to be carried over—a necessary safeguard, I should have thought—and whether the motions would be debatable. The report does not mention what sort of time my right hon. Friend has in mind for such a debate. Can she enlighten us?

Mrs. Taylor: I hope that there will be agreement, but we would need the safeguard of allowing the House to express its opinion and we would need the House's formal approval. I would envisage that we would debate such a motion.

Mr. Sheldon: Each one?

Mrs. Taylor: Yes, were there to be more than one in any Session. At the moment, we are in new territory, and I have in mind no specific Bill on which to use the procedure in this Session. There is plenty of time to discuss the details of how this will work.

Part of the reason for discussing the principle is to encourage the Government to be less hesitant. Previous Governments have always been hesitant about allowing Bills either to go to Special Standing Committees or to be considered in draft form by Select Committees, simply because of the time constraints that the cut-off at the end of a Session can provide. It is envisaged that specific motions would be moved on any measure proposed to be dealt with in this way.

I remind the House that the Procedure Committee in the House of Lords recently recommended similar procedures to those I am proposing. It acknowledged that a Bill carried over in one Session and sent up from the Commons at the start of the subsequent Session should be treated in the same way as other Bills. Paragraphs 13 and 14 of the appendix to the Modernisation Committee's third report make it clear that the carry-over should not give rise to any particular problems for the Lords, which is generally willing to accept this procedure.

The Committee's fourth report, "Conduct in the Chamber", covers a wide variety of areas in which Members rightly feel that the House's way of working needs to be brought up to date. Looking at the list of recommendations, it is surprising that some of those procedures have survived for so long. The recommendations are a mixture of procedural and administrative changes, some of which can be implemented by the Chair, while others will need changes to Standing Orders—hence the motion.

Some hon. Members think that the changes we are proposing are not necessarily the last word in terms of how the House conducts itself. The report deals with issues such as time limits on speeches; the ending of the

automatic precedent for Privy Councillors; and ending some of the anachronisms, such as opera hats for points of order in Divisions, spying strangers and the banning of quotations from the Lords. The report also contains some simple measures to be more helpful to Members, such as putting the names of Members' constituencies on the annunciator and, where possible, giving notice on the annunciator and the PDVN of time limits on speeches.

I will deal first with changes that can be implemented by the Speaker without any change to Standing Orders. The first is our recommendation in paragraph 28 that the Speaker should be

"under no obligation to give any precedence to Privy Councillors in debate."

Considering the initial reaction, that may the most welcome of the changes we have suggested. I am aware that some, although not all, Privy Councillors have reservations.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): Are we to understand from the rather delicate way in which this has been expressed that the recommendation that the Speaker be under no obligation to give precedence to Privy Councillors implies that Privy Councillors have, in the past, perhaps had a rather undue share of the cake in terms of the length of time allocated for speaking in the House? It has been rather difficult to understand why people who have had a lengthy career, but who have not necessarily illuminated the House during that career, should get the biggest share of the time.

Mrs. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman has illuminated the House with the reasons for the change. That is why I said that it was one of the more welcome changes we have proposed. There are one or two Privy Councillors who have some reservations, but many others think that it is a reasonable change.

I hope that the House will accept the principle that all Members are equal, and that we all have an equal right to be considered to speak in any debate. It is a fact that some Privy Councillors will receive priority in certain debates because of specific roles that they occupy. For example, they might be the Chair of a specific Select Committee, which might mean that they receive preference in a particular debate. However, they should not get automatic preference just because they are Privy Councillors.

The second point in terms of proposals that do not require a change to Standing Orders is the old practice of banning direct quotations from speeches made in the House of Lords in a current Session of Parliament. We recommend that that should be abolished, and it is right that we should be able to quote whomever we wish without fear of being pulled up.

The third recommendation concerns how we behave in the House. Members who are here for a debate should be here at the beginning, should listen to others who speak, should stay after speaking, unless they have compelling reasons not to, and should certainly reappear for the winding-up speeches. On many recent occasions, it has been brought to the attention of the House that Members have not obeyed the usual courtesies of debate and have not listened to the speeches of others. Members who fail to observe the normal conventions of the House should not expect to get priority in being called to speak in future.

We have suggested that the Speaker should indicate to Members that that will be the case if they do not observe courtesies that should be obvious to any Member who is genuinely interested in a debate. Madam Speaker has indicated that she is "fully sympathetic" to that idea, although, understandably, she does not want to be placed under an absolute obligation to write to every Member on every minor transgression. We can leave it to the Speaker's discretion.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): In discussions around the building over the past fortnight, I have become aware that many Members do not appreciate that recommendation, but it is one of the best to come from the Committee. It is extremely discourteous to expect other people to listen to our speeches, but to fail to return to the Chamber to listen to others. Can my right hon. Friend give any hint of how such matters will be quickly made known to Members so that the recommendation is enforced?

Mrs. Taylor: My hon. Friend raises a genuine point. We sometimes assume that every Member reads every Select Committee report—including those of the Modernisation Committee—and every line of *Hansard*. That may not be the case. There will be occasions on which Madam Speaker will wish to draw points to the attention of Members; on other occasions, the Whips will wish to do so. Members who are not present for winding-up speeches cannot expect Ministers automatically to respond to their points. A combination of those factors may lead Members to understand the reasons for the conventions. They are simple courtesies, and, if a Member is genuinely interested in a debate, they are the least that can be expected.

Our fourth recommendation relates to the absolute ban on direct quotations in supplementary questions. We recommend that it be lifted, although, as we have said, the Speaker should not hesitate to stop lengthy questions. The fact that a Member is quoting is no excuse for making a question unduly long. I am sure that Madam Speaker will not hesitate to act when necessary.

We recommend a new procedure for raising points of order during a Division. At present, we have the opera hat, and, although some Members may feel that they look particularly fetching in it, it makes the House of Commons look ridiculous when someone wearing the hat is trying to raise a point of order from a seated position while everyone else is milling around and going to vote.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): The point is that everyone is milling around. If we must get rid of the opera hat, there must be some means by which a Member can indicate in the melee that he or she wishes to make a point of order.

Mrs. Taylor: We dealt with that point in the report by suggesting that Members, having indicated to the Clerk or the Chair that they wish to make a point of order, should be able to do so. We suggest that a Member should do so from a position on the second Bench, as close as possible to the Chair and the Clerks' Table so that he or she can be heard by the Chair and by the *Official Report* without obstructing the movement of Members to the Lobby. I understand that the hon. Gentleman wants to be sure

[Mrs. Taylor]

that Members will still be able, in rare circumstances, to make points of order, but we have offered an alternative that might be used.

Mr. Bennett: I accept that it is difficult to make a point of order during a Division. When we put the hat on, most of the rest of the House is amused by our appearance. However, although having a special place to stand is perfectly all right for the person making the point of order, it often happens that once a Member has made a point claiming that something is absolutely outrageous, another Member wants to rebut it quickly. If one is standing in the far corner, it will not be easy, after hearing a point of order, to rush to the second Bench to make a point.

Mrs. Taylor: It is not for other Members to rebut points of order, but for the Speaker.

If we adopt the new procedure, what should happen to the top hats that have been in the Chamber until now? I understand that we have two hats here normally. Perhaps one could be displayed in our archive near the old annunciator downstairs. I am sure that many Members would like the other as a souvenir, but I do not think it best to do that with it. Perhaps we should find a way to raise money for charity by disposing of the hat. Perhaps Madam Speaker could give some thought to that.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): We could put it in the Dome.

Mrs. Taylor: My hon. Friend makes an intriguing suggestion, and I will convey it to my hon. Friend the Minister without Portfolio. Wherever the hat goes, we will make sure that any money raised is used for a very good purpose.

The Committee also recommended a couple of simple administrative changes. First, the constituency as well as the name of the Member who has the Floor should be displayed on the annunciators that are visible throughout the Palace of Westminster. That simple change would be of assistance, as would our second suggestion, that details of proposed time limits on speeches should be put out to Members on the annunciator and the PDVN.

Madam Speaker has made it clear that she sees

"the logic of this and it may well be possible to implement it on some (or indeed most) occasions",

but she adds:

"Equally, however, there will be occasions when I am not in a position to do so."

That relates to whether Members inform the Speaker early enough that they wish to speak in a debate. Sometimes, Members inform her office rather late in the day, and it would not be possible at, say, 1 pm to indicate that a decision had been taken. Madam Speaker has undertaken to use her "best endeavours" to provide such information, and the House should accept her offer. If Members give the Speaker better notice of a wish to speak, it will be more likely that they will get a warning that a time limit has been placed on debate.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): I am grateful to the Leader of the House for giving way.

Does the Modernisation Committee acknowledge that its recommendation threatens the spontaneity of debate in the House? I have always thought that one of the points of having debates in the Commons was that Members could listen to speeches and then feel moved to seek to catch the Speaker's eye. Does the Leader of the House accept that to oblige us all to write in advance, before we have heard the debate, could stultify the process and kill off the spontaneity of debate that I hope the House still treasures?

Mrs. Taylor: If the right hon. Gentleman is concerned about the spontaneity of debate, I hope that he will support the suggestions on interventions, time limits and injury time that I am about to move on to. They are critical if we are to ensure that debates are more spontaneous.

Time limits can apply at the moment. If they are to apply, and Madam Speaker can make an early decision on the matter, it is reasonable that hon. Members who wish to speak know that that is the case so that they can prepare a 10 or 15-minute speech, rather than thinking that they have the time to make a long speech and having to curtail it at the last moment. If there are to be time limits, surely there is nothing wrong in informing Members that that is to be the case.

Mr. Forth: I am grateful to the right hon. Lady for giving way again. I have no problem with time limits—I hope that we all strive to be concise. My difficulty is that if we constrain too tightly the requirement always to notify the Speaker in writing if one wishes to contribute, the danger will be that hon. Members who might not have thought that they would speak, but who attend the debate and listen to other speeches, may wish to contribute but simply not be able to do so. Would the Leader of the House share my regret if that were ever to be the case?

Mrs. Taylor: It is not a question of excluding people. There is not always high demand to speak in debates, although in many debates there is. If hon. Members have been waiting for a specific debate and have written to the Speaker and prepared in advance, and if they have perhaps not spoken for some time, that should be taken into account. I am not saying that one should not be able to participate in a debate if one has not written to the Speaker; nor is the Modernisation Committee.

Mr. Cash: Occasionally, statements are made—the practice has become frequent in the past few years—on days when there is controversial business. They take up a great deal of time and thus considerably curtail debate on the main business, much to the infuriation of hon. Members who wanted to speak. Some people believe that that has been done deliberately to reduce the length of the main debate. Statements are bound to affect whether Madam Speaker wishes to impose a time limit. Will the right hon. Lady comment on that and on the eight-minute rule, to which she has not yet referred and about which the House can reasonably expect some explanation?

Mrs. Taylor: I will deal with the hon. Gentleman's final point when I come to the changes that require amendments to the Standing Orders. The usual complaint from Opposition Members about statements is that we do not have enough of them. Now we have a complaint that

statements conflict with the desire for longer debates on certain matters. The hon. Gentleman merely illustrates the dilemma that we always face when we consider whether to have a statement on a particular issue. It always has to be a balance between the importance of the statement and the importance and pressure of the debate. Sometimes, statements are moved to protect Opposition days and there is always the possibility that a private notice question may be granted, which can also cut into the time for debate.

The first recommendation of the Committee that involves amendments to the Standing Orders—I hope that Opposition Members who have intervened will welcome this change—is that extra time should be allowed for interventions in short speeches when there is a time limit. If hon. Members are inhibited from giving way during their speech to let other Members make a point, it can inhibit debate and lead to set speeches, with no flexibility. I raised that matter on the Floor of the House when we originally debated the Jopling changes in December 1994 and argued that we should consider the possibility of injury time. The experience since then has shown that there is a very strong case indeed for injury time, but we say that it should be for interventions and not for the full length of any answer; otherwise, it could lead to abuse of the time limit. I hope that the House will agree that there is a strong case for that.

Our next recommendation is that the Speaker should be given discretion to impose a variable time limit on speeches. At the moment, the limit is 10 minutes between certain hours. There may be occasions when that is not the most appropriate limit. For example, in a debate where there is much pressure, but it is not intense, if everyone speaks for 15 minutes, every hon. Member who wants to speak may be able to do so, whereas if someone hogs the debate and takes much longer they will not. That was the reason for the recommendation. We decided on the lower limit of eight minutes, for example, for an order or a prayer after 10 pm, with only one and a half hours for debate, when there is great pressure. We thought that that limit might be useful on some occasions, but we do not envisage its being used frequently—certainly not in the near future. We thought it right to have that option for very short debates.

Another recommendation is that hon. Members who are named by the Chair should lose their parliamentary salary for the period of their suspension and be excluded from the precincts. The latter point was considered by the Committee because it dealt with what we considered a loophole in the rule, which was shown up in the previous Parliament. Our proposal was recommended by the Procedure Committee then.

Standing Orders provide for exclusion from the precincts for those who are suspended for disorder in the Chamber, but not for those suspended for other reasons—for example, following the report from the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges. It is right to be consistent in our approach on those matters. Such a restriction would not prevent hon. Members from carrying out their constituency duties.

The other recommendation that I must mention is the way in which we deal with the old procedure of spying strangers. The Modernisation Committee made a recommendation that would have had consequences that it had not foreseen: a motion could be passed in a well-attended House, and the business could be lost. Also, it was not a motion which could be used on all occasions. For example, if the House were debating a matter on the Adjournment, the procedure could not be used because there would be no next business.

The Standing Order change that I am suggesting would keep present procedure but dispense with the antiquated—and to some, offensive—wording. A Member would have to move that we should sit in private session, rather than using the words, "I spy strangers." The ability to use such a procedure is an important safety valve for individual Members and provides minimum change while modernising the language. Of course, the procedure could still be used to demonstrate the lack of a quorum if that was what the Member had in mind.

Mr. Sheldon: We used to have the count—a procedure used to ensure that 40 Members were always present in the Chamber. That was of particular value in ensuring that hon. Members were present and that we did not have the depleted numbers that we have now. The change was one of Dick Crossman's less elegant ideas. At some stage in the future perhaps we might consider some variation on the count to ensure that the House is properly representative of the people who send us here.

Mrs. Taylor: My right hon. Friend makes a valid point, but, as I said, the procedure can be used to demonstrate whether there is a quorum.

There is only one significant change mentioned in our previous debate on the subject that we have not taken on board. That is whether we should refer to Members by name or by constituency. The Committee felt that we should make no change in that respect. My right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) said in the previous debate that he wanted constituency references to continue because Members of Parliament are here as representatives of constituents, not in their own right. You, Madam Speaker, have pointed out on occasion that if we referred to each other by name, Members might be more likely to get hot-tempered or carried away.

I think that I have dealt with all the points in the third and fourth reports. I was going to mention the electronic voting report that came out today and progress on other matters. Suffice it to say that, because of the time that I have taken as a result of accepting interventions, I will not detain the House further.

We think that we are making good progress in testing some of the changes that we suggested in our first report. The Committee's future work will include a report on scrutiny of European legislation; we hope that it will be published quickly. We will then move on to discussing the parliamentary calendar. The changes that the House is being asked to approve tonight are not dramatic, but they are significant and I believe that, over time, they will improve the workings of the House of Commons.

7.10 pm

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire): I thank the right hon. Lady for her kind words at the beginning of her speech. I look forward to working with her for most of the time, but, inevitably, against her from time to time. I hope to make the transition from debating Eurofighters to debating top hats without too much discontinuity.

I welcome the two reports, which seem to be a sensible, pragmatic approach to reform. It is easy for me to commend the work of the Select Committee because I am

[Sir George Young]

not yet a member of it. I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard), whose co-operative approach at the beginning of the Committee's agenda helped get it off to a good start. I also commend the Leader of the House for the way in which she chaired the Committee, exhibiting patience when confronted with a wide range of views and distilling them into a consensus.

Like other hon. Members, I got a parliamentary brief on the work of the Modernisation Committee and its reports in my post from Charter 88 a few days ago. I thought that its comments on the work of the Committee were a bit harsh. The ones that caught my eye were: "extremely cautious", "disappointing" and

"minor amendments to existing practice".

However, paragraph 2 of the fourth report makes it clear that the reports are an initial response, focusing on areas where immediate action can be taken. Charter 88 should suspend its judgment for three or four years until it can consider the work of the Committee in the round.

I certainly prefer this cautious, incremental approach to the roller-coaster approach on constitutional reform with which we are confronted: devolution, the Human Rights Bill, Lords reform, elected mayors, change in the voting system, and all that. If I had to choose between the two approaches, I would back the approach of the Modernisation Committee.

Some of the practical results of the Committee's work already benefit the House: the revised, user-friendly Order Paper; the more comfortable voting arrangements in the Lobbies; the programming of Bills by agreement, with proper respect for Bills of first-class constitutional importance; and more extensive use of pre-legislative scrutiny through a variety of means, some of which the Leader of the House mentioned. There is also clearer information about proposed legislation. The Committee already has a lot of good work to its credit.

All Governments have occasionally found it necessary to make changes to the workings of the House. Our approach to reform should be guided by some principles. We should support sensible evolutionary reform, provided that it does not weaken the power of Parliament or the chain of accountability that links the elector and his or her elected representative and the ability to question and hold in check the Executive. It must not weaken, but enhance, the esteem in which the House is held and achieve practical improvement in the task of the House to scrutinise and make laws. It must help us to communicate with the nation and provide a focus for the concerns of the nation. As Bagehot said, it must allow Parliament

"to be the cockpit of the whole life of English politics which is action and reaction between the Ministry and the Parliament."

I turn briefly—I accept the representations about short speeches—to the third report, I acknowledge that there is a tension between the sessional cut-off and the proposals for better scrutiny of Bills. I also accept that it is right to resolve it by easing the sessional cut-off in certain circumstances. To use another analogy, we are extending the runway way for worthier, slower-moving Bills so that they can achieve take-off and not abort. I welcome the safeguards that the Leader of the House mentioned in her opening remarks. It is sensible for the usual channels to determine eligibility, and to have an experimental period before finalising procedure.

On the fourth report, I was struck by a sentence in paragraph 7, which states:

"Ultimately it will be for the authority of the Chair, and the confidence which every Member should have in any Speaker, rather than the changes of procedure and practice which we are proposing, which will determine the regard in which the House is held and the effectiveness of its proceedings."

There is much common sense in that. Anyone who has played football knows that it is not what the rules say, but what the referee decides, that is often crucial in determining a result.

I accept the recommendations on short speeches. I looked up the last Opposition Supply day in which I took part, about two weeks ago. I spoke for 18 minutes, the Secretary of State, who followed me, for twice as long; so I hope that I have a good record in that respect. I accept that it is sensible to have injury time for interventions. I have noticed a tendency for Members who think that they may not get called, or who may not want to stay for the whole debate, to intervene in early speeches. I do not think that that is as yet a gross abuse but it is something to watch. It shows that if one has to, one can condense a speech into an intervention.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): Will my right hon. Friend give way on that point?

Sir George Young: I detect that the dinner hour is almost upon us. I suspect that my hon. Friend may have other engagements.

Mr. Soames: Unfortunately, I have to go out to dinner and will miss the rest of my right hon. Friend's excellent, brief speech. If carried to a ridiculous length, interventions of the sort that he described would be vexatious and no doubt Madam Speaker would be swift to stamp on them. Nevertheless, does he agree that, given Back Benchers' opportunities to speak and the fact that many of them wish only to make one or two important points in an early speech because of other obligations, such interventions are not vexatious, provided that they are not abused?

Sir George Young: A sense of balance is crucial. I remember sitting on the Back Benches, having prepared a speech and hoping to be called towards the end, seeing the clock tick as the Minister gave way to a succession of Back Benchers who then removed themselves. Often the chap who sits patiently on the Back Benches with some considered remarks does not get called because the Minister has given way too often to people with other commitments. It is not an abuse; it is something to watch.

I agree that it is sensible to give the Speaker discretion on time. Although I may be a sufferer, I can live with the proposed changes to the rights of Privy Councillors. I note the determined fight by my right hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Sir P. Emery) to preserve them.

I paused at the proposals for the opera hat, but I believe that the Committee is right. We should now put on the black cap for the top hat. I have never used it, but I agree that the advent of television has probably brought that harmless, indeed rather utilitarian, device to an end. It sits uneasily with a modern legislature. However, someone conventionally dressed with a top hat on does not look much more unusual than people wearing some of the other

costumes worn by Members or Officers in other parts of the building from time to time. I notice the excellent suggestion to privatise the hat once it is redundant. The proceeds will be used for charitable purposes, but, under the definitions that the Treasury uses, it will be privatised.

I applaud the work of the Modernisation Committee. I look forward to playing a part in it and I agree with the proposals before the House. The Opposition support the measures commended by the Committee and we shall continue to take a constructive approach toward its work to make the House as effective as possible, but I have to add a note of caution: however well the Committee does its work, its reforms will be swamped if we get too many ill-considered, hasty, piecemeal constitutional measures that threaten the precious chain of democratic accountability which has made our parliamentary democracy the envy of the world and which the Opposition will fight to the last to preserve. With that endorsement, I commend the measures to the House.

7.19 pm

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): I shall take only a few minutes. The recommendations are to be welcomed. At first, I was naturally a little concerned about some of the possibilities that might ensue, bearing in mind that we have had some rather dramatic changes made to the way in which the House of Commons conducts its business over the past 20-odd years, especially in the 10 to 12 years before Labour assumed office. I thought that that trend would continue, but it has not.

The arrangements in respect of short speeches are sound. Privy Councillors have been mentioned for the first time with a view to telling them that, except on rare occasions when they have a special interest in the subject, they will be treated like anybody else; that is a sound suggestion and I am certain that Madam Speaker will ensure that it is carried out. The ideas relating to interventions are pretty good, because they would allow people to make short interventions, although I note that, if a long answer is given to an intervention, that time will be lost. Hon. Members who allow interventions should be aware that they will get only half the time back.

I have to confess that I could not put on the top hat. Nearly every time there was an argument during a Division in the past 18 years, I wanted to raise a point of order, as hon. Members probably realise, but I could not bring myself to wear the top hat. I used to throw it to my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) or anyone else and then tell them what to say—tell them to use my point of order. After the cameras came on the scene, I was even more determined to stay as far away from the top hat as possible, so I am pleased to see the back of it now.

I believe in some traditions—even though I want to get rid of the House of Lords, I want to save the building, because it was built by workers and is a wonderful place. Some traditions serve a useful purpose, but, for the life of me, I could not see why we needed the top hat. I did not know what would be done to replace it, but I now realise that we are to go to the second Bench back, as close to the Speaker as possible, so as to stand out while putting our points of order. I suppose that that is marginally better than standing on the Table; it is certain that far more people would see any hon. Member who did that, but my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish would have a job to climb up, as would many other hon. Members.

What worried me most was the fact that "I spy strangers" might be abolished. I see that the Committee has come up with a fairly reasonable proposal to replace it. If I have read it correctly, the only difference is that we will not be calling for the Gallery to be cleared—although I have to say that, in the 28 years I have been a Member of Parliament, I have never seen the Gallery cleared. Those of us who call "I spy strangers" do so for another purpose—especially in the past 18 years. I should not reveal this, but we want to test whether the Government have their troops here at quarter to 10 on a Friday morning, which is not a bad idea when the streets have not been properly aired.

I well remember one famous occasion, which others will recall, when we were desperately trying to get the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill through. We had been trying for years and, one Friday, it was No. 4 on the agenda. No. 4 is not good news and the first item had been tied up by loads of amendments from Tory Back Benchers to ensure that we would never reach the disability Bill. At about quarter to 10 in the morning, I came in and shouted "I spy strangers" and, sure enough, the Tory Government had only 27 Members here. That was great news—the first business fell.

I caught my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) in a moment when he did not fully understand what was going on and said, "Ken, pull yours off." He had a few minutes on his debate and then pulled his off—that was two down, with only one more to go. I spotted the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack), who is now second-in-command on these procedural matters, and I said, "You've got the third Bill—are you in favour of the disability Bill?" He was—in fact, he was one of the few Tories who had voted with us—so he was in a bind. He pulled his Bill off and, within a few minutes, we had got the disability Bill on the agenda. Mr. Scott had to hotfoot it here from Chelsea and speak on behalf of the Government against the Bill.

We did not quite win, but we came close. That indicates that what we did was not an abuse, but a sensible use of "I spy strangers". It enabled us to elevate a part of our business that should have ranked much higher than some of the others ahead of it, but had been pushed to the back, mainly because it was the disability Bill. I am pleased that a way has been found to ensure that the principle of "I spy strangers" will continue. I heard my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) speak earlier about the old quorum rules. Calling for a quorum would have been a great device for people like me, but that mechanism has gone and I do not think that it will ever return.

All in all, it is not a bad package. I have to tell any hon. Member from either side of the House who tries to claim that it is an attack on parliamentary democracy that it ranks very low when compared with all those orders that were shunted upstairs, which we used to debate until two or three o'clock every morning—an hour and a half for each, after my then hon. Friend Bob Cryer and I had insisted that they be taken separately, because we were masochists and, more important, because it would keep the Government Members up. The Opposition have only limited power and doing that is one of the ways to make an impact on the Government.

The Tory Government of yesteryear decided to get rid of all those opportunities to filibuster—I should not say filibuster—all those opportunities to harry the

[Mr. Dennis Skinner]

Government, and they sent all those matters upstairs. I warned them at the time, saying, "Do it and you will regret it when Labour gets into power," to which they responded, not believing that it would ever happen, "When Labour gets into power?" Even after black Wednesday, they still did not believe that that would ever happen, but I continued to warn them that it would and now they are faced with it.

The package is okay—I give it a few marks out of ten. I hope that it gets through tonight and that we are able to make these minor changes and ensure that our wonderful parliamentary democracy continues—at least in this place, where we are all accountable to our constituents. Then, we can move on to that other place and make sure that it is made democratic as well.

7.27 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): It is always difficult to follow the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner)—or the hon. Member for masochism, whichever he prefers. It will be even more difficult this evening, because I propose to be slightly more radical than he was.

Before I do so, I join the Leader of the House in welcoming the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young) to his new role, although later in my speech I shall dissent slightly from one of the points that he made. I am sure that he will bring to the Modernisation Committee an openness of mind and a feel for the way in which the House of Commons works that will be extremely helpful.

I also pay tribute to the Leader of the House as Chair of the Modernisation Committee. Her patience is legendary, although on occasion she must have wished that we in the Committee had set a time limit on speeches, which we had not, and others might have shared that view. It has to be said that the Committee is moving painfully slowly, because it is the intention of all members of the Committee, particularly the Chair, to try to reach agreement by consensus. What is remarkable about the number of Divisions that took place on one of the reports is that it showed how exceptional it was that one of our members was unable to join that consensus; on every other occasion, we have been completely united.

I want to discuss the motivation for this exercise, because it is easy to get so stuck on the details of reports that we forget the motivation. As it is now a full year since the Committee was set up, I want to return to the core issues and the rationale behind it. There are three core elements: the scrutiny of legislation; the accountability of the Executive, to which the hon. Member for Bolsover rightly referred, and the improvement of the way in which we represent our constituents. All the recommendations that we make to the House—the rather slim ones that we are discussing tonight, the more substantial ones that we discussed last summer and future proposals—have to be tested against those three propositions. If we are not making progress on those three broad points, we must ask ourselves whether the exercise is worth while.

In response to the work that we have done so far, Members on both sides of the House have said to me, "It is going well. It is going in the right direction, but it is disappointing that you are not making more progress." The hon. Member for Bolsover would agree with me on that.

First, on scrutiny of legislation, modest improvements will result from the carry-over provisions, but we have not yet fully developed the options put before the House—and agreed by the House—in our first report. That set out the options that are already available to us to improve the scrutiny of legislation, but the Government have been unable, or have not seen fit, to take up some of the more imaginative ways in which we can tackle that problem.

If the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire thinks that the way in which we have been dealing with the constitutional Bills—by taking every single sentence, clause, full stop and comma on the Floor of the House—is the envy of the world, he is living in cloud cuckoo land. Most Members of the House know that taking the whole Committee stage of such legislation on the Floor of the House is plain barmy. It has resulted in many of the important parts of that legislation not receiving the attention that they should have received and which was precisely one of the objectives that we stated in our first report.

It is now critical that we examine and take advantage of the recent experience on the Scotland Bill, the Government of Wales Bill and the Human Rights Bill. We must recognise that the proper way to proceed on Bills of such complexity is to consider the principles on the Floor of the House, as we do with the Finance Bill and as we did with the Sunday Trading Act 1994 and, I believe, a local government Bill. Once all hon. Members have had a full opportunity—a much greater opportunity than they have had in the proceedings on those constitutional Bills—to assess the priorities and principles of the legislation, the scrutiny of the detail is much better undertaken in Committee.

Even the modest proposals for carry-over will not extend the time allowed for legislation in future Sessions to the extent that we will be able to give Bills more time on the Floor of the House. Indeed, the past year has been exceptional in that the parliamentary year has been extended, and unless something odd occurs, that will not happen again in the near future. The House must examine—I hope that, through the usual channels, this will be arranged rapidly—our recent experience and reconsider the recommendations in the first report of the Modernisation Committee.

On the accountability of the Executive, great strides have been made in trying to examine new ways in which we can operate in the House. When I first came to the House in 1974, Select Committees did not exist. Their advent introduced a new way of operating. It was a new experience for Members to sit together and interrogate and challenge representatives of the Executive. That still does not happen in this particular part of the building, but it happens upstairs, and we are getting better and better at it. Surely it is critical that we provide more, rather than fewer, opportunities for that to happen. We must find ways of debating the results of Select Committee inquiries.

The hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) is not here, but if we were to apply the Mackinlay test, as defined yesterday at Prime Minister's questions, to what happens in Select Committees, we would find that most

hon. Members would pass with flying colours. However, the same Members in the Chamber at Prime Minister's questions all too often ask

"fawning, obsequious, softball, well-rehearsed and planted questions".—[*Official Report*, 3 June 1998; Vol. 313, c. 358.]

That does not happen in Select Committees, where there is true accountability of the Executive.

I hope that the implications of transferring more business out of the Chamber, and making sure that more work is done in that environment, will be examined with reference to the assessment of the parliamentary year, the parliamentary day and the parliamentary hours. Many Members on both sides of the House are disappointed that after 12 months, the Modernisation Committee has not reached even tentative conclusions on those issues. Once we take more business away from the Floor of the House, we can tackle the problem of our hours, days and years. We can achieve that by liberalising our attitudes and responses to the opportunities to call the Executive to account.

It is true—I am sure that the Leader of the House will want to make this point later—that the Committee is beginning to have very imaginative ideas about that. As a member of the Committee, reflecting the views of many other hon. Members, I hope that we will now get a move on. There is a great deal of work to be done in this respect and I believe it to be extremely important.

On representation of our constituents, I do not find that people come to my advice surgery saying that they are worried about the top hat or the garb worn by the Speaker, the Clerks or the Serjeant at Arms. Hon. Members may recall that on Monday, in a debate on electoral reform, Conservative Members repeatedly asked whether that subject was constantly mentioned in our mailbags or advice surgeries. The answer is no, but it is equally true that people do not come to our advice surgeries saying, "Whatever you do, maintain the first-past-the-post system." If that is to be the litmus test of what people are worried about, we should consider the fact that members of the public are fed up to the teeth with the confrontational image that they have of us.

On Monday, an NOP poll demonstrated that 57 per cent. of the electorate strongly agree that:

"Politicians spend too much time bickering and don't work together."

A further 27 per cent. agree, less strongly. My maths is not very good, but that adds up to—

Mr. Richard Allan (Sheffield, Hallam): Eighty-four per cent.

Mr. Tyler: I am grateful to my more numerate hon. Friend. Eighty-four per cent. of the electorate agree with that proposition. That is a real test, rather than the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) wondering why people do not come to his surgery. Eight-four per cent. of the electorate believe that we are too confrontational. Clearly, we have to find ways to achieve more consensus in the House, and more transparency.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Frankly, that is the biggest load of rubbish that I have ever heard in my life. It is important that we stop talking too much arrant nonsense. It is difficult for many of our constituents these days to know what is being discussed in the House of Commons. Those who complain most about the noise at Question Time, are those who listen avidly to it and who complained bitterly about the loss of Question Time on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Mr. Tyler: The hon. Lady is making my point for me. If the electorate concentrate only on the charade or cabaret show of that one half-hour in the week, like the American viewers of that extraordinary late-night programme that shows it, that is exactly the reaction that we will get. However, the hon. Lady says, and she is right, that the House of Commons should be more elector-friendly and more transparent. I agree, and many of the recommendations in our latest report on the conduct in the Chamber should address that.

It is not only a matter of courtesy. Of course, it is more helpful if we are courteous to each other. However. the whole point of being in the House to hear people speak before or after us is that there is a better chance of a real debate. It is more likely that there will be a proper dialogue across the House. If one walks in, makes one's set prepared speech and then goes out to dinner, it is unlikely that one will hear how other hon. Members respond to that speech or how the Leader of the House or the Minister replies to the whole debate.

It is the essence of a debate that one does not pop in and out of it—one is part of a continuum. The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), who has an excellent reputation for taking part in debates in that sense—being here, listening and taking part—is a prime example of a real parliamentarian. To my mind, the type of parliamentarian who pops in at Prime Minister's questions, makes a funny intervention and departs is not serving his or her constituents well.

That is precisely why the report—which may appear to be rather peripheral—about the conduct of debate is extremely important. If we cannot debate issues in a way that develops a result—a continuum, a conclusion and, often, a consensus—we are not a debating chamber but a forum for a slanging match: a cockpit in which people throw alternative views at one another.

On the timing of speeches—*[Interruption.]* Some hon. Members are looking at me askance—

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): The hon. Gentleman has already taken three minutes longer than my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young).

Mr. Tyler: The hon. Gentleman says that I have been too long. I also have served on the Committee for a year, and I hope that it may help the House if I explain why the Committee needs a kick up the backside to speed up its conclusions.

Timing of speeches matters. I believe that it is important that we allow latitude for injury time. I make one plea, however, on behalf of all Back Benchers, to all three Front-Bench teams. It will not be enough to have a time limit on Back-Benchers' speeches if Front Benchers are not less self-indulgent. Recently—I know that you are well aware of the fact, Madam Speaker—there have been occasions, in a one-and-a-half-hour or three-hour debate, when time for Back-Bench speeches has been squeezed so mercilessly that a proper Back-Bench view has not been

[Mr. Tyler]

expressed. Fortunately, tonight we started earlier than anticipated, so there will be plenty of time for Back-Bench views.

This sequence of reports is helpful. The latest—published today—on electronic voting, although, on the face of it, no great step forward, is useful and expresses the views of the House.

However, we make a ludicrous mistake if we allow ourselves to think that removing the top hat, or enabling Members to get through the Lobbies slightly quicker, is all that we need do to modernise this place. The electorate do not believe that, and we shall be answerable to them if we do not take this real opportunity to take the House of Commons into the 21st century.

7.41 pm

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): I warmly welcome most of the recommendations in the reports, although they are slightly timid.

I very much welcome the idea that non-controversial Bills may be carried over from one Session to the next. However, I warn the Leader of the House that there was a great abuse when some private Bills went on from Session to Session. If this is to happen, there must be agreement that the Bill is non-controversial, and at the start of its passage an announcement should be made that it is intended that the Bill should take six months to pass through the House and that it will be three months in one Session and three months in the next—especially so that people outside the House know the time scale envisaged. It should be planned, not accidental.

Helen Jackson (Sheffield, Hillsborough): I appreciate my hon. Friend's argument, because many hon. Members have asked members of the Modernisation Committee when we shall get round to timetabling our hours in the House more sensibly, and the answer has been, "When we have an opportunity to timetable and programme more of the legislation that we have a responsibility to pass, at its start." Does he agree that proposals such as those that he is making must be accompanied by a more structured programming and timetabling of all our work in the House?

Mr. Bennett: I am reluctant to go too far down the line of structuring it. It is important that people outside the House know exactly when we aim to finish the legislative process, but it is also important that the Opposition should have flexibility to argue about how time is allocated within that span; taking that away would be to deny the Opposition a great deal.

Better behaviour in the Chamber is important. I hope that, if the motion is carried tonight, you, Madam Speaker, will consider ways in which to bring that to the attention of a wide audience and to ensure that Members comply, so that they need not be reprimanded.

The hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) urged that very short speeches be made from the Front Benches also. I am not entirely sympathetic to that view, especially when we are debating orders. When a Minister is dealing with an order in a short time, it can be far better for him or her to take half a dozen interventions than to say, "I have only 10 minutes, so I shall just gabble out my notes," preventing any exchange of views across the Chamber. Although, on the whole, Ministers should try to make short speeches, we should not place too much pressure on them and give them an excuse not to answer to the House.

I realise why motion No. 5 says,

"the Speaker may disregard the time taken by interventions"

when calculating the time for which a Member has spoken, but I hope, Madam Speaker, that you will err towards "shall" rather than "may" more often than not.

To help Members, we resisted for a long time having the electronic clocks above us. When speeches are limited to 10 minutes, it might be easier if part of the clock counted down to give Members an idea of how long they had spoken. Often, when I believe I have been on my feet for three minutes or less, it comes as a terrible shock to see the two pips going on the clock—and the next minute the Chair cuts me off. I realise, however, that in bringing the electronic age into the House, we must move fairly slowly.

I am grateful that the process of asking strangers to withdraw has been modified. I am also very pleased to see the hat go. I am aware of the force of the argument that it should be given to charity, but I believe that the best way for the House to send it off would be for us to hold a Division on one of these motions tonight and get my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) to wear the hat to finish it off. That would be a really appropriate way for it to go. If my hon. Friend does not put it on, those outside who manipulate photographs will be tempted to produce covers for publications showing my hon. Friend wearing it. I therefore ask him: why not take up the challenge tonight? I have never known my hon. Friend to be a coward in any issue, so how about it?

The hat has subjected the House to much ridicule, but the new procedure will be fairly difficult to operate. Many points of order during Divisions concern delay in the Lobbies—in which, on occasion, my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover and I, and others, have been involved. Such matters need not be raised as a point of order. Action could be taken rapidly, given all the electrical devices that the Clerks can have—

Mrs. Dunwoody: Cattle prods.

Mr. Bennett: If my hon. Friend wants to get that remark on to the record, it must be an intervention—or at least the Member who has the Floor must repeat it—but no doubt her cattle prods are there, although someone in the *Hansard* box is now worrying who to attribute the remark to. I was not, in fact, after cattle prods; I was after a bit more vigour when it becomes obvious that hon. Members are delaying in the Lobbies.

My amendment does not meet with favour with a huge number of hon. Members, but I must say, Madam Speaker, that you are one of the fortunate ones. You have chosen what to wear when you are in the Chair. Most others who have to wear special dress in the Chamber have not had the opportunity to choose what to wear.

In my opinion, the Chair is distinguished by the person who occupies it, not by their mode of dress. Matters such as the Committee stage of the Finance Bill are sometimes dealt with on the Floor of the House. My hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) has

taken the Chair when the House is in Committee; she did not need to wear anything special to be a very distinguished Chair.

Mrs. Dunwoody: I shall be extremely ungracious and disagree with my hon. Friend. Does he not realise that the really influential people in this place are the Clerks? They are the ones who run the House—whatever we like to think—under Madam Speaker's eagle eye. Our only chance of getting back at them is to force them to wear both gowns and wigs, particularly during the summer. I hope that my hon. Friend will not lightly abandon that useful practice.

Mr. Bennett: I appreciate my hon. Friend's point, but I do not think that the Clerks need to wear wigs and gowns. Perhaps there was a time when less distinguished people arrived in that position, but the recruitment of Clerks has changed in recent years and the people who occupy those chairs now were chosen on merit and do not need to wear a wig to cover any lack of skill.

As for the Serjeant at Arms, I have never seen the Serjeant's dress sword used to any advantage, but I have seen more than one Serjeant looking extremely ungallant as he avoided tripping over it. I wonder whether it is really useful. I hope that the Modernisation Committee might consider that we do not need fancy dress in order to distinguish people's roles, which can be best distinguished by where they sit and the way they behave rather than by the clothes they wear.

7.50 pm

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): I, too, must declare an interest in the debate inasmuch as I am a member of the Modernisation Committee. As my signature is appended to the reports, I am committed to them.

I must make an observation about Standing Orders. They are the basis upon which Madam Speaker governs the House, so any change to them is very serious and important. I shall address only one proposed change to the Standing Orders: short speeches. I am concerned about it—there is no point in my declaring otherwise. It is probably well known in the House that it was intended to reduce the duration of speeches to five minutes, but we compromised on eight minutes. I suggest that the House consider the matter carefully.

I noticed that the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler), who is my colleague on the Modernisation Committee, began his speech at 27 minutes past the hour and finished at 41 minutes past the hour—he spoke for 14 minutes, taking one short intervention of less than a minute's duration. I do not criticise the hon. Gentleman; I simply observe that I am not sure whether he was making the case for short speeches. Let us reflect on that point.

It is important that we are able to express the passions that we feel as elected representatives, who are in this place on an equal franchise, about the great issues of the day. We can sometimes do that by simply shaking our fists at the Government Front Bench; we sometimes make subtle and argued speeches. Each hon. Member pursues his or her argument in a particular way. We are not all gifted with the ability to make a deft little speech, but we can carefully construct and assemble an argument. Can we discharge that function honourably if we are limited to eight minutes on great occasions?

In truth, we often afford too little time to the great speeches and occasions of the day. I was happy to note that the Second Readings of the Government of Wales and Scotland Bills lasted for two days. In the late 1940s, Second Readings lasted for two or three days when radical changes were being proposed. My point is that we compress a great deal and I wonder whether that serves the interests of Back Benchers. Do we have an adequate opportunity to try to unpick the Government's arguments and authority? It is a testing process. The hon. Member for Cornwall, North took 14 minutes—I do not think that he deliberately went out of his way to be verbose—to give a perfectly reasonable summary of the Committee's report. That is my concern about this proposal. I shall try to keep within my eight minutes.

Half of the assemblies of the world have introduced short speeches, which have become a succession of soundbites, trivialisations and armies marching against each other. The hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston (Ms Hughes) shakes her head: I accept that we have different views.

Ms Beverley Hughes (Stretford and Urmston): I shook my head because I believe that there is another argument that the hon. Gentleman should, perhaps, accept—or at least consider. My experience of this place is not long, but I have long experience in politics and in academia. I have found that the quality of a speech is often in inverse proportion to its length. It may assist the quality of debate if hon. Members have to put their points succinctly and clearly. Short speeches may benefit the House in terms of the quality of speeches and of debate by enabling more hon. Members to express their views. Does the hon. Gentleman agree?

Mr. Shepherd: I accept that every hon. Member makes a speech in the way that he or she is best able. I reflect only upon the fact that this is a representative House: some people are naturally witty and some approach subjects sideways. Our intention is to try to influence argument and debate. We have all been tutored that the shorter and more condensed the speech, the better it is, but that is not always true.

Mr. Tyler: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that it is a matter of balance? If hon. Members are long winded—and some are—it inevitably means that other hon. Members will not have an opportunity even to express their views succinctly, as they will be excluded completely from the debate. Does the hon. Gentleman accept that it is a matter of balance and that, in some circumstances, the Speaker should have the discretion to limit debate? That is all we ask.

Mr. Shepherd: Of course I accept that it is a matter of balance; I thought that 10 minutes was a reasonable expression of that balance. That is why I am concerned about this change to Standing Orders—that is all. I can see that hon. Members accept that it is appropriate to truncate speeches and that they believe that the best speeches are those that are refined and reduced to eight minutes' duration. I simply state that we are elected—regardless of

[Mr. Shepherd]

our inadequacies—to represent our constituents, to express their views and to put our arguments to the best of our ability.

I have watched the House narrow its focus more and more. In my career in Parliament, I have noticed that Privy Councillors usually rise to speak first in debates. My right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) spoke for 12 minutes in a very limited debate on the West Lothian question. Do we really expect him to compress his speech to eight minutes? Should a former Foreign Secretary be limited to speaking for only eight minutes on the great issues of the day? Under this rule, Privy Councillors will rush to speak first. We often seek the reflections and the wisdom of people who have experience in public life. They should not always speak first in debate, but should hear the range of arguments and perhaps respond at 8 pm—we do not all rush off to dinner.

I recall when the former Prime Minister Lord Callaghan used to sit in this Chamber and I remember his speeches well. It was said that he took a rather avuncular approach to issues. He would say, "You propose this, but we should consider that," and he would list certain problems and then wish us well. If we had listened more closely to his experience, we would have been saved some grief.

If Privy Councillors rush to speak first—and speak for an unlimited time—that will concentrate debate even more. My right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath), a former Prime Minister, was caught unawares by the 10-minute rule and his speech was cut off. In our glad rush to try to modernise and curtail the procedures of this place, we may lose the very essence of this representative institution. We must try to express, in however humble a fashion and as appropriately as we can—we are not all PhDs or clever computer people—the views of a broad range of the British people. In the way in which we express our views, we try best to represent them. The curtailment of speeches is an extremely serious proposal.

7.59 pm

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): I occasionally think that I was extremely lucky to be elected to the House when I was. I was not particularly fashionable and I was certainly not a PhD—I was one of those appalling people who was a housewife.

I am devastated when I hear Members speak about the need to modernise, by which they mean to timetable and to reorganise the House of Commons. When I first came here, there were no Select Committees. Dick Crossman created them. It was so long ago that I can afford to say that because the Labour members of those Select Committees were so independent minded, did so much good work and expressed themselves so forcefully, there was a long debate in the Labour Cabinet about how they should be encouraged to be quiet.

I was happy to take part in that debate. Many of us said that it would be disastrous if the Select Committees were curtailed in any way and they therefore continued for a considerable time. They were closed down and later reopened because the Members of those Parliaments understood that individual members of Select Committees and Members of the House have the right to try to hold the Executive to account and to ask awkward questions, even of their own Government.

This is rather an unfashionable view, but we fail disastrously in the House if we do not understand that we as individual Members have a responsibility not only to our constituents, but to a number of basic principles, one of which concerns the desire of the people of the United Kingdom to be governed by responsible and open government that is accountable at every level.

I disagree with much in the Modernisation Committee's reports, but these are not the most difficult reports in the series. I caution my right hon. Friends on the Front Bench. I have grave reservations about carrying over Bills. I understand why it is being proposed. It has been argued that it will apply only to non-controversial Bills and will be done by agreement. All the arguments are eminently reasonable, but when I was in the European Parliament for four and a half years, it became clear to me that if a legislature does not have a cut-off point and does not know how to get rid of legislation that will never progress and is, and never will be, agreed, it gets into an extremely dangerous and unacceptable situation.

I say to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House that if a limited measure is proposed, I hope that in two or three years' time people will not say that it has been convenient for the Government and the realm should be extended. It is sometimes assumed that we shall have Labour Governments in perpetuity. That may be the case, but we should never alter the rules of the House on that assumption. That would be extremely dangerous.

It is important to consider matters other than those that gain extensive coverage in the newspapers, such as wearing a top hat. I have worn the top hat. My ego must be very large; I never felt in any way diminished by it. If I want to raise a point of order during a Division it is because it is important and what I wear in those circumstances is not important to me. What is important is the effect that my raising the point of order has on the procedures of the House.

We should consider seriously the implications of proposals such as shortening speeches and their impact on our procedure. Procedure is the means by which one controls any organisation. That is the lesson taught to anyone in politics; learn the standing orders and how the procedure works, and anyone who wants to wreck it has all that machinery at their disposal. Those who do not do their homework will never be able to control what happens in any organisation.

We have heard tonight that if we had short speeches more people would be able to get in and more points would be made. More points might be made, but would more individual arguments be advanced that were based on a fairly sound evolution of ideas? There are 655 Members in this place and not all of them will get into every debate. I have sat through many debates as a Back Bencher, listening to many speeches and not being called, but I regarded that as the price that I had paid for being elected to a legislature that gives people the right to express their own opinions.

I have sat through speeches of—dare I say it—old Labour Members. We had a miner who, for many years, made one speech a year at considerable length. Now, of course, he would not be selected, but if he had been he would not be allowed to go on for so long because the points that he made were not made in a structured, disciplined and organised way that we are told is essential

to the House of Commons these days. He was saying what he believed and he was saying it in the way that he best understood.

Although I shall not vote against the recommendations tonight, I worry about the way that we are going. There are matters that the House of Commons should seriously debate. For example, we should examine the work in America of the general accounting office. It does a great deal of detailed work for the Senate and for Congress, makes it available to Members as legislation is going through, is independent of the Government and is responsible to the legislature. It enables individual Members to understand the full implications of the legislation that is being discussed.

We have nothing like that; nor are we suggesting that we should have. Many of us rely on the good efforts of a superb Library, but if we had other sources answerable not to the Government but to the House of Commons, many Back Benchers would be much better informed and would be able to make more vital points.

I was told recently that hon. Members who came in at the last election had entirely different views and wanted the whole place redone and everything changed, and that there were some hon. Members who were an overlap. I have been called many things in my time, but that was the first time I have been called an overlap. Of course, overlaps were of no importance.

This little overlap thinks that this place is important—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]—and that the House of Commons is getting itself into a potentially dangerous situation. We are curtailing speeches, we are seeking to timetable every Bill and we are seeking to discipline the development of individual pieces of legislation. All that carries with it real dangers, although it is not fashionable to say so. It is true that when Lord Palmerston had nothing much to say he made a speech of four and a half hours. We do not do that these days.

Modernisation is useful only if it enables our constituents to know what legislation we are considering, what implications and sanctions go with it and whether modernisation gives them the right at an early enough stage to object to any aspect of legislation that affects their lives. Those who think that that can be dealt with by timetabling show an appalling ignorance that will cost us all dear.

8.8 pm

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): In the spirit of the debate, I start by apologising for missing the first two or three minutes of the opening speech. I was caught by surprise that the business reached the Floor of the House so early.

The recommendations in the two reports are sensible. I shall deal not with those with which I agree entirely, but with those where I think that the Committee might have gone further or should reconsider in future.

My hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) said that we should have nothing to do with the recommendations on carry-over. I think that those recommendations constitute one of the more important ways in which we can improve our proceedings. Let us look at the way in which legislation is currently dealt with. A Bill is given a Second Reading, a Committee stage, a Report stage and a Third Reading. The time-consuming stage, certainly with major legislation, is the Committee stage, whether it takes place on the Floor of the House or in a Standing Committee. That is when the delays happen.

We have to fit the Committee stage into a parliamentary year which—unless there is a general election—features the Queen's Speech in November, followed by five or six weeks of business before the Christmas recess. Virtually no Standing Committees get going in that period. All the Standing Committees must then finish by the end of June or the beginning of July if we are to complete our business before the end of the Session. Effectively, what we do is compress the work of our Standing Committees into, at the most, seven months of the year, and that causes problems—problems of timetabling, for instance. When all the Committee and Report stages are happening at once, representatives of minority parties—indeed, Members in general—may not be available. The same person may be expected to deal with two or three Standing Committees at the same time.

I understand why some people want us to approach the proposals cautiously. I understand why they do not want things to go too far, and think that we should see how they develop in the context of non-controversial legislation. However, I also think that it is possible to exaggerate the amount that Oppositions are able to do. I have been told time and again that delay is the weapon that Oppositions have, and that, of course, is true: Oppositions depend on being able to delay and make themselves awkward. Nevertheless, I find it difficult to think of any legislation that has failed to be passed as a result of such delay.

Mrs. Dunwoody: I can give a classic example. The Chairman of the Liaison Committee, my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon)—who was present earlier—and Lord Barnett alone managed to stymie the reorganisation of the House of Lords, for extremely good reasons.

Mr. Gerrard: I accept that it has happened from time to time, but I think that it is the exception rather than the rule. In any event, what is proposed would not affect legislation of that kind, which is plainly controversial.

I am strongly in favour of pre-legislative scrutiny, but if we are to have special Standing Committees and the like, there must be no whipping. If I am told that it will cause a problem if I, as a member of such a Committee, start asking the Minister awkward questions, the value of pre-legislative scrutiny will disappear. If we graft pre-legislative scrutiny on to the present timetables, we may end up with some difficulties, but that will not necessarily mean that progress on Bills will take longer. Sensible scrutiny might allow us to rid ourselves of what often strikes me as clutter in Standing Committees. I do not know how many times I have heard Committee members say, "This is a probing amendment". What they mean is, "I do not know what this part of the legislation will do, and I want to find out". An hour or two—sometimes three hours—of debate then follows.

Mr. Shepherd: The hon. Gentleman should bear in mind the fact that the Labour Opposition's stance on the Maastricht treaty was predicated on probing amendments, which are an important instrument. At that time, Opposition Members always said that theirs were probing

[Mr. Shepherd]

amendments, although in total they would have deleted nearly all the legislation. The current Prime Minister was expert at that when he was shadow Home Secretary.

Mr. Gerrard: There is a difference between what are clearly intended to be wrecking amendments, and amendments tabled in Standing Committees by someone who genuinely does not understand the legislation and is trying to establish what it means. There must be better ways of doing that. It should be out of the way in the pre-legislation stage: at that stage, everyone ought to understand precisely what a Bill is about, how it works and why. If that could be done, it might then be possible to compress the time taken by Standing Committees, and to avoid some of what often strikes me as pointless debate.

I was interested by what the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) said about conduct in the Chamber. I agreed with some of what he said about the time taken up by the Bills on Scotland and Wales and the way in which they were handled, but I was worried by his suggestion that we should move debate outside the Chamber. There are important roles for Select and Standing Committees, but I feel that we need more debate in the Chamber than we have now, rather than less.

When people outside say that they do not like the confrontational nature of debate in the Chamber, they often mean that they do not like the noise, the disturbance and what strikes them as the bad behaviour that go on here, especially at Question Time. I do not think that those people object to hon. Members expressing political views strongly, even when those views contradict each other directly. That is confrontation, but it is important, and I believe that it is what people want to hear. They do not want to hear a soggy consensus; they want to hear Members of Parliament express views in which they personally believe on matters on which they feel strongly and wish to comment, regardless of whether the Front Bench agrees.

Confrontation of that sort is very healthy. We should beware of saying that all we want is consensus. We want good, gentlemanly behaviour in debates, but that need not prevent people from disagreeing strongly with each other, and making it clear that they do. Short speeches should not necessarily prevent that.

In any event, what is proposed is not compulsory. There is no suggestion that debates must be time limited; it is left to Madam Speaker to decide when that is appropriate, and also to decide the appropriate limit, which may not always be 10 minutes. At present, certain hon. Members seem to think that the rules should not apply to them. Some of us become rather sick of sitting on the Back Benches waiting to speak, and then finding that it is 7 pm and the 10-minute rule applies, and then, perhaps, still not being called to speak, although another Member has indulged himself by speaking for 40 minutes at the beginning of the debate. I do not care who that Member is; I feel that it is an abuse deliberately and knowingly to prevent others from expressing their views. The suggestion in regard to interventions is obviously sensible: at present, when speeches are time limited, the speaker has no incentive to give way to either a friendly or a hostile intervention.

The public ought to understand what goes on in the Chamber, and I therefore consider the proposed changes to the "I spy strangers" rule worth while. I entirely agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) that Back Benchers need such a mechanism to try to prevent business being passed, but I understand that what is proposed would not render such a mechanism unavailable.

I hope that the Leader of the House and members of the Select Committee will continue to look at the procedures and perhaps some issues that have not yet been dealt with. We have had a report, which we are not debating tonight and perhaps will debate in due course, on voting procedures. One thing that seemed to be missing from the report was the question of voting arrangements for Members who are seriously ill.

That may not seem to matter much in this Parliament, where the Government have a large majority, but we all know that there have been times when ambulances have been in New Palace yard. That may happen again if there is a Government with a small majority, dependent on a few votes. The procedure of having very sick people brought into New Palace yard does not do the House any good. The time to look at that issue is now, when it does not matter in terms of affecting the Government—not when it could make the difference between a Government staying in office and losing office.

It is also tremendously important that the Modernisation Committee looks at the way in which private Members' Bills operate. At the moment, Bills with huge support can get nowhere and, at the same time, private Members' business that would be generally agreed disappears because time cannot be found for it. Therefore, I welcome what has been done so far in the Modernisation Committee. I hope that it will press on and start to look at some of the bigger issues that need to be addressed.

8.20 pm

Mr. Richard Allan (Sheffield, Hallam): I wish to speak briefly as Chairman of the Select Committee on Information in response to the recommendations in the fourth report, which will be passed on to us, but, first, I express support for some of the comments by the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) in respect of pre-legislative Committees. I must also apologise for being late, having come from a Standing Committee myself. The group for which I feel sorry is Government Back Benchers, who may have a deep interest in a matter, but who, because of the time constraints on Standing Committees, have no ability to speak on that issue.

I particularly praise Government Back Benchers on the Committee that has just finished considering the Data Protection Bill, who managed to make some important contributions—I see the Government Whip who was on that Committee, the hon. Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Pope), smiling over there—and still completed the business according to the timetable. Pre-legislative Committees in particular would offer Government Back Benchers a chance, which they do not have, really to get stuck in.

The recommendations on the annunciators came before the Information Committee at its last meeting, at which point, in an effort not to be seen as one that always proposes ultra-high-tech, very expensive solutions, it came up with a low-tech, cheaper solution. That was to

put around the Benches the volumes that *Hansard* produces linking Members to their constituencies, so that Members could simply link a Member to his or her constituency, having read their name from the annunciators.

On further reading of the report, I understand that the recommendation is much stronger. It is essential that we put the constituency names up on the annunciators. Wishing to play our full part, we intend to move ahead with that. I can report that, today, I have been in discussion with a Committee Clerk about two particular areas. One is altering the current system—which is perhaps best described as a mid-tech, rather than a high or low-tech, solution—and seeing what changes we can make cheaply to that system.

Our suggestion, which will go back to our Committee, is that we have a trial session in the Chamber when the House is not sitting, whereby the annunciator operators try various solutions that are currently possible, and Members come in and try them out for such things as legibility, which is a crucial issue, given that the annunciators are so high up. I do not think that English Heritage would like us to move the annunciators into the Chamber itself, so we shall consider having an experiment within the current system to see how Members feel about it.

Looking further into the future, we are interested in having discussions as to how the annunciator system can be improved in general to make it a more high-tech solution and to get beyond the current limitations. Those limitations drove us to suggest the book alternative, in sheer frustration at the costs that were being presented to us for changing the current system to that required. I give the House notice of our full participation in the modernisation project, which is one that we, too, hold dear.

8.24 pm

Ms Beverley Hughes (Stretford and Urmston): I should like to comment on one or two of the contributions and points that have been made.

We have heard much in the press—indeed, it has been rehearsed tonight, in part, by my hon. Friend the Member for Nantwich and Crewe—that the thrust for some of the modernisation reforms has arisen from the arrival in the House of many new Members. The perception is that they have a different agenda as to how the House procedures should work.

It is worth remembering that, before the Labour party came into government, Labour Members who were here identified—well before the arrival of new Labour Members—that it was important to include in our reforms the question of how far the House needed reforming. That commitment to the electorate in our manifesto arose from the experience of those Members who were here in opposition. Although new Members may endorse all or part of that agenda, it has arisen not from any particular agenda that we brought, but from the experience of Labour Members who have been in the House a long time in opposition.

Mr. Tyler: Will the hon. Lady also acknowledge that it was not one single party? Part of this proposal came out of the Maclennan discussions between our two parties, so it is a broadly based proposition.

Ms Hughes: I am happy to acknowledge that.

It is worth rehearsing as well the reasons why Members at that time thought that reform was important. One of the important reasons was the understanding that the public perception of politics, of politicians and of what was going on in the House had fallen into disrepute. They thought that something needed to be done to reinforce public confidence and esteem in the parliamentary process, and that we needed to consider how far procedures as they were then and, to some extent, still are now, needed to come into the modern world and to address the agenda for the next century, rather than previous centuries. I am certainly not one of those who wants to jettison tradition for its own sake—I do not feel that at all—but I support the process of examining how far we need to make measured and necessary changes to bring the parliamentary process into the modern age.

Again, the press has made much of the fact that that agenda might include such things as reform of working hours. That is important. I do not want to dissociate myself from those issues. As someone who has been a working parent for 20 years, juggling paid work, politics and parenting, I find that nothing irritates me more than being leashed to the voting Lobby until 11, 12 or later at night, when I could be doing more useful things.

However, as important as that is, I fully endorse the view that that is not the primary objective of the modernisation process. Its primary objectives must be to enhance the quality of legislation and the quality and effectiveness of procedures, and to maximise Members' expertise and the effective use of their time. Indeed, some Members have raised other issues that are also important, such as the ability to scrutinise legislation more effectively and to hold the Executive to account.

As a Back-Bench Labour Member, I fully support that. That is part of our role, but, although we are considering measures tonight that do not get to the heart of those important issues, what we are considering is a necessary prerequisite to get to that stage. To enhance our ability to scrutinise legislation and to hold the Executive to account, we need a cultural change in parts of this place—in this Chamber and in Standing Committees. I believe that Standing Committees have potential in that regard. It is far from being realised at present, certainly for some Government Back Benchers. However, although we are not there yet, what we are talking about tonight is, as I have said, an essential prerequisite for dealing with those further questions.

I have enormous respect for my hon. Friend the Member for Nantwich and Crewe, both for her expertise—

Mrs. Dunwoody: Perhaps we could call it Crewe and Nantwich?

Ms Hughes: I beg my hon. Friend's pardon—it would indeed be enormously helpful if constituencies were shown on the annunciator. I thought that her constituency was Crewe and Nantwich, but was repeating what an experienced Member said earlier, obviously incorrectly.

I have enormous respect for the expertise of my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) and for her speech, and listened very seriously to the points that she made. I do not share her view on two points. First, I think that the quality of many speeches and debates will be improved if there is a focus, which is sometimes—when appropriate—provided by imposing a time limit.

[Ms Hughes]

Secondly, some hon. Members seem to have assumed that time limits will automatically result in whittled-down speeches. However, the report makes it clear that discretion will rest entirely with Madam Speaker, and that she will decide when time limits are necessary and what those time limits should be. I think that we can all have confidence that—in exercising her role in protecting hon. Members' right to participate in debates—she will allay those concerns. I therefore think that the amendment on short speeches would assist in improving the quality of our speeches and debates.

I should like to raise only one other issue—as I am keeping my speech short, in line with the general content of my speech. I believe that discipline and structure—words about which other hon. Members have expressed concern in this debate—can provide benefits if part of a framework, which is what a debate timetable can be. Over time, the benefits of a disciplined and structured approach can also be realised in the parliamentary process.

I hope that the Modernisation Committee will consider very soon how the parliamentary process, and hon. Members' involvement in it, can be enhanced in considering and extending the timetabling of parliamentary business—not to curtail or overly structure business, but to allow the creation of a framework for the parliamentary year that will enable both hon. Members and parties to make strategic decisions on the matters on which they want to concentrate their attention and activities, perhaps particularly when in opposition.

8.31 pm

Mr. Robert Syms (Poole): It is important that change should be incremental. As I am both a Conservative and a conservative, I think that it is a pity that we are making changes so early in a Parliament. Usually, there is a reason for things being the way they are. As our Parliament has been going for centuries, traditions have developed that are built around the rights of individual Members. One should therefore be very careful about changing too quickly what has gone before, as there may be a very good reason for it—although that reason may not be obvious to a new hon. Member, such as myself.

I am very pleased with the new format for the Order Paper. I must say that, when first elected, I was one of those who could not understand the Order Paper format. The key point is that change should be incremental.

The hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) mentioned the confrontational atmosphere in the Chamber. I think that the House is sometimes at its best in such an atmosphere. In how many Chambers in the world is there real heat in debate? It is not so much what people say, but the expression on their face, what they are doing with their hands, or whether they are jumping from foot to foot.

I think that our system is very good. When mistakes are made, and when people are called to account our system, it is second to none in the world.

Our intervention system is also very good, and allows rather more spontaneous debates. On many occasions—particularly when Ministers are generous in giving way—it allows hon. Members to elicit more information and a fuller explanation of a clause or Bill, which is beneficial to all hon. Members, and sometimes saves not only speeches but time.

I agree with the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) on speeches. Although limiting speeches seems to be a trend around the world, one of the few powers that we have as hon. Members is the ability to speak for our constituents and constituency. Although limits may not be so bad if there are 400 hon. Members of one party, many of whom can speak for eight or 10 minutes to make a point, we must have regard also to the hon. Members who belong to extremely small parties. At some point, they may want to have their say, and may need more than eight or 10 minutes to do so. The House may be 659 in number, but we must have regard to the ones and the twos, who have a perfect right to have their say and to make their representations. We should not think purely within the context of the major parties, because this is a Chamber for all.

The hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan) made a very important point on the annunciator, which I find very difficult to see up in the rafters. Unless one clocks the clock in the Chamber or is kicked by someone on the shins, one does not know when to stop speaking. Earlier this week, my speech was cut off when I was in full flight. One feels an idiot when such things happen, and it is difficult for the occupant of the Chair. It is also undignified.

We should save a lot of time if we could find a method of allowing hon. Members to see how long they have spoken, and of displaying both the name and the constituency of the hon. Member speaking. On many occasions, I have had to lunge across the Chamber to pick up "Dod" or "*The Times* Guide to the House of Commons" to try to find information on an hon. Member, which takes up a lot of time. Such a system would make debate swifter.

Our voting system—going through the Lobbies—is a terribly important practice. Today, hon. Members have better office accommodation than we have ever had. However, we are consequently spread out over a larger parliamentary estate. The only time in the day when one may see colleagues, and perhaps have the opportunity to see and speak for a few minutes to the leader or senior members of one's party, is in the Lobby.

Dr. Phyllis Starkey (Milton Keynes, South-West): Will the hon. Gentleman concede that the various options all proposed maintaining the Lobby system, and that the Committee recognised the value of the Lobby system and was not proposing any change to it?

Mr. Syms: I am not quite so sure about that. I think that some of the proposals could well have led to abolition of the Lobby system. I think that physically walking through the Lobby also imposes a very important discipline on hon. Members.

I hope that any change is incremental. We must all remember that today's majority may be tomorrow's minority, and have regard to the rights of individual Back Benchers. I was very impressed by the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge–Brownhills—who, if there were to be a shop steward to protect the rights of hon. Members, would have a very good claim to the post.

8.37 pm

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): I welcome the opportunity of being able to say a few words in this debate. It would be wrong for it to be dominated only by members of the Modernisation Committee, but, as our Committee Chairman, the Leader of the House, is a member of the Cabinet, it is important to have one speech on the reports from a Committee member who is also a Government Back Bencher. The House should realise that the Committee is not being cautious in its work. We have had to deal with many issues simply to lay a foundation for the future.

As one or two hon. Members have said in the debate, the Committee Chairman has done an excellent job in trying to build consensus in laying that foundation. As my hon. Friend the Member for Stretford and Urmston (Ms Hughes) said, the most important task for the Committee is not to make change for the sake of change, but to improve how the House works—not only for the benefit of hon. Members, but to ensure that we legislate better, and scrutinise legislation better. That objective has been foremost in the mind of the Committee Chairman, who has also kept it foremost in the thoughts of Committee members.

On the Committee's third report, on carry-over legislation, I take a different view from that of some other hon. Members. I believe that, at a general election, we elect a Government to govern for five years. The Government should have not only a five-year programme but the ability to plan their legislation over that period. I accept that we should proceed cautiously to start with, but, in the long run, we should not be afraid to move forward. It is nonsense that, after the Queen's Speech in November, we have loads of Second Readings together, then loads of Bills coming back on Report together, with the House working all kinds of hours. Then we have slack periods and a crossover of legislation coming from and going to the House of Lords. It would be more sensible to have some Bills starting in November and others in December, January or other months.

I understand the concerns of my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody). Perhaps no legislation should be before the House for more than one year. I am not saying that the process should drag on indefinitely. We should merely plan the year better. That would result in better legislation and better scrutiny. Once we have tested the water cautiously, I hope that we shall be a little bolder in the coming years.

One or two Conservative Members who intervened earlier failed to recognise that the first part of the fourth report after the introduction refers to the role of the Speaker. The Committee recognised the importance of your role, Madam Speaker, and that of your three Deputies in interpreting the report and the way in which our Standing Orders operate. We have confidence in you on that. That is why it is the first major item in the report. You are occupying the Chair for this important debate because of the importance that you place on the report.

I understand the argument that it is wrong to limit the length of speeches, but the Committee is not suggesting that the limit should necessarily be 10 minutes or eight minutes. It gives the power to consider the circumstances, to avoid people who have sat through a debate not having the opportunity to speak. It may be sensible sometimes to have 15-minute speeches. It is important to allow as many Members as possible to contribute to a debate. They should not have to sit and listen to others and then fall off the end of the debate because others have chosen to go on for half an hour or 40 minutes. That is an abuse of our procedures.

I would have gone even further and supported a six-minute limit for short debates. We had a one-and-a-half-hour debate on the beef on the bone order late at night recently. Even if we assume that one hour was available for Back Benchers—although there was less time than that—it would have been fairer for 10 people to have had six minutes rather than six people having 10 minutes. We should let as many people as possible express their views.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) rightly referred to—[HON. MEMBERS: "Right hon?"] My hon. Friend. He should be right hon. He has been here long enough. Perhaps he might get it—it could go with the top hat.

Mr. Skinner: My hon. Friend has made me a Privy Councillor just when Privy Councillors are not going to have long speeches.

Mr. Pike: Fate might do that to my hon. Friend at some stage. He made the valid point that sometimes Members of Parliament can use the procedures of the House to achieve things for their constituents and gave an example. I remember another time when several hon. Members, using the top hat, spying strangers and adopting other devices, held up the private Stansted airport rail link for two years until British Rail agreed to complete the Manchester airport rail link. That was right. I remember asking one former Minister—it might have been the shadow Leader of the House in another role—how many people travelled to Manchester airport by rail. He said none. That was true, because there was no rail link.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House on the way in which she has dealt with the issue of spying strangers. The Committee could not agree a way forward, but I congratulate her on coming up with a proposal that meets the requirement of the House, allowing us to do what we currently do, but in an up-to-date and sensible way.

I welcome what the report says about wearing the top hat. It is right that points of order during a Division should be dealt with differently. I have worn the top hat many times and I thought that there was no problem with it until one of my constituents took a photograph of me wearing it from his television. If the hat had had "10s 6d" on the side, it would have taken me back to the only starring role that I had in a school play, many years ago, when I played the Mad Hatter. It looks silly, particularly to those outside the House who do not understand why we wear it. The proposals are sensible.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the report. I shall support the motions to change our Standing Orders.

8.46 pm

Mr. Andrew Stunell (Hazel Grove): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for allowing me to contribute to the debate, as a member of the Modernisation Committee. I agree with the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) on one issue—if we are modernising something, we have to have a clear perception of what it

[Mr. Andrew Stunell]

is for, so that the modernisation does not damage it. What is this place for? The primary role of the House is to hold the Government to account, to ensure that sensible laws are passed and to give strong representation to our constituents.

There are many myths about the House, which those of us who have come here only recently can see have some holes in them. Once a Member has been here for a while, the mythology begins to take over from the reality. There is a myth that we are a self-governing institution, but we are constrained in many ways by what the Government allow us to do. Some of our considerations of the report were limited by what we were advised that the Government might permit us to do. Some of the co-operation that has been discussed is dependent on what the usual channels agree to. We must not be taken in by the myth that we are a self-governing institution with complete free will, made up entirely of sensible and reasonable people.

Mr. Shepherd: I must intervene, because the hon. Gentleman is expressing a peculiar view of life that has become current. The Government are the Government because they have a majority of elected representatives in the House. When the Government say something, they are speaking for a majority of elected representatives. This House determines matters, based on the number of Back Benchers behind the Government Front Bench. That is the essence of the House. There is nothing romantic about it. It is practical, it is true, it is direct and it is the force of government in this country.

Mr. Stunell: I was not saying that what goes on was a romance—I was saying that it was a myth. One of the jobs of the Modernisation Committee is to make the myth a reality. That is what the reforms that we have been trying to make over the past 12 months, which I hope that we shall pursue much more rigorously in future, are designed to achieve. One must ask whether, in the recent past, the House has been effective in holding Governments to account. Anecdote after anecdote—those of us outside the House at the time could only read them in newspapers—show that the Government were able to do as they pleased and were not held rigorously to account. I hear Opposition Members complaining during Question Time that they are not able effectively to hold the Government to account. We must accept that we do not have a perfect institution; we have an institution which needs to be modernised.

Mr. Syms: It is possible in the Chamber to put the majority party on the rack, but the time of judgment is not in the Chamber; it is when people vote at an election. The previous Government had many difficult moments, and lost half their Members of Parliament. That is the Chamber holding the Government to account and the people making their final decision.

Mr. Stunell: The hon. Gentleman's point is, in one sense, fair. Ultimately, the Government are held to account, but surely accountability is not just sudden death at the end of five years when the electorate pounce—or, indeed, at the end of 18 years. Accountability is about ensuring that the Government's day-to-day and week-to-week decisions are scrutinised—one hopes before they are fully implemented and the damage is done. Accountability in the form described by the hon. Gentleman would certainly require an election every five years, but would not require us to be in the House during the intervening period, as the Government could simply carry on and take their turn at the ballot box.

I come to the issue of ensuring that we pass sensible laws. To some extent, I disagree with my hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) about consensus. Consensus is certainly important in some respects, but let us remember the two biggest failures of recent legislation. One might well be the poll tax, when strongly polarised debate produced bad legislation. The other might well be the Child Support Agency, when strong consensus produced bad legislation. The process of debate does not guarantee good legislation; it does not matter whether we are all friendly or all in opposition.

Mrs. Dunwoody: The Child Support Agency is a case in point. People in this place agreed with the principle of it, and, because it was not properly debated—indeed, had the proceedings been timetabled, the Bill would have gone through even faster—they had no idea of what the legislation contained until the regulations were printed. By then, it was far too late.

Mr. Stunell: I thank the hon. Lady, who is a formidable near neighbour of mine, for her intervention, but, on this occasion, I think that she is mistaken. A timetable tries to ensure that, in the amount of time devoted to a Bill, opportunities are provided to debate its key principles. If we undertook pre-legislative inquiries—a proposal in the Committee's previous report, which the House approved—experts could point out what was feasible. We do not always pass sensible laws; even Governments recognise that. The Committee was informed that about 3,000 amendments a year are tabled to Government legislation by the Government because legislation is ill prepared and ill thought out and snags arise. We need a system in which we do not have to take down every building put in front of us and rebuild it.

The Government are not held to account. About 26 Select Committee reports have held the Government to account, but they have never been debated properly by the House. The fact that everyone knows that they will not be debated means that they are not taken all that seriously, either by those who draw them up or by Ministers who may be the victims of them.

We are not in a position to provide the strongest possible representation of our constituents. I shall give just one example why. Hon. Members acting on behalf of their constituents are constantly applying to you, Madam Speaker, for Adjournment debates. Your office told us that about one in eight requests are accepted, which means that, on many occasions, the Government are not held to account for their activities concerning a constituent or an issue. We need to go far beyond the contents of the Committee's reports, to ensure that we make time for the improvement of accountability and so that laws are properly dealt with. I think that there are 17 Law Commission reports waiting on a table somewhere for the House to find time to deal with them. On the whole, the stuff is not controversial, but it would improve the lives of our constituents.

The reports contain very modest stuff—points about short speeches, for goodness' sake. Speeches should be curtailed only when you, Madam Speaker, have more people on your list than you can reasonably accommodate. Apart from that, we should be hearing hon. Members from both sides of the House clearly expressing perhaps the views of their party and perhaps their personal convictions, but, above all, the views of the constituents whom they were sent here to represent. How frustrating it is for constituents to be left dumb when their views need to be expressed so clearly.

We need to make space and adopt procedures to allow pre-legislative scrutiny. The Committee heard examples that threw doubt on the carry-over procedure. I am told that, on several occasions, the previous Government nearly got round to introducing a Bill on adoption, but could never quite do so because they could not find enough time in one Session to get the job done properly. Such legislation might be controversial, but it transcends party barriers, should be discussed thoroughly and is urgently needed in family law. We need to ensure that we carry out some sort of audit on Acts of Parliament after they have been implemented.

We must remember what Parliament is for. It is for holding the Government to account, passing sensible laws and representing the people who sent us here. Those should be the foundations for modernisation. I do not think that, when considering those three key objectives of the House, any hon. Member could possibly say that we have gone nearly far enough or fast enough in improving the situation.

8.57 pm

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): I begin with a reassurance for the House: although there is more than an hour of the debate left, I do not propose to take anything like as long as that—*[Interruption.]* Do not tempt me.

We have had a good debate, and I should first reiterate what has been said in varying ways by many Members, about what the function of this place is, and therefore what the function of the Modernisation Committee is.

We are all proud to be elected Members of Parliament, and, when we come here, we have a number of important functions to perform. It is important that we should take part in the debates on the great issues of the day and take a critical interest in the legislation that Governments place before us. None the less, above all—here I echo to some degree the sentiments of the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell)—it is important that the Executive should be held properly to account in this place.

I speak with a background rather different from that of most right hon. and hon. Members in the Chamber this evening. Like the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), I have been here for 28 years, but only in the past year have I occasionally stood at a Dispatch Box to address the House. Over 18 years, I found myself at odds with my own Government from time to time.

The poll tax has been mentioned, but neither my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young), whom I am delighted to be supporting in the debate, nor I could be held responsible for that. We constantly criticised and frequently voted against the measure. I also found myself frequently isolated on the subject of Bosnia during the early years of the Balkan conflict. I was also one of the few Tories who opposed the abolition of the Greater London council; I thought it wrong to deprive London of a directly elected authority.

I give those three personal examples with hon. Members who have recently been elected to support the Government especially in mind. Without wishing to sow the seeds of dissension and rebellion, I must tell them that they should, to some degree, take as their text the admirable and robust words of the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay), whose spectre has haunted the debate, although he has not been present.

Those who are elected in support of a Government have a prime duty to try to ensure that the Government whom they are pleased to support produce legislation that is well thought out, constructive and sensible, and that the Executive does not become overweening, over-powerful and arrogant. All of us in the Chamber have a duty in that regard, but it lies especially heavily on the shoulders of those who sit on the Government side.

My test of the effectiveness of the Modernisation Committee is the extent to which it is making this place a more effective Chamber. I welcome the reports before us, as did my right hon. Friend in his admirable and succinct opening speech, and I pay my tribute to the Leader of the House.

Being Leader of the House is a somewhat schizophrenic job, and we must all be sympathetic towards the right hon. Lady. Obviously, she is in charge of the Government's business and she has a partisan duty to ensure that the Government get that business. But she also has a wider responsibility—in many respects second only to yours, Madam Speaker—to the House in general.

I believe that in the way in which the right hon. Lady has chaired the Committee, she has discharged that second duty with scrupulous efficiency. I served on it for the first few months of its existence and then moved to the Parliamentary Privilege Committee—a joint Committee between this House and the other place on which, again, I serve with the right hon. Lady. I do not want to embarrass her, or to divulge what that Committee is discussing, so I shall simply say that she is considering the issues there with the same impartiality that she sought to bring to her chairmanship of the Modernisation Committee when I served on that.

However, having said all that, let me now look at what is being proposed and at some of the important points that have been made during the debate. It is crucial that we should all take to heart the comments by the hon. Members for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) and for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner). I often disagree with both of them, but the one thing that no one in the Chamber could begin to deny is that they are both first and foremost consummate parliamentarians, who believe in this place and seek to achieve what they believe in through this place. Their attendance here is also exemplary.

If only others would take a leaf out of their book in that latter regard, the Chamber might be what it truly should be—the cockpit of the nation. It is important that the Modernisation Committee should have as its prime objective bringing the Chamber back to true life. I supported the Jopling reforms, but some of them have had a bad effect in that respect. Thursday nights are a prime example. There were Thursday nights, not so long ago, when the Chamber would have been full at 9 o'clock. Now it is almost empty, although it is fuller tonight than it has been for several Thursdays.

[Sir Patrick Cormack]

The Chamber needs to be well attended. It should be the very centre of our parliamentary life and existence. Of course, the Committees, both Standing and Select, are important, but the Chamber is far more important.

The hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) spoke about confrontation, an issue which my hon. Friend the Member for Poole (Mr. Syms) picked up. I do not think that people outside are necessarily disgusted by noise. I remember Norman Tebbit, or Lord Tebbit as he is now, saying that, if people looked at the Supreme Soviet—this was in the days before the end of the cold war—they would see an assembly that was sycophantic but that had no democracy. He contrasted it with the House of Commons at its most lively and rumbustious.

The House is often at its best either when it is debating issues on their merits, without regard to party affiliation—as we are tonight and as we did on Tuesday when we talked about the voting system—or when a great issue of national importance has brought us here with conflicting passions. No one who was here on that Saturday morning the day after the Falklands had been invaded will ever forget that debate, which exercised great influence not only on the nation but throughout the world—the way in which it influenced history has now been fully accepted and documented.

I should like the Chamber to be better attended, which is why I particularly welcome the Modernisation Committee's recommendation—a number of hon. Members have referred to it—that hon. Members should be encouraged and even disciplined to attend more regularly and to stay once they are here. It is discourteous in the extreme for hon. Members to turn up, deliver themselves of a few random thoughts and then to waltz away without returning for the winding-up speeches. If hon. Members take part in a debate, they should remain throughout the whole of the proceedings, save for taking a little modest refreshment, perhaps; they should listen to what others have to say about their contributions and perhaps to intervene—that is why I welcome the recommendation on injury time.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd), who has been described as the man best qualified to be Parliament's shop steward, talked about the dangers of a too rigid application of timing. Those of us who were privileged enough to have listened to Michael Foot or Enoch Powell speaking in the Chamber would not have wanted many of their speeches time limited. Similarly, my hon. Friend the Member for Poole rightly argued that to limit the time for minority parties, some of which have only one, two, three or four Members of Parliament, would be relatively unfair. Although it is right that the occupant of the Chair should have discretion and exercise it properly, we should not go too far down the road of limiting time.

The hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) was somewhat disparaging about those of us who believe that constitutional measures should be taken on the Floor of the House. I believe that those matters of supreme importance to our nation should be debated in the Chamber—the Modernisation Committee's recommendations on programming have been extremely helpful in that regard. We have not got the matter absolutely right, but we are moving in that direction, and the Leader of the House is to be congratulated on her personal efforts to ensure that programming works more effectively than it did when it was first operated.

Mr. Tyler: In the interest of clarity, may I clear up one point? I do not in any way disagree with what the hon. Gentleman says about programming consideration in Committee, which I believe has been very effective—I, too, pay tribute to the Leader of the House. Moreover, I am not suggesting—I do not think that anyone has suggested—that the whole Committee stage of such a measure should be dealt with by Standing Committee. I believe, however, that the Modernisation Committee's compromise suggestion for consideration of other Bills—that the main issue should be debated on the Floor of the House exactly as the hon. Gentleman suggests, but that the detail of the schedules and subsidiary clauses would be much better scrutinised by Standing Committee—is sensible.

Sir Patrick Cormack: I am aware that that is the hon. Gentleman's point of view, but, with great respect, I do not agree with him. Constitutional matters should take up a large share of the time available on the Floor of the House, so that all hon. Members have the opportunity to debate them.

We have heard a number of interesting speeches. It was fascinating that the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston (Ms Hughes) shared some of the aims and objectives of the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich, although she came to different conclusions.

The hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston talked about public perception. The thing that most damages this place in the eyes of the public is the acres of empty green leather they see when they turn on their television sets. If the Chamber could be fuller, more vigorous and more lively in its debates—and if those debates could be better attended throughout—the public perception would change dramatically, as people saw us about our task.

A number of references were made to the carry-over provision. There is a case for carry-over, but I associate myself with those hon. Members—particularly the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett)—who said that it should take place only on the basis of agreement and not by accident. It should be properly agreed, properly programmed and properly pre-announced. That way, complicated Bills that deserve detailed scrutiny could be accommodated over two Sessions, rather than one. To try to railroad through controversial Bills—or suddenly to say, "Good gracious me. We do not have enough time. We will run the Bill over to the next Session"—would be an abuse of parliamentary procedure which we should not begin to contemplate. I am glad that the Committee did not do so.

We have had a fascinating debate, and the Modernisation Committee is doing a great deal of good. However, I hope that it will heed the old Latin motto, festina lente, and make haste slowly. It is far better that the reforms that the Committee puts in place should be on the basis of proper detailed consideration. The Committee should truly help to make the Chamber a more lively place and the House a more effective instrument of legislation. Above all, the Committee should try to make the House a place where the Government—wherever they come from in the political spectrum—are held constantly to account and made properly and fully answerable for their every action.

Let me finish with this point. When I sat on the Government Benches, I once said that we must not take to ourselves powers that we would not wish others to exercise. It was a lesson which was not always heeded. I hope that Labour Members will realise that the vast majority that they enjoy at the moment at the will of the electorate—and because of some of the mistakes that we made—is not theirs as of permanent right. In working out how we should run this place in the future, that should be uppermost in their minds.

9.11 pm

Mrs. Ann Taylor: I wish to reply briefly to some of the points raised in what has been a good-humoured, informative and—for the House of Commons—enjoyable debate. I wish we could have more such enjoyable debates. I want to deal with each speech briefly, and I hope that I will be able to cover all the points.

First, I thank the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young) for his positive comments on the report. He talked about his thoughts on dress for officials of the House of Commons and was somewhat radical in his proposals. On that basis, I will certainly welcome him to the Modernisation Committee in due course. I also welcome his comments about carry-over being a process of extending the runway for Bills. That is how we should see it—as a positive move, but one which applies only in certain circumstances and not universally.

The right hon. Member also referred to the position of the referee in all this, and the importance of Madam Speaker's approach. We place a great deal of trust in Madam Speaker and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) said, that is why the Committee made particular mention of the role of the Chair and our confidence in it. I noticed that the right hon. Gentleman is a supporter of Queens Park Rangers so, presumably, he has specific views on referees. If that is the case, my views on referees and Bolton Wanderers may come into our future debates.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) claims to speak for the masochist tendency, although some of my colleagues believe that he speaks for the sadist tendency. He made important points, and I was pleased to have his support. He does not always support proposed changes in the running of the House, but, if we have support ranging from his to that of the other hon. Members who have spoken, we are perhaps getting it right.

The hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) made a positive contribution to the Modernisation Committee, as all its members did. He said that some changes had come more slowly than he would have wished, and mentioned his desire to split constitutional Bills so that the principles can be dealt with on the Floor of the House and the detail upstairs, as happens with the Finance Bill. I agree that there is a case for that, but each Bill—constitutional or not—must be examined on its merits. I was glad that he acknowledged the progress that we have been able to make by programme motions on constitutional Bills. There was a little element of trade-off there, and we made progress on one front, if not on all at once.

The hon. Gentleman also mentioned the need to ensure that Select Committees work as well as possible, and that they are respected. The Government take Select Committees extremely seriously. According to the latest figures that I have seen, appearances by Ministers before Select Committees are up about 20 per cent. on the figure achieved under the previous Government. I hope that that proves our good faith and seriousness.

My hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) asked about carry-over. He hoped that the Government would always announce at an early stage their intention to carry over a Bill. I draw his attention to paragraph 102(b) of the Committee's first report on the legislative process, which states:

> "In drawing up detailed proposals the appropriate authorities should consider the need to ensure . . . the identification by the Government as early as possible of any Bill it wished to be subject to a carry-over procedure."

We want to do that. I hope that that reassures my hon. Friend.

My hon. Friend mentioned the need for change in the dress of people in the Chamber. Personally, I tend to agree. We could certainly make changes as far as wigs are concerned, although the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) about getting back at the Clerks opened up a dimension I had not previously considered; I may review my opinion in that light.

The hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) expressed his reservations forcefully in the Committee. Interventions have dealt with his points, and I hope that he sees that a wide spectrum of opinion disagrees with him. Many people believe that having a time limit will increase the rights of Members to participate in debate.

My hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich has been an hon. Friend for many years. She was as open as we would expect her to be about her views on modernisation in general. To sum them up, she is again it; She is quite open about that, and she is right to emphasise our individual responsibility for knowing the Standing Orders and the procedure. She was right to say that, over the past few years, fewer people have come to terms with the Standing Orders and the influence that they can have. I think that she is wrong to feel that the measures that we are suggesting are dangerous and that curtailing speeches is automatically dangerous. We are proposing sensible ideas which will help the quality of legislation.

The packages proposed both in the previous reports and in the ones that we are considering today are intended to improve the quality of legislation. My hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) made that point very well. He is not a member of the Committee, but he seemed to show as much knowledge of our reports and even our deliberations as those who are members. He made a considered and positive contribution. If he had been a fly on the wall during some of our discussions, he could not have argued more effectively. He was right to point out the way in which the parliamentary year is concentrated, with lots of Second Readings together and lots of Committee work together. Soon, we might have lots of Lords amendments to consider, which will make it difficult to plan June and July.

Many hon. Members want better planning. No doubt in the next few weeks they will be asking me to plan ahead in a way that the parliamentary programme does not always make possible. My hon. Friend also made a valid point when referring to the earlier report, about the value

[Mrs. Ann Taylor]

of pre-legislative scrutiny, which can save time later if problems are dealt with at the appropriate stage. He and others made points about private Members' Bills, which the Committee will want to consider as soon as is practical.

The hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan), who chairs the Select Committee on Information, made points that will be very welcome indeed to members of the Modernisation Committee, who were slightly alarmed at the initial reaction of his Committee to our proposals. The Information Committee thought that there might be significant difficulties with what I hope are simple measures, such as getting the names of constituencies on the annunciators. I am glad that we are likely to be able to make more rapid progress than was at first thought and I congratulate him on making that clear to the House and encouraging us in that way.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stretford and Urmston (Ms Hughes) reminded us of our manifesto commitments and said that it was not merely new Members who were pressing for change. It is important to remember that. We said that one of our purposes was to make Parliament more effective and more efficient. Some people who oppose modernisation think that if we make Parliament more efficient we are, by definition, making it less effective. I reject that approach. I think that the two can go together. I am glad that she was able to welcome so much of the report, although I can understand why she wanted us to go further and to consider the parliamentary timetable. As I said, that is one of the matters that we will be moving on to in the near future.

The hon. Member for Poole (Mr. Syms) said that he liked interventions. He had some reservations about the timing of speeches, but his positive suggestions about the clock, the countdown and names of constituencies being visible to those sitting in the Chamber were constructive. Perhaps we can consider the suggestions further. I should like to pick him up on one other point he made about electronic voting—the fact that it might destroy the Lobby system. Members of the Committee were keen to maintain the Aye and the No Lobbies, whichever method of recording the vote within the Lobby was used. In the survey, some people thought that electronic voting might be the end of the Lobbies; that was a factor.

My hon. Friend the Member for Burnley drew on his experience of many years in the House to talk about the need for longer-term programming than one parliamentary year. I have some sympathy with his desire to have a more paced Parliament rather than merely parliamentary Sessions. That has some attractions, as does his suggestion that we ought to have 12 months or possibly longer—a fixed period—in which to pass any piece of legislation. The Committee has not considered that, but it is an interesting suggestion.

The hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell) took issue with his colleague the hon. Member for North Cornwall. I resist the temptation to draw obvious conclusions. He rightly said that accountability was a day-to-day matter. I do not think that the hon. Member for Poole was suggesting anything else. When he talked about the consequences of a general election, I do not think that he thought that that absolved us of the day-to-day responsibility to ensure that the Government are held to account. I do not think that the two are contradictory. There should be no problem.

The hon. Member for Hazel Grove mentioned that poor legislation had been passed both when there was consensus and when there was confrontation. That gives me the opportunity to make what I hope will become an important comparison that will help prove that the suggested changes are worth while and improve the quality of legislation. He said that the Child Support Agency was an example of faulty legislation produced with consensus, as everyone here knows. As was pointed out, it would have been even worse had we had a timetable.

My solution is the one that I mentioned nearly a year ago in our first debate on modernisation. If the CSA proposals had been subject to pre-legislative scrutiny, I do not think that the legislation would have reached the statute book in that form. We might have had a CSA that worked from the beginning. We are learning from the mistakes of the past. The Government will publish next week the draft Bill on pension sharing. The Social Security Select Committee has already made arrangements to consider it. The measure is similar in that there is genuine agreement that something should be done about pension sharing, just as there was about doing something about absent parents. I think that by allowing pre-legislative scrutiny and taking account of that and of the views of outside bodies, we are more likely to get the legislation right in the end. I hope that the changes will be useful in that respect.

The hon. Member for Hazel Grove went on to discuss demands for debates on the Floor on issues that get squeezed such as Select Committee reports, Law Commission Bills or Adjournment debates. We both know that the Committee is soon to discuss whether we can come up mechanisms to assist in that respect.

Mrs. Dunwoody: My right hon. Friend will remember that I raised the question of carrying over legislation and said that as long as it is clear that the procedure is used for non-contentious legislation, and is carefully set out in a way that will not allow any Government to use it to steamroller through even more contentious and difficult issues, it may be acceptable. She has not chosen to give that undertaking.

Mrs. Taylor: I specifically gave that assurance right at the start. What is more, that assurance is in the third report. The conditions that will apply to the use of carry-over are absolutely clear and unequivocal. I do not think that the House of Lords would be willing to accept Bills that were carried over had we not abided by the assurances that I gave when I opened this debate.

Mr. Shepherd: It is clear that the Opposition has the absolute right to prevent carry-over, which is why it has to be done by agreement. Opposition Members can stop-carry over; is that not so?

Mrs. Taylor: To reiterate, the Bills that should be eligible for carry over will be, first, those that have not completed their passage through the House in which they originated; secondly, only those for which there is a specific ad hoc motion; and, thirdly, those whose

eligibility for carry-over has been agreed through the usual channels, which was one of the conditions I laid out at the beginning of the debate. That shows what sort of Bill we are dealing with in respect of carry-over.

I thought that the deputy shadow Leader of the House, the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack), was going to make my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover an even better offer than he had already received this evening. My hon. Friend has been offered the top hat and an opportunity to be made a member of the Privy Council, but when the hon. Gentleman pointed out that, after 28 years on the Back Benches, he had got on to the Front Bench, I thought that he was going to offer my hon. Friend a place on the Front Bench—[HON. MEMBERS: "Come over."]—our Front Bench, that is. We live in hope of that happening some day.

The hon. Member for South Staffordshire spoke about the early days of the Modernisation Committee, when he was a valued member of it, before he had to leave to serve on another Committee of the House. He laid down some reasonable tests that he thought should be applied to any changes, which were well taken. I appreciate his comments about the way in which the Committee has gone about its business. He said that the real test was: would the Modernisation Committee changes make the House more effective? Only time will tell, but I think that the changes make a positive contribution. If more Members can speak in debates, that will be helpful, because people will feel that it is worth staying in the Chamber. If there is injury time for interventions, that will make our debates more lively, which will also be helpful.

I am grateful for the support given to me by the hon. Gentleman when he was on the Modernisation Committee and by the right hon. Member for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard), who is just leaving the Committee. It is on that basis that I welcome the right hon. Member for North–West Hampshire.

The hon. Member for South Staffordshire spoke about the public's perception of the House and the fact that empty green-leather Benches do not provide a good image. That is a problem, as is the image at Prime Minister's Question Time, but we have a responsibility to ensure that more people know the totality of the work of the House of Commons, because those images—first, when there are few, if any, hon. Members listening to a debate and, secondly, the hothouse of Prime Minister's Question Time—are the extremes, whereas the vast majority of a Member's time is spent somewhere in between. Much of a Member of Parliament's time is spent on Committees and one of the things that the Modernisation Committee is trying to do is to ensure that the different aspects of the work of a Member of Parliament are given proper weight and regard.

The hon. Gentleman finished by advising us to make haste slowly. I do not think that we have been making haste rapidly—indeed, there is a sense that I have been too patient in my role as the Chair of the Committee. I have been extremely tolerant on many occasions, but it is important that we make changes that are acceptable to those on both sides of the House. That is what I have endeavoured to achieve in the Committee, but I realise that there is scope for more change. The report that we will publish shortly on the scrutiny of European legislation will be important; and the whole House will welcome the fact that the Committee is soon to consider the parliamentary year and related matters in terms of the opportunities for debate. I hope that we can come up with even more constructive, and perhaps radical, suggestions that will also be acceptable to the House. For this evening, I commend the motions to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House approves the Third and Fourth Reports from the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons on Carry-over of Public Bills and Conduct in the Chamber (HC 543 and 600).

SHORT SPEECHES

Ordered,

That Standing Order No. 47 (Short speeches) be amended, as follows:

Line 1, after 'at', insert 'or before';

Line 4, leave out 'for not more than ten minutes';

Line 6, after 'debate', insert 'for no longer than any period she may specify (which shall not be less than eight minutes)';

Line 11, leave out 'ten minutes' and insert 'that period';

Line 12, at end, add—

'Provided that, in calculating that period, the Speaker may disregard the time taken by interventions'.—*[Mr. Kevin Hughes.]*

SUSPENSION OF MEMBERS

Ordered,

That—

(1) the following Standing Order (Suspension of salary of Members suspended) be made:

'The salary of a Member suspended from the service of the House shall be withheld for the duration of his suspension.';

(2) Standing Order No. 45 (Members suspended, &c., to withdraw from precincts) be amended, as follows:

Line 3, leave out from 'House' to 'shall' in line 4;

Line 5, leave out from 'House' to the end of line 8; and

(3) paragraph (5) of Standing Order No. 44 (Order in debate) be transferred to the end of Standing Order No. 45.—*[Mr. Kevin Hughes.]*

WITHDRAWAL OF STRANGERS FROM HOUSE

Ordered,

That Standing Order No. 163 (Withdrawal of strangers from House) be amended, as follows:

Line 2, leave out from the word 'Member' to the word 'and' in line 5 and insert the words 'moves "That the House sit in private" the Speaker or the chairman shall forthwith put the question "That the House sit in private" '.

Line 7, at the end insert the words 'but such a Motion may be made no more than once in any sitting'.

Line 10, leave out the word 'strangers' and insert the words 'those other than Members or officers'.

Line 11, leave out the words 'that strangers do withdraw' and insert the words 'under paragraph (1) of this order.'.—*[Mr. Kevin Hughes.]*

PETITION

Green Belt Development

9.34 pm

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire): I am pleased to have the opportunity to present the petition of 1,000 of my constituents, led by Mrs. Brenda Ball, who are concerned about plans to build in the countryside, particularly in the neighbouring seat of my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley). Those plans will involve the building of 10,000 houses in the green belt. My constituents wanted to show solidarity with their near neighbours in expressing their concern.

Although the wording of the petition does not say so, there is a deeply felt sense of outrage in the north of Hertfordshire at the decision of the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions not to intervene to save the green belt in our county. It says:

The Petition of the residents of the North East Hertfordshire constituency declares that we are concerned about the decisions to sanction plans for new development throughout the countryside. The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions to ensure that more homes are built in city areas, instead of the countryside or Green Belt, to breathe new life into our cities and to protect valuable countryside for future generations.

And the Petitioners remain etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Hertfordshire Structure Plan

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kevin Hughes.]*

9.36 pm

Mr. Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden): I am grateful for the opportunity to debate proposals to alter Hertfordshire's structure plan so that it is possible to build 10,000 houses in the green belt in my constituency.

Throughout my parliamentary career, I have been a passionate defender of the green belt. I raised the issue in my maiden speech. I have always believed that it is essential to defend the sanctity of the green belt to maintain the environment and character of my constituency. At public inquiries, I have opposed plans to build on green belt land in my constituency.

I am pleased to say that in the past 15 years in which I have had the privilege to represent a Hertfordshire seat, there has been no significant incursion into the green belt in the area that I represent. Several proposals to do so have been successfully seen off, but not one acre has been lost.

I have invariably had cross-party support in standing up for the green belt, and I have usually had the local authorities on my side, so I am appalled that Hertfordshire county council, through its structure plan, proposes to build 10,000 houses in the green belt on nearly 2,000 acres in my constituency. I was horrified when that plan was endorsed by the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions.

I make it absolutely clear to the House that I am not talking simply about building on a green-field site. The plan involves building within the green belt itself; in short, on land that is most safeguarded against such developments. As far as I can discover, the proposal would be the largest incursion into the green belt in living memory, so it is not only a local, but a national, issue.

Locally, the opposition to the plan is overwhelming, as my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald) has said. In a single morning, 3,500 people signed the petition in the marketplace in Hitchin in my constituency. Many thousands more have done so since. The sheer volume of papers containing the names of people who have signed the petition is apparent to the House.

The site involved is especially beautiful. Few people live in it. It is a purely rural area, but it is much cherished by people in the rest of the constituency. How deeply it is cherished was brought home to me by an especially poignant ceremony, in which I participated, on the borders of the area concerned. I was invited to unveil a new footpath map in the village of St. Ippollitts. The map, which is especially beautiful, illustrates the terrain, the flora and fauna of the area, as well as showing the footpaths covering the area between St. Ippollitts and Langley. Each footpath is maintained and cared for by a team of volunteers.

Tragically, only two months after the map was unveiled, a large part of the area that it shows is to be bulldozed and covered with concrete. One of the most beautiful stretches of countryside will become a high-profile housing estate, and all the care and devotion that people have put into maintaining that area of countryside in its natural beauty are to be laid to waste.

This is a national, as well as a local, issue. Planning proceeds by precedent, so the decision to allow building on that scale in such a location will be potent ammunition for those wishing to develop in green belt areas elsewhere in the countryside. Green belt status will have been devalued by that dangerous decision and the appalling precedent that it sets.

The legal basis for the green belt is spelt out clearly in planning policy guidance note 2, issued in 1995. It spells out five purposes for the green belt. The first is

"to check unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas".

The green belt round Stevenage has achieved precisely that, by ensuring that Stevenage had a clear-cut western boundary along the motorway, to the west of which was green belt land; but with this precedent to overrule that green belt protection, how can urban sprawl be contained elsewhere in the country around towns with even less defensible boundaries?

The second purpose of green belts laid down in PPG2 is

"to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another."

In this case, the green belt has, above all, prevented Stevenage merging into Hitchin. In practice, the new settlement, although said to be west of Stevenage, is divided from Stevenage by a motorway, an industrial zone and a railway, so the inhabitants will naturally gravitate to Hitchin, and the tendency will be for that settlement to expand toward Hitchin and undermine the thin stretch of remaining green belt between itself and Hitchin. In any case, the precedent has been created that green belts elsewhere in the country cannot be relied on to separate two closely adjoining towns.

The third purpose of green belts laid down in PPG2 is

"to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment".

That the green belt has done, for the best part of 50 years in this part of the country, but now a couple of thousand beautiful acres are being abandoned. With that precedent, why should any countryside elsewhere be sacrosanct as a result of green belt protection?

The fourth purpose of green belts laid down in PPG2 is

"to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns."

Hitchin is an historic market town—a beautiful one. It has retained its character and setting precisely because the green belt has restricted its size and kept Stevenage at bay. But with this precedent, how can any historic town be kept safe by relying on the green belt?

The fifth and final purpose laid down for green belts in PPG2 is

"to assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land."

It is always easier, and often cheaper, to build on green-field sites than to recycle urban land. While the green belt protected the countryside, planners and developers had to focus on previously built-up land, and that often meant finding many small sites, and it meant that planners had to agree to changes, for example, from employment use to building use. Why should they bother, once this precedent has established, since the easy and profitable solution of building on green-belt land is available if one pushes hard enough? In short, this decision offends every single purpose for which green-belt status was established.

I welcome the presence in the Chamber tonight, not only of my hon. Friends, but of the hon. Members for St. Albans (Mr. Pollard) and for Hemel Hempstead (Mr. McWalter), both of whom I had the privilege of defeating in previous elections. I am sure that they will reflect the concerns of their constituents about the damage that has been done to the sanctity of the green belt that has protected the character of their constituencies as faithfully as it protects the new boundaries of my constituency.

Hon. Members can imagine my delight when, after building was proposed in the area, I persuaded my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition to launch the Conservative countryside campaign on that very site west of Stevenage in my constituency on 2 February this year. I was even more pleased when it seemed that that campaign had persuaded the Government to do a U-turn on the issue of developing in the countryside and on green-belt sites. The Deputy Prime Minister signalled his intention to restore the 60 per cent. target for building in built-up areas upon which we had consulted and which we had included in our manifesto. He declared his determination to protect the countryside.

I welcomed the Deputy Prime Minister's apparent change of heart, as did my hon. Friends. Unfortunately, it soon became clear that, although the rhetoric had changed, the substance of policy had not. West of Stevenage was the litmus test and, on that test, the Government resolutely refused to turn blue. The Deputy Prime Minister reaffirmed his consent for the biggest incursion into the green belt since the new towns were established.

Several reasons have been given for sticking to that decision despite the Government's alleged change of policy. When I asked the Deputy Prime Minister how he could claim that the Government's policy had changed if he was not prepared to alter his position on that key decision regarding the biggest and worst incursion into the green belt since the war, he replied that it was a question of local democracy. He claimed that all the local authorities were in favour of the decision. That is simply incorrect. The decision affects land in North Hertfordshire district council area and, although the council is Labour controlled, it resolutely opposes the decision.

It is true that Hertfordshire county council has led the proposal for building on the site, but I believe that that decision is a travesty of local democracy rather than a reflection of it. The county council is controlled by a Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition. It has formed a joint party called the administration group, which has a majority of just one over the Conservatives. The group knew that it could not get a decision this unpopular through the full council without risking its defeat by one of its members siding with the Conservative opposition. So it took the decision in a planning committee which was packed with trustees, tightly whipped.

The decision was taken by just 14 council members out of 77, and only 14 county councillors supported the final plan. When the Conservative opposition put down a motion in full council that the issue should be considered by the full council before it went ahead, the ruling Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition changed the standing orders so that it could throw out the motion, even though a majority of county councillors voted in favour of that decision being taken by the full council. It is a travesty of democracy and it is appalling that the Deputy Prime Minister should have cited local democracy as a reason to allow the green belt to be built on.

[Mr. Peter Lilley]

It is sad that no Liberal Democrat Members are present. They have claimed often enough to be supporters of the environment and to be a green party. Taking them at their word, I wrote to the Leader of the Liberal party asking him to urge his supporters on Hertfordshire county council to abandon their anti-democratic and anti-environmental support of the plan to build on the green belt. He has never replied. I have subsequently spoken to him and he said that he had no intention of replying and that it was beneath his dignity to involve himself in this, the most important decision affecting the future of the green belt and the whole country since the war. Far from being a matter for local democracy, it has been an abuse of local democracy by those running Hertfordshire county council.

The Government's second line of defence was to argue that, although a couple of thousand acres of green belt land have been lost in the front line, they have designated an even larger area of countryside as green belt in the rear. That is fatuous. There is no defence at all if the green belt is mobile. It is meant to be rigid. It is effective only if it is rigid. If it simply moves back like a piece of elastic every time there is pressure on it, it is of no use in preventing the encroachment of urban areas on the countryside.

The third justification is that the west of Stevenage development would be particularly sustainable in transport terms because it is near a railway and an existing town. On that basis, any town with a railway is not safe from expansion into the surrounding green belt. In any case, virtually every town in the west of Hertfordshire has good railways and very few people are far from those railway centres. In my constituency, it is possible to be a maximum of only six miles distant from a railway station.

The fourth justification is that no alternative locations are available on which to build. The inquiry considered a few alternative large sites and it rather strangely turned down proposals for building a similar development on a non-green belt site elsewhere in the county. However, it gave no consideration at all to building on the largest area of recyclable land, the former Hatfield airfield which has recently been closed following the move of British Aerospace to the north.

It is in any case nonsense to suppose that it is essential to find large sites in order to meet the target for building new homes in the county. The target for the 20-year period between 1991 and 2011 is set at 65,000 houses. Already, some six or seven years into the period, 44,000 houses have been built or allocated planning permission. Almost all of that has been achieved by finding many small sites, by urban regeneration and by a limited amount of peripheral development. A further 21,000 houses are required over the remaining period, which is almost twice as long as the part that has elapsed.

The structure plan states:

"There is a fair prospect of meeting the whole of that extra requirement in the same manner"

as for the first 44,000 houses, by urban regeneration and limited peripheral development. It continues:

"However, against the possibility of this not proving practicable, strategic provision is made on a contingency basis for up to 6,000 dwellings to be located on Green Field sites . . . of which 5,000 are at Stevenage (with a prospect of 5,000 more after 2011)."

On the council's own admission, the incursion into the green belt may not be necessary to meet the council's targets. It would be extraordinary if that beautiful stretch of countryside were sacrificed—which would create a damaging precedent for the country as a whole—and it all turned out to have been unnecessary.

The final blow to the insistence of the Government and the county council that it was all necessary to meet the targets was dealt this week by Serplan itself. On 3 June, it issued a press release giving revised forecasts for the period between 1991 and 2016, stating:

"The figures are less than the Government's household projections for the same period. That is because national research now shows that 40 to 50 per cent. of the projected extra single person households may not form without some sort of subsidy. The evidence suggests that even if the Government commits extra resources to giving people a home, 20 to 25 per cent. fewer single person households will form than previously projected."

The whole basis of the original targets is now undermined by the planning body that does the forecasting on which the Government have relied.

Earlier this year, I—along with many of my hon. Friends who represent Hertfordshire—went to see the Minister for the Regions, Regeneration and Planning. We were grateful to him for allowing us time to express our concerns, and our passionate opposition to what is proposed for the area west of Stevenage. He said that the Government had genuinely changed their policy—that they now wanted more development outside the south-east and less within it. He said that they were moving from "predict and provide" to a more flexible system, and that they would be reviewing previous predictions. All that was music to our ears; yet the Minister still insisted that the decision should not be revised or reconsidered in the light of the policy changes that he proposed.

If the Government are raising the national average target for the amount of building on recycled land from 50 to 60 per cent., that must mean scaling down plans to build on green-field sites. If the Government are to reduce the amount of building on green-field sites, where will the reductions be made? Why are the Government not beginning by axing plans to build on the green belt—particularly this most offensive and largest plan? If they are genuinely keen for less building to take place on green-field sites and more on recycled land, where will the reduction take place, and why will it not be made in the area to which I refer?

I have a further question. If more powers are being devolved to the regions and to Serplan, which now says that the requirement for houses in the south-east is less than the Government predicted, why are the regions not being given authority—indeed, encouraged—to reflect that decentralised planning decision in the way that the new planning structures were said to allow? If the Government are serious about their proposals to shift more housing development out of the south-east and up to the north, and to less populous parts of the country, why is that not yet being reflected in decisions such as that involving Hertfordshire county council? Above all, how can the Government say that the policy has changed if they will not alter the single most offensive planning decision that they have allowed: the decision to build 10,000 houses on green-belt land in my constituency?

If the Government are prepared to reverse that decision, they will gain the respect and sympathy of people not just in Hertfordshire, but throughout the country who are

concerned at the damage that this decision will do to the sanctity of the green belt. If the Government are not, their credit will be zero among all those who care for the environment and believe that it can be satisfactorily maintained only if we uphold the sanctity of the green belt.

9.59 pm

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire) *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. Does the hon. Gentleman have permission of the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) to speak in the debate?

Mr. Heald: I certainly do.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: And that of the Minister?

Mr. Heald: I have not mentioned it to the Minister. I certainly mentioned it to my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) as that bit of extra time was available this evening.

At a rally some six weeks ago, the hon. Member for Hemel Hempstead (Mr. McWalter) and I stood shoulder to shoulder on this issue, in support of the points that my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden has made. My right hon. Friend has been fighting tigerishly to defend—*[Interruption.]* Tigerishly is the right word. He is fighting fiercely to protect—

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kevin Hughes.]*

Mr. Heald: My right hon. Friend has been fighting fiercely to protect our part of Hertfordshire. The hon. Member for Hemel Hempstead knows the area well, too. He was a North Hertfordshire district councillor in Letchworth. He knows how important it is to Letchworth that it has the agricultural belt around it and the green belt beside it. He knows, as I and my right hon. Friend do, that it is important in Hertfordshire that the green belt should not be a flexible thing that can be tossed aside and an area where developments can occur in huge numbers.

There is no doubt about the demand. People could build as many houses as they liked in Hertfordshire and they would sell them. Buyers would pour over the borders from Bedfordshire, Essex and come up from London because Hertfordshire is a wonderful place in which to live, but, in doing so, they would destroy its character. That is why this proposal has been strongly opposed not just in Hitchin and Harpenden—although, my goodness, it has been opposed there—but in Letchworth, where people care about the environment, and in other places in my constituency.

The county has a lot of green belt. It has protected itself through the green belt; I see Labour Members nodding. Not just I and the hon. Member for Hemel Hempstead, but the leader of North Hertfordshire district council, a Labour member, as my right hon. Friend mentioned, and the chairman of the council have said that this will not do.

I bitterly regret the fact that the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions was not prepared to budge. He let down not just Conservative supporters of the green belt, but everyone in that part of Hertfordshire: Labour, Liberal and all those individual people—

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. Nick Raynsford): Nonsense.

Mr. Heald: The Minister says, "Nonsense," and I noticed that he was laughing earlier. People in north Hertfordshire are not laughing. They think that this is an absolute disgrace and a decision which he should reverse. If he and Secretary of State mean what they say, they must act, not just give us words. It is time that this decision was reversed. The Minister should get on his feet and actually do something for the environment, rather than just talk, talk, talk, which is what Labour does.

10.2 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. Nick Raynsford): I am grateful to have the opportunity to respond on this subject, as it enables me to outline the Government's policy as it relates to the new Hertfordshire structure plan and to remind the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley)—and the hon. Member for North-East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald), who did not have the courtesy to inform me that he intended to speak—of the record of the previous Government, whom they supported. Their remarks indicate an astonishing degree of selective amnesia about the performance of that Government on decisions on the green belt. I shall be pleased to remind them about the Conservative Government's record.

I shall start by outlining the procedures; it is right that the House should be aware of them. Structure plans were introduced by the Town and Country Planning Act 1968 and carried forward into section 32 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, which requires county councils to prepare structure plans for their areas. Planning policy guidance for structure plans is set in PPG 12, entitled "Development Plans and Regional Planning Guidance", which was published in 1992. It requires structure plans to set out broad proposals for housing, employment, transportation and other strategic matters and their distribution between districts.

Structure plans do not identify specific sites—that is the preserve of local plans—but they can identify strategic allocations for major development. When applied to housing, a strategic allocation is generally taken as being 1,000 or more dwellings.

Structure plans must have regard to regional planning guidance, which is non-statutory advice published by the Secretary of State—in consultation with standing conferences formed by local authorities—to guide the regional distribution of development and housing. It is not part of the role of RPGs to specify the location of new development. Later in my speech, I shall deal with our proposed changes to the system for preparing regional planning guidance. Hertfordshire is guided by regional planning guidance for the south-east, which is in RPG 9.

Structure plans are prepared and owned by county councils. The Secretary of State has a reserve power, under section 35(2) of the 1990 Act, to direct modifications to a structure plan. He exercises that power,

[Mr. Nick Raynsford]

very sparingly, to ensure that plans do not depart from national or regional planning guidance without very strong justification. For structure plans, the power has been used only six times since 1993—to direct the modification of plans for Suffolk, Surrey, Berkshire, Kent, Bedfordshire and West Sussex. All except the last of those were made by the previous Administration, and the last four arose from the failure of the councils to propose adequate housing provision.

As hon. Members will know, my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister recently announced our new approach to planning for housing, "Planning for the Communities of the Future". I am well aware that several hon. Members are concerned about how Hertfordshire's plan squares with that and with policy for the green belt and reuse of brown-field sites. I know that hon. Members are concerned about protecting the green belt and the countryside; the Government are also concerned about it. We remain fully committed to their protection.

Protection of the countryside has always been a planning priority. Green belt policy is guided by planning policy guidance note 2, "Green Belts", which was published in 1994. The PPG note makes it quite clear that—as has always been the case—green belt boundaries can be changed by the development plan only if "exceptional circumstances" exist.

In recent years, both the current Government and the previous Administration have had to allow releases of green belt land for development. There is nothing new about that process. My hon. Friend the Minister for the Regions, Regeneration and Planning recently met the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden and other hon. Members, told them that the previous Administration had allowed releases of green belt land for housing and said that we would provide some examples.

The right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden will undoubtedly be interested in those examples. They are as follows: 46 hectares in Birmingham, 158 hectares in Broxbourne, 137 hectares in Dartford and 260 hectares in Solihull. In case Conservative Members think that that is only some dim and distant recollection, I should remind them that, in the final year of the previous Conservatives Administration, they released, on appeal, 500 hectares of green belt land for development. In one of the three sites affected, they acted directly against the recommendation of the inspector, who recommended refusal.

The suggestion made by the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden and other Conservative Members that the previous Government's record on the green belt was somehow magnificent and that the current Government are acting improperly is erroneous. It is an extraordinary statement of hypocrisy on the right hon. Gentleman's part.

Mr. Lilley: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for pointing out those decisions. He should therefore be able to confirm that the Government's single decision in Hertfordshire will have a greater effect than the effect of all those decisions he has listed put together.

Mr. Raynsford: The right hon. Gentleman has again missed the point. The fact is that—in that one case, in the last year of the previous Government—500 hectares were affected. He will also have heard me mention 260 hectares in Solihull, 137 hectares in Dartford and 158 hectares in Broxbourne. Perhaps he cannot do his mathematics. Perhaps that is why has recently been transferred from his previous shadow job to his current one.

Mr. Kerry Pollard (St. Albans): I am not sure that the House is aware that Broxbourne is in Hertfordshire. The previous Administration gave away a great swathe of green belt in that decision, but the Conservatives are now claiming to be the great friends of the green belt. That is hypocrisy.

Mr. Raynsford: I agree with my hon. Friend.

The important point is that land can be taken from the green belt only if opportunities for development in urban areas and beyond the green belt have been fully considered. Only if insufficient land is available from those sources can green belt alterations be countenanced.

Mr. Heald: The Minister will know that the site that we are talking about is 2,000 acres. I do not know how many acres he thinks there are to the hectare, but on the mathematics that I employ my right hon. Friend's figure is right. The Minister is talking about tiny amounts in comparison with the huge scheme in Hertfordshire. How many acres does the Minister say there are to the hectare?

Mr. Raynsford: The site that the hon. Gentleman is referring to is 800 hectares. That is smaller than the combined sites that I have described. If the hon. Gentleman wants, I can list other sites released by the previous Government on appeal. Let us consider some, because perhaps he would benefit from hearing them. In June 1994, 24 hectares were released for a corporate headquarters and residential accommodation in St. Helens. In March 1993, 167 hectares were released for a business park in Ashton-under-Lyne. In the same month, 30 hectares were released for industrial development in Cheadle. The recommendation of the inspector, who was trying to safeguard the green belt, was overruled. In May 1993, 56 hectares were released for a business park in Dartford.

The right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden is showing the House why he was transferred from being shadow Chancellor, because he cannot add up. If he adds up the developments that I have mentioned, he will realise that they amount to substantially more green belt than the site that he is talking about. I shall spare him the embarrassment of listing the many other examples of green belt sites that were released for development by the previous Government. The right hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends clearly do not wish to be reminded of those uncomfortable facts.

"Planning for the Communities of the Future" highlights the need to develop sustainable communities. Green belts may divert development into open countryside beyond them—land that may be of high environmental value. Development in such areas can promote unsustainable transport demands. In exceptional circumstances, releasing some green belt for development can enable more sustainable solutions to be realised, provided—I emphasise this point again—all the options have been fully considered.

The reuse of previously developed land is another important issue. The previous Administration's target, set out in the 1996 Green Paper "Household Growth: Where Shall We Live?" was that

"by 2005, half of all new housing should be built on re-used sites."

"Planning for the Communities of the Future" increases that target to 60 per cent. over the next 10 years. We expect regional planning guidance to set targets to achieve that. We have commissioned the Local Government Association and English Partnerships to set up a database of previously developed land. That will help councils and developers to identify land available for reuse and target it for redevelopment. The process carried out in Hertfordshire is similar to our approach and shows that it will work.

"Planning for the Communities of the Future" also sets out our approach to planning for the housing provision implied by the 1992-based population projections up to 2016 and for future projections. We are determined to get away from predict and provide and give local councils and communities more ownership of the figures and the proposals to meet them. We have set out a new system for defining housing provision through revised arrangements for the preparation of regional planning guidance.

In future, regional planning conferences will work with the Government offices for the regions, business, other regional stakeholders and the new regional development agencies to produce draft regional guidance, including proposals for future housing provision. That will be tested at a public examination and subject to environmental appraisal. Targets will be included to measure the success of the strategy and to trigger subsequent formal review of the guidance. That new approach will be used in preparation of a revision of RPG9, to be published in draft later this year, which will roll housing figures forward to 2016.

In answer to the specific question asked by the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden, there will be an opportunity for a further appraisal of Hertfordshire household requirements in the context of the revised RPG9. That will be subject to the procedure I have described but based on forthcoming household projection figures. It is wrong at this stage to pre-empt that. He should not draw any conclusions from the Serplan figures, which were generalised for the south-east and, of course, have not had the benefit of any testing by an examination in public.

In the meantime, it is important that there should be an orderly transition from the old arrangements to the new ones, so development plans in preparation must have regard to existing regional planning guidance. I remind the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden that existing regional planning guidance in respect of Hertfordshire—RPG9—was produced by the Government he supported.

The right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden is well aware of the lengthy process by which the Hertfordshire structure plan was prepared. If other hon. Members want details of it, we can supply them. The essence of the matter is that Hertfordshire county council initially sought to provide all new housing allocations on previously developed land. That was shown to be too ambitious and unachievable—not least because the area does not contain many of the older industrial sites that are common in some parts of the country, which are the most obvious sites for such development. The county came very reluctantly to the conclusion that green-field releases were unavoidable. Hence, it proposed major development west of the A1M near Stevenage, and a smaller, but still significant, proposal at Hemel Hempstead. That was thoroughly tested at an examination in public before an independent panel, which endorsed the strategy.

Early this year, it fell to my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister to consider whether he should direct any modifications to the plan. He concluded that he should not, because up-to-date information showed that the proportion of new housing on previously used land would be close to our new target of 60 per cent., that development west of the A1M near Stevenage and development near Hemel Hempstead offered the most sustainable solution, and that the use of green belt land had therefore been justified.

The council subsequently asked my right hon. Friend to consider reducing the county's RPG9 dwelling total by an unspecified amount. The Deputy Prime Minister replied on 23 April, indicating that there is nothing in "Planning for the Communities of the Future" to justify changing the county's housing figure, for reasons that I have explained. Copies of the council's letter and my right hon. Friend's reply are available. The plan was therefore adopted by Hertfordshire county council on 30 April. Not too much significance should be attached to the description of the process that the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden gave. It is part of the standard procedure of delegation in county councils. Decisions on such matters are taken by their planning committees and delegated as a matter of course. That is what happened in Hertfordshire.

The Hertfordshire structure plan was very thoroughly—one could say painfully—prepared and tested. The county council came only reluctantly to the view that development to the west of the A1M near Stevenage and at Hemel Hempstead was necessary. The council afforded extensive opportunities for the public to object to the plan and sought energetically and innovatively to comply with regional planning guidance, green belt policy and sustainable development principles.

I should emphasise three final points. First, the council considered that the creation of a sustainable community west of the A1M near Stevenage justified taking land from the green belt, and, on balance, we agreed. Secondly, Hertfordshire is set to meet our requirement for development on previously used land. The latest information shows that the proportion could reach 68 per cent. Thirdly, development in the county must be guided by the extant regional planning guidance. That is why my right hon. Friend declined to vary Hertfordshire's housing figure.

I should stress that Hertfordshire also has proposals to increase the total area of green belt in the county by an amount substantially larger than the area that it proposes to take for development. The key purpose behind it all is to enhance the principles of sustainability by ensuring that development occurs where it is nearest to transport links and employment opportunities, thus reducing the need for travel and for people to depend on a motor car. That will reduce all the problems associated with indiscriminate development in rural areas that would have been the

[Mr. Raynsford]

inevitable consequence if it had not been decided to focus on a specific area where sustainable development was achievable.

Mr. Heald: Does the Minister not appreciate that in the northern part of Hertfordshire, the countryside is protected in two ways? Part of it is protected as prime agricultural land and the other part is protected because it is green belt. It is the easiest thing in the world to say, "We'll have a bit of flexibility here and take a bit of land out of the green belt and allow development on it, but then we'll add a bit more agricultural land to the green belt." One could go on like that for ever and a day, but the fact is that we would end up with more concrete and more houses. The people of north Hertfordshire do not want that.

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman seems to ignore the fact that the area of green belt in the county has substantially increased and will increase further.

Mr. Heald: What use is that?

Mr. Raynsford: Therefore his logic is entirely wrong.

Mr. Heald: What about the countryside?

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman has also ignored the way in which the county council has approached the issue, considering thoughtfully and carefully all the issues of sustainability—a concept with which he clearly has difficulty.

Mr. Pollard: Is the Minister aware that in the south-west quadrant of Hertfordshire—the area that I represent—we have more or less wall-to-wall housing and are allowing development on hospital sites? Should not other parts of Hertfordshire—the areas that we are talking about tonight—bear their fair share of the increased demand for housing?

Mr. Heald: We do not want to end up like you.

Mr. Raynsford: My hon. Friend made a perfectly valid remark and that reply from the hon. Member for North-East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald) shows an insensitivity for the concerns of people who live in the same county as him of which he should be heartily ashamed.

Mr. Heald: What the hon. Member for St. Albans (Mr. Pollard) said is true. Some areas in the south-west of the county are very built up. We all appreciate that—but it does not mean that the answer is to make the north of the county so built up that it becomes just the same. That was my point; surely the Minister understands it.

Mr. Raynsford: I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman is once again missing the point about sustainability—and he is showing a disregard for the interests of people in areas that have been subject to intensive development who want some safeguarding of green land, parks and open spaces in their areas to ensure that they, too, have access to the countryside.

Concern for the countryside is not the unique privilege of one section of the community. It is shared widely by all sections of our community, by people who live in towns as well as people who live in the country. It is the Government's commitment to ensure that we have a policy that pursues the interests of the countryside and protects the countryside and green land for people in all areas, not just those who live in the country.

I reaffirm to the House that the Government remain firmly committed to the protection of the countryside and of green belts. We are the first Government ever to consider land use and transport planning together and to take an integrated approach to sustainable development.

We have said before and will say again that the creation of sustainable communities may, in exceptional circumstances, justify taking land from the green belt. We considered that that was the case with the present proposals for development west of Stevenage and Hemel Hempstead. It is our belief that, in those circumstances, and in view of the proposals to extend the green belt elsewhere by 4,600 hectares, it was not appropriate for my right hon. Friend to intervene in the adoption of the Hertfordshire structure plan.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-three minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 5 June 1998

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Sport

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kevin Hughes.]*

9.34 am

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr. Chris Smith): It is almost a year since the House last debated sport and just over a year since the Government came into office. In that time, we have achieved a good deal, and I hope to illustrate some of that during my remarks. I am also conscious of something that my hon. Friend the Minister for Sport said, in his own inimitable way, in last year's debate. It was:

"I have attended many debates on sport—debates that have often consisted mainly of a long speech from the Minister of the day saying how fantastic everything is."—[*Official Report*, 27 June 1997; Vol. 296, c. 1125.]

I can assure the House that I do not intend to fall into that trap today—well, not entirely.

The Government have supported sport well during the past year, but much remains to be done, and I will outline some of the challenges ahead. First, I must say a few words of tribute in memory of the man who was the model Sports Minister and who set standards that all subsequent Sports Ministers seek, mainly in vain, as they would be the first to acknowledge, to match. Denis Howell's advocacy of sport was without parallel and he continued to champion the cause of sport to the end. We miss him grievously and we shall carry on missing him.

Let me also pause to offer congratulations to the England team on the first day at Edgbaston and, in particular, to Mike Atherton on his century—and still, of course, not out.

So what is the Government's role in sport? I see it as setting the framework for the development of sport, seeking to protect the interests of sport, and modernising sports administration. Too often in the past, the United Kingdom has had no coherent vision for sport. This Government are determined that there should be appropriate and clear structures in sport; in the short time that we have been in office, we have set out our agenda.

The Government's vision is of sports policy based on two pillars: sport for all and international excellence, and the two are fundamentally interlinked. We cannot have medal winners without a broad base of participation, and we will not get general participation without the inspiration from the best.

"Sport for All" is an old strapline, but it is a good one. We have looked again at what we mean by it and how to make it relevant to the challenges that sport faces today. We believe that the concept should be wide ranging. It must be a policy capable of delivering benefits to ordinary people, as well as developing excellence among elite sportsmen and women. We want to ensure that sporting enjoyment and opportunities are available and easily accessible to the entire community, regardless of age, gender, social background, location or ability.

We are taking a close interest in sport for disabled people. My hon. Friend the Minister for Sport has made particular features of his year in office the pursuit of that issue and doing what he can to support it. We are keen to ensure that the special problems that prevent those with disabilities from being able to participate and improve their performance in sport are properly addressed.

Sport for all is also an ambition we pursue for the benefit that it can bring in terms of national pride and the inspiration it can bring with success, particularly at an international level. We need to develop sport and invest in sporting talent from the grass roots up and to ensure that our elite athletes get all the support that they need to achieve success on the international stage.

At the international level, Britain has a great tradition in the organisation and running of successful major sporting events: the lawn tennis championships at Wimbledon, the British Open golf and Euro 96. Such events help to raise the nation's international profile and provide a major boost to the tourism and hospitality industries. However, I have some concerns, and I intend to ensure that changes are made.

We have kicked off on access to football, as football is a national sport and as we promised, and so must deliver, action. The football task force has produced an excellent report on racism in football. The report has been well received, and I am grateful for the constructive input from the football and other relevant authorities—we are, of course, particularly grateful to David Mellor and his colleagues. The report's contents are frankly disturbing in places, demonstrating that change is needed at all levels if the evil of racism, which has blighted the game for so long, is to be eliminated.

The task force has not been, and must not become, only a talking shop. That is why I am so pleased that the report on racism suggested a series of practical actions, the implementation of which I shall be monitoring closely. I look forward to seeing the next task force report, which is due shortly, and shall consider how access for disabled people to football stadiums can be improved.

Subsequent reports will examine other important access concerns such as ticketing, where the issue for clubs is how to weigh commercial considerations with community responsibilities. I am sure that the football authorities will be only too aware of public concern over recent price increases and of calls for some form of independent regulator. My hon. Friend the Minister for Sport has rightly challenged football to put its house in order on that issue.

I hope that the House will not too readily accuse me of hubris if I congratulate Arsenal on winning the double this year. To make matters even with my hon. Friend the Minister for Sport, I also pay tribute to Chelsea for securing the European cup winners cup and the Coca-Cola cup.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): I am absolutely delighted to learn something what I probably should known already—that the Secretary of State appears to be

[Mr. John Bercow]

an Arsenal supporter. In a friendly spirit, may I test the right hon. Gentleman's knowledge of Arsenal's successful past? Can he tell the House who scored the winning goal for Arsenal when it last won the Football Association cup—and, indeed, the double—which was in 1971?

Mr. Smith: The answer is Charlie George. There is a fine and honourable tradition of Islington people supporting what is undoubtedly the best team in the land.

We are also reviewing the list of major sporting events for which coverage on terrestrial television is protected. I know that that subject arouses strong feelings and that it is of great interest in both Houses of Parliament. I have received many representations on the matter from hon. Members on both sides of the House.

We do not underestimate the difficulties of balancing the need for public access to the major sports events that have a national resonance with the needs of the sports themselves. For the first time, the list is being reviewed in the light of clear and transparent criteria. I am carefully considering the novel solutions proposed unanimously by Lord Gordon's advisory group, and I have taken full note of comments from hon. Members. I hope to announce my decisions within the next few weeks.

Sport for all will govern and permeate all that we do in sport, as well as being the badge for specific policies by which we shall seek to widen opportunity and access. A key element to increasing participation and improving performance is the opportunity for people to watch top-level sport, which is why we believe that it is essential that Britain should host major international sporting events. Such events generate enormous enthusiasm, especially when British teams or individuals achieve significant results.

The Government are fully committed to England's bid to host the 2006 world cup. That excellent bid is backed by the lottery sports fund; it is built on the firmest foundations of Euro 96 and some of the best and safest football stadiums in the world. Government support was a manifesto commitment, and my hon. Friend the Minister for Sport has made it a personal priority to promote the bid and to join the Football Association team in lobbying FIFA delegates. I commend his unstinting efforts and enthusiasm, which I know are greatly valued by the FA and highly effective in opening doors to key decision makers across the world. The unique team of Bobby Charlton and Tony Banks is proving to be a major international success.

Our football grounds have been transformed since the Taylor report. Much of the credit for that goes to the clubs and to bodies such as the Football Licensing Authority and the Football Trust. I know that the House will want me to offer our best wishes to my hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry) in his role as the new chairman of the Football Trust, and also to place on record our appreciation of his predecessor Lord Aberdare.

One of the Government's earliest acts was to announce a new £55 million funding package for the Football Trust, with contributions from the English Sports Council, the FA and the Premier League. My hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde has been a leading figure in sport for many years; his experience and personal interest in football will be invaluable in leading the Football Trust forward. I also acknowledge with gratitude the invaluable help that the trust is giving the task force.

The Government are determined that Britain should be in a position to host the Olympic games at the earliest possible opportunity. We are keeping in close contact with the British Olympic Association to ensure that all practical steps are taken so that all the ingredients are in place for us to mount a winnable bid at the right time.

Moreover, the United Kingdom Sports Council is advising us on a national strategy to ensure that all future bids for major events are of the highest quality and that there is proper co-ordination. When that strategy is ready, we shall bring together all the interested parties—from the sports governing bodies and from within Government—to ensure that we bring to Britain the best of world events. We are, of course, hosting a number of important events in the near future, including the cricket and rugby world cups in 1999 and the Commonwealth games in Manchester in 2002.

The Government are committed to the re-emergence of Britain as a leading sporting nation. The lottery sports fund world-class performance programme gives us the opportunity to help our most talented sportsmen and sportswomen to compete successfully across a wide range of sports at international level. Each year, £35 million is available through the programme in England alone. So far, grants totalling more than £24 million have been awarded to more than 25 sports across the United Kingdom to provide support for our elite athletes competing up to Olympic and world championship level.

The benefits of the programme are already becoming clear. Following Britain's success in last year's rowing world championship, competitors and coaches praised the programme as one of the main reasons for their team's outstanding performance. Praise for the programme has also come from the Squash Rackets Association, which has stated that the funding that it received enabled the England team to prepare properly for the men's world squash championship last year and to retain the world title.

We must not underestimate the lottery's tremendous impact on sport. The lottery sports fund has now provided more than £800 million to some 4,000 sports projects throughout the United Kingdom. The first phase of monitoring lottery-funded projects found that participation by people under 18 had tripled and that, as a result of improved accessibility, participation by women and the disabled had doubled.

We have always felt that fair distribution, particularly to areas of social and recreational deprivation, is a crucial aspect of lottery funding; hence the early development of the English Sports Council's successful priority areas initiative. However, we are not standing still. We propose to bring the benefits of the lottery to more people and in more imaginative ways. Our proposals to ensure a more strategic approach for the distribution of lottery funds, outlined in the National Lottery Bill now going through Parliament, will help.

The national lottery reforms will establish a completely different framework, shifting the focus away from capital funding exclusively to funding people and their activities and access, the developmental needs of children and young people, making partnerships more flexible, and

encouraging distributors to consider how their strategies will contribute to regeneration and the reduction of economic and social deprivation.

I know that there have been some suggestions that the advent of the sixth good cause for the New Opportunities Fund will mean less money for sport. I am pleased yet again to be able to put the record straight. We shall honour the commitment that sport will receive in full the £1.8 billion that it was originally earmarked to receive from the proceeds of the national lottery. In addition, the New Opportunities Fund will provide money for healthy living centres and out-of-school-hours activities. That will enable people to gain greater access to sport, with leisure centres working with healthy living centres, and sport as one of the activities in after-school clubs.

Sport relies heavily on sponsorship, and I have been encouraged by the increase in commercial sponsorship of sport in recent years. However, there is one form of sponsorship in particular that does not, and should not, mix with sport: tobacco. In the general election and in our manifesto we said that we would ban tobacco advertising. In government, we are doing better than that: our aim is to end tobacco sponsorship as well. We will also seek to ensure that sport is properly safeguarded in the process, but we do not want our young people in particular enticed and encouraged into smoking when they would not otherwise have made that choice.

Thanks to the tireless of work on my hon. Friend the Minister for Public Health and her tough negotiating in Europe, we have negotiated a European Union directive that I believe reflects a fair balance of providing reasonable time for sports to adapt while ending the totally inappropriate link between smoking and sport. The Government are considering several options to help the sports concerned, and they will be announced in the White Paper later this year.

The Government are determined that everyone should be able to try as many sports as possible so that they can find and pursue the one or ones for them, but I am not so naive as to believe that everyone gets that chance. Certain groups traditionally participate less in sport: women, people with disabilities, people from ethnic minorities, and some young people. Sometimes, we can identify what the problems are, but, in other cases, we need to change perceptions of sport or its participants. We will consider those problems, real or perceived, closely to find how we can remove such barriers.

I am convinced that sport can be a useful tool in helping us to tackle the problems of social exclusion. Of course, sport cannot be the only solution. Social exclusion occurs where a variety of problems combine to deal some people a poor hand in life, but sport, with its demands for teamwork, discipline, personal application and communication, can teach valuable lessons that can be applied in other situations. Sport has a major role to play in the fight against social exclusion in its many forms. For example, throughout the country, community schemes involving sport have successfully tackled crime and vandalism.

In Westminster, Crime Concern has managed a project that has enabled 19 young people to complete a sports leaders training course, with 16 going on to find work or register for further study. Half of them were offenders, with 33 arrests or cautions between them. In Bradford, the Bolton Woods community centre has had 18 football teams training at least one day a week, including at-risk young people who are encouraged to develop skills and self-awareness regardless of their ability. According to Crime Concern, the scheme has helped to reduce crime in the areas by more than 50 per cent. over four years.

On tackling deprivation, the Warwick Park youth centre in north Peckham, funded in part by a Sports Council lottery grant, has sports facilities that serve one of the most deprived parts of London and has been encouraging young adults and helping to generate self-confidence.

Those projects also send a clear message that the most successful work is done where Government agencies, both from central and local government, and voluntary organisations come together to devise imaginative and flexible solutions to problems. It is such partnerships that I want to encourage, because the winners are the socially excluded in our society.

Local authorities are by far the single largest provider of sports facilities. Clearly, they are central to the success of our sport for all policy. We recognise their key role in extending opportunities to everyone in the community. We are committed to working in partnership with local government, the governing bodies of sport, the Central Council of Physical Recreation and other agencies to produce an integrated, planned approach to sports provision.

I was delighted that we were able so quickly to deliver another manifesto commitment to halt the sale of the school playing fields that schools and their communities need. When the Conservative party claims, as it always does, that it is the champion of team sport, let me remind it that it was the unnecessary sale of school playing fields, over which it presided, which set back this nation's future so badly. We hope that the new legislation requiring all state schools to seek ministerial consent for the sale of playing fields will have completed its parliamentary process by July. Alongside that, my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister is issuing new planning guidelines on playing fields so that both planning procedures and education legislation are brought to bear on the problem—a manifesto commitment delivered.

Sport will remain a national curriculum subject. Some people have been alarmed by a misunderstanding of the announcements on the curriculum in primary schools by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment a few months ago. Alongside the inclusion of an hour of numeracy and an hour of literacy in the primary school day, we have introduced greater flexibility in how sport and physical recreation are taught, but they must be taught. There is no way that schools can or should stop teaching sport.

We are encouraging local authorities to develop and publish leisure and cultural strategies to improve planning and policy making, and to ensure that provision is relevant to local needs. Sport will be a major element of that strategy.

A key element of our national strategy for developing sport and sporting excellence is the creation of the United Kingdom Sports Institute. We have always been committed to the concept of specialist facilities for our elite sportsmen and women so that they have a chance to be properly prepared to compete with the world's best. When we came into office, we found a mess. There was a broad commitment to an institute or academy, but no clear idea of what to put in it. Bids were being invited on

[Mr. Smith]

a completely unfocused basis. Our preference from the start was for a central site with a regional network built on existing facilities rather than for a huge, centralised institution. We listened to what sportsmen and women had to say, and we know that that is what they wanted. We set about creating the blueprint against which bids could be judged and a proper process for deciding the location of the headquarters. In August, the Prime Minister and I agreed a new vision based on the development of elite athletes, who will have absolute priority for the institute's services. In December, Sheffield was selected as the preferred central site.

Since that announcement, a lot of hard work has been done to put in place the funding and the structure that will make the institute deliver. This huge and important project will influence British sport for years to come. We must get it right, and we are pressing ahead. Much financing will depend on lottery funding, and detailed arrangements are being developed by the United Kingdom Sports Council. All that is in accordance with the arm's-length conventions in place. I am keeping closely involved, and the council will report to me by the end of June with clear proposals, agreed with the institute consortium, on the management structure, the form of the headquarters and the relationship with the regional network.

We owe our top athletes the chance to compete on equal terms with the world's best, and they must have access to the latest proven developments in coaching, sports science, medicine and nutrition. We all get pleasure from UK success in international competition, and we want more of it. The institute is primarily a facility for Olympic sports and minority sports that lack a commercial element. However, all sports, including competitive team sports, will be part of the institute and will draw on top-quality central services and expertise. Linked to the national network will be centres of excellence for several individual sports.

As part of our new approach to sport, my hon. Friend the Minister for Sport and I concluded that there was a need to review the way in which the Sports Council structures that we inherited were working and to ensure that they operated effectively for the future in the best interests of sport. In consultation with our home country colleagues, we have been considering the important question of how the Government should provide support to sport at a UK level in future. That has taken longer than we had hoped, but we wanted to get it right. We have made good progress in recent weeks, and I hope that we will soon be able to make a further announcement.

I was sorry to see Howard Wells go after he had put so much into getting the UK Sports Council off the ground. We wish him the very best in his new position at Watford football club.

Our review also included the regional structure of the English Sports Council and the relationship between the council and local authorities and sports governing bodies in the regions. Those key partners were first brought together in 1966 at a series of regional conferences convened by the late Denis Howell. Today's descendants of those early conferences are the regional sports forums. I am grateful for the enthusiasm and dedication of forum members, particularly since the previous Administration foolishly abolished the regional councils for sport and recreation.

The English Sports Council keeps in close contact with its key partners in the regions, and it is important that arrangements for local liaison and feedback should continue and be enhanced. We will encourage the council to review arrangements with local agencies to ensure that there are appropriate mechanisms for the voice of grass-roots sport to be heard.

I have outlined the progress we have made in helping sport since last year's debate. Much of what was promised has been delivered, or is well on the way to being delivered, including the UK Sports Institute and the football task force, and reforms on playing fields and tobacco sponsorship. I am delighted with those achievements, but sport for all in its wider sense can become a reality only if all key players work in partnership to get even more people involved in sport, particularly young people, women and those from ethnic communities and with disabilities.

Sport can motivate and inspire whole communities, and is of vital importance to our society. We in Government recognise that, and I can announce that we propose to develop a comprehensive strategy for sport. It will address many issues of real importance to people who watch and play sport, such as the role of sport in education; the development of sport for all and international excellence for the best; the links between sport and social regeneration; and the importance of sport and recreation for our policies on public health.

I propose to consult widely over the coming months as we prepare a strategy. We will talk to sports organisations, local authorities, health and education specialists and people in the public and private sector about their contribution to sport. I want to encourage people in the sporting world and beyond to tell us what can be done to motivate people to play sport and to provide sporting opportunities for all. I regard today's debate as a first opportunity to hear views on these matters, and for hon. Members to contribute to the development of our thinking. As I have said, much remains to be done. We are not complacent.

A great summer of sport is in prospect. Let me offer, on behalf of the whole House, our best wishes to our sportsmen and women, including those competing in the test matches against South Africa and Sri Lanka, those at Wimbledon, those on international rugby tours, and those at the Commonwealth games and the world disability athletics championships. Of course, we wish England and Scotland every success in the world cup finals which start in France next week. The England-Scotland final will be a memorable match indeed.

10.5 am

Mr. Richard Spring (West Suffolk): Over the next few weeks, the nation will follow a number of sporting events with considerable interest. Millions of our citizens will root for our football players in the world cup, our cricketers who are successfully playing South Africa, our rugby players in the southern hemisphere, our Wimbledon contestants and even, perhaps, the winning horse in the Derby tomorrow. This is an appropriate time to consider the state of sport and how best to support it.

I apologise to the House for having to leave early to attend a long-standing constituency engagement. I shall leave our case in the capable hands of my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins).

I must praise my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) who was the first Prime Minister clearly to highlight the importance of sport in our national life. That was also done by successive Secretaries of State for National Heritage, and I pay particular tribute to the immense contribution made towards raising the profile of sport by two former parliamentary colleagues—Iain Sproat and Sebastian Coe. I fully endorse the comments that the Secretary of State made about Denis Howell, who is sadly missed.

I am delighted that so many hon. Members are keen to participate in the debate. We look forward particularly to the contribution of that great parliamentary champion of sport, the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry).

The Minister for Sport knows my firm view that this is not an area for party political rancour. I thank him for always so courteously keeping me informed. However, aspects of Government policy give us genuine concern. Sport is an important part of the national life. There are those who view sport as a peripheral or frivolous activity: Winston Churchill apparently once said that whenever he felt like exercise, he laid down until the feeling went away. I suspect that that is not the view of hon. Members present today.

Sport enriches the lives of those who enjoy it, and it contributes to our health and well-being. It offers the opportunity to hone our competitive instincts, although, for many, it is simply fun and relaxing. It is also part of our heritage. Britain is the birthplace of many of the world's great sports, and we codified and helped to popularise them throughout the world. Sport is a binding force between regions and generations, and across borders. It is a focus for local and national pride. We cherish it for those reasons, but, above all, it means enjoyment for those who play and watch it. I endorse the sentiments expressed by the Secretary of State about extending the ability to play sport to groups in our society such as the disabled and others who have disadvantages.

I am in no doubt that hon. Members on both sides of the House agree that Government support for sport should begin with a clear emphasis on the importance of sport in schools. While sport can be played by people of all ages, it is by taking up sport when they are young that many people learn to love it, and then continue to play sport throughout their lives. Primary and secondary school sports education is only the first step in a lifetime's enjoyment of sport. I suggest to the Secretary of State that still more could be done to encourage sport in higher and further education. We need to look to colleges and universities to do more to promote sport among their students. As the previous Government identified, the best means of doing that is by encouraging links between schools, colleges and sports clubs.

We also want to support, foster and facilitate the talents of our best sportsmen and women. We want to take pride in seeing them beat the world's best. We do not want them to be driven abroad for lack of opportunities. We want a sporting culture that encourages the very best to reach their full potential and inspire others of less ability to do likewise. Those are the targets and priorities of the Opposition. I ask the Government to affirm today their commitment to those goals, and to respond to some of the specific questions about how they expect to achieve them.

Hon. Members will recall that a comprehensive framework for the achievement of the goals that I have outlined was established by the previous Government. By the time of the last general election, significant progress had already been made. The present Government said before the election in their policy document "Labour's Sporting Nation" that no White Paper had been published on sport since 1975, but a comprehensive plan was introduced in 1995 and was revisited a year later. The recommendations in the Conservative Government's consultation paper "Raising the Game" were broadly welcomed by the Labour party when it was published.

Our test of the Government's commitment to sport is simple. How far have they advanced the agenda set out in "Raising the Game"? Some of our initiatives have been taken forward, but I regret that some have not. We do not believe that the Government have materially advanced the agenda for sport in the past year. They have not sufficiently continued on the upward course that we set. Let us now examine their scorecard.

The previous Government placed great emphasis on the need for a prominent role for competitive sport in schools and on team sport. Conservative Members believe that it is not only participating that is important, but that young people learn critical lessons about winning and losing and how to react maturely. Sport thrives only if both parties play by the rules and accept the results with good grace. I cannot think of a better way of learning how to live alongside others and make a contribution as part of the team.

Essential to a thriving sporting culture in schools is the provision of adequate facilities, including playing fields. We, therefore support the cross-departmental involvement in preventing the indiscriminate sale of playing fields by local councils. That measure builds on the decision of the previous Government to make the Sports Council a statutory consultee in the sale of playing fields.

We can arrest the decline of school sport only if it has a secure position within the formal curriculum in every school. That is exactly what the previous Government set out to ensure—that physical education continued to be one of only five subjects that pupils were required to pursue from their entry into school at age five until the end of compulsory schooling at 16. PE in the national curriculum covers a range of activities that pupils pursue at different times, from athletics to outdoor and adventure activities and swimming. We revised the national curriculum with the specific intention of increasing the importance of competitive sport, including team games played in a form appropriate to each age group.

The Labour party election manifesto said:

"school sport must be the foundation."

Despite what the Secretary of State said, it is disappointing that the Government have decided to de-emphasise PE in primary schools, with all the attendant risks. Of course, we support the Government's desire to improve numeracy and literacy, but we believe that it was a mistake to remove the core curriculum status of PE. Its removal sends the wrong signal to teachers, parents and pupils alike. It invites people to conclude that sport is peripheral. The Secretary of State will be aware of the difficulties that so many primary schools already have in attracting PE teachers, of whom there is a considerable shortage.

[Mr. Richard Spring]

The Government's message is not helpful. It undermines the long-term and strategic implementation of Government policy in support of sport. It is a necessary condition of the success of the Government's sports policy that it should be visible and applied to each young generation anew.

It is not enough simply to point to schools as the cornerstone of Government policy on sport. If young people are truly to learn sporting habits to last a lifetime, we need to look at the quality of sport in schools. That is why the previous Government introduced the sportsmark scheme—a recognition award to schools with effective policies for promoting sport. We also introduced the gold star mark for schools that had made outstanding achievements. After consultation, a set of criteria were introduced which were demanding but well within the reach of schools committed to high-quality sport. It is extraordinary that the Government have declined to implement our intention to extend the initiative from secondary to primary schools. The decision is at variance with the Government's rhetoric that

"school sport must be the foundation."

It is of the utmost importance to promote sport at the earliest possible age in order to encourage a lifetime's habit of involvement in sport. The Government's decision not to extend sportsmark to primary schools will have precisely the reverse effect.

Also important to raising the quality of sport in schools is the attraction of private sector money to local sport in schools and other projects aimed at young people. In assessing the Government's backing for sport, we should look at what is being done to facilitate the flow of private sector sponsorship. We established the sportsmatch scheme, which pledged Government money to match donations of between £1,000 and £75,000 of private money. I applaud the Government's decision to reduce the lower matching limit from £1,000 to £500. Can the Secretary of State or the Minister for Sport announce today how much extra money has been set aside for the scheme to account for the expected increase in private sector support for sportsmatch?

Many sports now rely on sponsorship to stage events at the highest level and to bring into a sport money that can then trickle downwards. Sponsorship is valuable not only to the high-profile sports that attract large, live television audiences but to less popular sports that might not otherwise be able to stage competitive events. This is not an appropriate time to debate the effects of tobacco advertising on smoking, but the Government's decision to ban tobacco sponsorship of sport was taken without proper consultation with the sports involved or specific information about the cash impact. Formula 1 was exempted on dubious grounds.

The sports that will be hardest hit by the ban are not the most glamorous or high-profile. Popular sports such as angling, darts, greyhound racing, pool, billiards, snooker and showjumping will be hard hit. They had no exemption. Apparently, only very big fish can secure that. Those sports are not optimistic about finding alternative sources of sponsorship. This is a crucial question for their survival. I hope that the Minister for Sport will be able to offer some clear assurances today. The governing bodies and those involved in such sports are genuinely extremely worried about the future viability of their sports and competition within them.

It would be difficult to overstate the impact of the national lottery on sport. It has been a catalyst for a renaissance in sporting activity at all levels throughout the country and has spectacularly increased investment in sport. The previous Government began shifting the emphasis of the distribution of lottery money from capital spending to supporting talented individuals. We welcome the Government's decision to continue that policy. However, the Secretary of State is keenly aware of our deep concern about the Government's decision to set up a sixth lottery good cause under his control, which will deprive the existing good causes of money that they were expecting. The Secretary of State is taking £250 million out of sport during the remaining four years of the current lottery licence. That £60 million a year is more than the £50 million that his Department spends on sport each year.

Like the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde, we regret the Government's decision not to include sport centrally in the scope of the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts. The previous Government planned to make lottery money available to fund the development of talented athletes and other sportsmen and women. In its pre-election document "Labour's Sporting Nation", Labour pledged to fund talented sportsmen and women from NESTA. It is a great disappointment that the Government have chosen not to honour that pledge.

Labour also pledged before the election to make sport a permanent lottery good cause.

Mr. Chris Smith: I am puzzled by what the hon. Gentleman is saying. His memory cannot be so short that he has forgotten that my hon. Friend the Minister for Arts said on Monday that NESTA would have a role in the development of sports-related invention and innovation. He must also be aware of the world-class performance programme, with sports lottery money going directly into the development of talent for our elite athletes.

Mr. Spring: I am fully aware of that programme. However, the distributing bodies and those involved in sport clearly want a more specific answer on the role of NESTA in sporting innovation. That is a different question.

Sports organisations will be disappointed that the Minister for Sport was not able to offer an absolute commitment on funding for sport from the lottery after 2001. The English Sports Council underlined its concern last week in a letter to me about the future of initiatives such as the world-class performance programme for elite sportsmen and women. The programme is funded solely by the lottery and will have to be maintained for at least 12 years to bring about the improvements in international performance that similar long-term investments in Australia, France and Spain have produced.

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Tony Banks): I would like to listen to the whole of the hon. Gentleman's speech

rather than interrupting him, but I must refer him again to the debate on the National Lottery Bill on Monday, when I said that

"the Government have no plans beyond those which they have announced already . . . to alter the funding of the existing good causes. That applies both to 2001 and beyond."—[*Official Report*, 1 June 1998; Vol. 313, c. 99.]

As I said at the time, I cannot make it clearer than that.

Mr. Spring: I accept that the hon. Gentleman said that. I was here at the time. He has made a commitment and explained the Government's intention. However, he knows that those involved in sport are seeking a cast-iron agreement on that. I hope that he will refer to the issue again when he speaks, because it is a genuine source of concern on which we need tougher reassurances.

There is a widespread view that there is insufficient strategic co-ordination between the Government, the UK Sports Council and the home countries sports councils. The Secretary of State referred to the recent resignation of the chief executive of the UK Sports Council. He has publicly expressed concern about unnecessary duplication and waste in the administration of sport, and he appealed for more direct Government involvement in trying to cut through the impasse that many believe exists at the top of sport.

Mr. Chris Smith: Will the hon. Gentleman kindly tell us who set up the system?

Mr. Spring: If the Secretary of State would care to wait, I shall refer to the origins of the situation and how it has evolved. He is clearly impatient for me to get to that point.

I was about to say that the problem was not new. The former chief executive was clearly frustrated by the lack of direction to find solutions. "Labour's Sporting Nation", which was written some time ago, gave a commitment to a national strategy. The Government have been in office for a year, but today we have heard once again about a further consultation process for the national strategy. Nothing has happened during Labour's first year in office, which is why the gentleman concerned resigned. Perhaps the national strategy is like the Minister without Portfolio's famous millennium sport, surfball—all an illusion. I hope that the Secretary of State will not use the further consultation that he has announced today as another opportunity to delay implementing a strategy that so many in sport have called for.

I now turn to a matter of considerable current concern. It is perverse that the Government should have made such great play of the need to improve what they term access to sport while preparing plans to introduce VAT on membership fees for health centres run by commercial operations, which will discourage people from taking part in sport. Will the Minister for Sport explain that aspect of Government policy and what representations he has made to the Treasury about it?

Tomorrow is Derby day; the race will be attended by up to 50,000 people. It is the country's richest racing day, with prize money of £1 million. Incredibly, it is only the sixth richest race in the world, because the prize money pool situation in Great Britain is pathetic by international standards. This chronic situation means that owners and trainers are voting with their feet.

The horse racing and betting industries are among the most substantial employers in the country, yet the Government take £350 million in betting taxes and return only £50 million—as, I fully accept, did the previous Government. Discussions are under way between the British Horseracing Board, the Home Office and the Treasury. The industry is hopelessly underfunded, with its global competitive position increasingly under threat. In his discussions with the Chancellor, the Secretary of State should vigorously point out the impending crisis

Sport provides enjoyment not just for those who play it, but for those who attend sporting events and the millions who enjoy watching it on television. As well as being a form of entertainment, televised sport is an important means of inspiring interest in sport, particularly among young people. We await with interest the Secretary of State's decision on the recommendations of Lord Gordon's advisory group. The right hon. Gentleman said in a written answer:

"I expect to announce that decision within the next few weeks."—[*Official Report*, 20 March 1998; Vol. 308, c. *760*.]

That was more than two months ago. I welcome the fact that he has said again today that he will make his announcement within the next few weeks. Let us hope that it is a few weeks this time, not a matter of months.

The pursuit of excellence is essential for a comprehensive strategy for sport. Encouraging excellence affords talented individuals the opportunity to fulfil their potential, and it is an essential means of encouraging wider participation in sport. As we all know, sporting role models can rapidly popularise a sport. Labour made great play of that aspect of their policy in opposition and undertook to implement the previous Government's plans for a British academy of sport. It is disappointing, to say the least, that the Government have made so little practical progress that can be announced and revealed.

Despite the fact that a shortlist of three sites for the headquarters of the renamed UK Sports Institute had been drawn up several months before the general election, the Government were unable to announce a winning bid until last December. The Minister for Sport revealed in a series of written answers in March that no contracts have been signed for the project and, indeed, none had even been put out to tender. There is no schedule date for the completion of the project. Such is the level of inactivity surrounding the project that hardly any sports have even expressed interest in it. That is not satisfactory.

Labour's pre-election policy document, "Creating Excellence in British Sport", suggested that the UK Sports Institute could produce results in the 2004 Olympic games. I regret to have to say that, at this rate, it is unlikely to be operational by 2004 and, yet again, our Olympic hopefuls are being short-changed.

I give the Minister for Sport my unqualified backing for his efforts to bring the world cup here in 2006. The spectacular success of Euro 96 demonstrated that this country has the capability to stage a world-class tournament and it is on that example that a successful world cup bid will be based.

The Minister for Sport and I were fortunate enough to attend the recent cup final at Wembley. Considering the number of supporters there, the event passed off with good humour and self-control, which was a great tribute to those present. I share the Minister's regret at the way in which one or two isolated instances, long after the

[Mr. Spring]

game ended, were disproportionately highlighted by the media. The behaviour of supporters has improved dramatically over the past few years, and it is a tribute to them, the sporting bodies, the organisation of stadiums, the clubs and all those who have made an enormous effort towards that.

Nevertheless, we strongly urge the Home Secretary at an early stage to put in place tough measures against potential misbehaviour by our supporters during the current world cup. We support rigorous action on that. Just as England's success in staging Euro 96 will influence the bidding for the 2006 world cup, so will the conduct of English fans during the forthcoming world cup.

All hon. Members with English constituencies will undoubtedly give maximum support to the England football team this summer. Its manager, Glenn Hoddle, has an unenviable task, but one which he is well qualified to carry out. I know that all hon. Members will deprecate the intemperate personal attacks on him. We should be totally confident of his integrity of purpose, and I know that everybody present will wish him and the team well in the matches that lie ahead.

Labour made a manifesto pledge to

"work to bring the Olympics and other major international sporting events to Britain".

All hon. Members would accept that staging such events has benefits, not only because of their economic impact but because of the sense of community and well-being that they generate. We trust that the Government will step up their efforts to achieve that pledge and use their influence to build broad support for such bids. We shall certainly support them.

We note that the Minister has met the British Olympic Association and the UK Sports Council to discuss an Olympic bid. Will he give details of the Government's exact role in that respect? Will he also tell the House how much money he expects to be required to make the Commonwealth games in Manchester in 2002 a success? On 6 April, the Minister for Sport said in a written answer that the level of central Government funding that would be required was under review in his and other Departments. Will the Minister tell the House the results of that review?

I take this opportunity to applaud a number of local authorities that have put in place comprehensive sport and leisure plans. I pay special tribute to St. Edmundsbury borough council in my constituency.

The Government's performance on sport in the past year has been something of a curate's egg. There are still many problems that need to be addressed, a number of which I have mentioned this morning. However, I assure the Secretary of State of our support if, in the next 12 months, he energetically seeks to deal with the matters that I have raised.

10.34 am

Mr. Tom Pendry (Stalybridge and Hyde): I begin by congratulating the Secretary of State on his fine speech. I thank him and, indeed, the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) for their kind remarks about me. I was impressed that the Secretary of State knew about the Charlie George goal. I wonder whether the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow), who tried to catch him out, knows to which club Charlie George went after Arsenal to play some of his best football. I shall give him a hint—it is the best team in the land. He clearly cannot.

Mr. Ivor Caplin (Hove): Derby County.

Mr. Pendry: Indeed, Derby County.

I congratulate the Secretary of State also on initiating this debate. Let us hope that it becomes a regular practice, because sport is not discussed enough in the House. That is curious when one considers the interest in sporting issues here, which is reflected in the number of groups that we have. I chair the all-party sports group; the all-party football committee is very large, and there are many other groups, including a boxing group. However, nothing seems to change about Friday morning debates on sport. I hope that, one of these days, the Secretary of State will manage to get a debate on sport in Government time during the week when many of our colleagues who would like to participate can be here—they have constituency engagements on Fridays.

I have already mentioned my chairmanship of the all-party sports group. I should like to place on record the important role played for sport by my predecessor, Lord Howell, and echo the words of the Secretary of State. I am sure that the whole House recognises the great work that Lord Howell did over the years. He will be sorely missed.

I am pleased to see in their places the three vice-chairmen of the all-party sports group, although the hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins), who will be winding up for the Opposition, has temporarily left the Chamber. We have here the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Mr. Jones), who will speak for the Liberal Democrats, my hon. Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston (Mr. Keen) and the secretary of the group, my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas). I hope that they will successfully catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

My hon. Friend the Minister for Sport went on record at the time of his appointment to talk about his job description, which he said was like going to heaven without dying first. I wonder whether he feels the same today. From what he is reported in the *Sunday Express* as saying, he must feel that he is at least in purgatory and some distance from the pearly gates. He must not despair; he must keep plugging away. I have said many times that sport politics is much more difficult to deal with than the general politics of the House and Whitehall. He was right to point out in that article the limitations of his job. No Government have given adequate recognition to the sports portfolio.

My hon. Friend has had a busy, action-packed year. On a personal note, he has been able to savour the joy of Chelsea winning not just one, but two cups—an achievement almost as staggering as the size of the Labour victory in the last general election. The whole House will want to congratulate him on the energetic and enthusiastic way in which he is supporting England's bid to host the world cup in 2006, which, hopefully, will be successful. We should be encouraged by the fact that we have the finest stadiums infrastructure in Europe and South Africa, which is bidding to host the finals in four years' time.

At this point, I want to declare an interest, as a good deal of the credit for the improvements to our stadiums is due to the Football Trust, which I chair. I am sure that the whole House will want to join me in paying tribute to the work of my predecessor, Lord Aberdare, who presided over the trust when the majority of the building of our fine stadiums took place.

The Minister for Sport recently paid tribute to Lord Aberdare, stating that football was indebted to him for his magnificent contribution to our national game. He went on to speak warmly about the major contribution that the Football Trust has made. The Secretary of State reaffirmed that view this morning. We at the trust welcome those remarks and hope that the trust can fulfil the Government's wish that it remains a UK body. That ambition is not helped by the fact that the trust's income from the reduction in pool betting duty applies only to England and Scotland and, even then, only to perform the essential Taylor work.

I therefore hope that the Secretary of State and the Minister for Sport will use their good offices to help to extend the life of the reduced pool betting duty, thus ensuring that the trust can continue its essential work for British football at every level.

Before to the general election—with my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, who was then the shadow National Heritage spokesman—I launched the Labour party's sports policy document, "Labour's Sporting Nation", which has already been mentioned in this debate and was extremely well received throughout the sporting world. In it, Labour promised to become proactively involved in a number of issues to improve the quality of sports provision for participants, spectators and viewers. I should like briefly to review progress in reaching some of the commitments stated in that manifesto document.

Our earliest commitment—first made in November 1995—was to establish a football task force to represent the interests of everyone involved in football—administrators, players, spectators and viewers. One of the reasons for that commitment was a fear that the game was developing in a way which would not ensure access and involvement in its future by many of the supporters who had stuck with football during its more difficult years.

It was encouraging to see that that commitment was made a reality soon after the general election. Although the task force was my idea, I might have constituted it rather differently. Nevertheless, I welcome its efforts.

As we have heard in this debate, last month, the task force published its first report, on racism in football. I reiterate that it endorsed the Government's official policy—stated in our "Charter for Football"—to amend the flawed legislative provision in the Football (Offences) Act 1991, whereby an individual cannot be charged with a racist or obscene chant if that chant was not in concert with one or more other persons. Hopefully—I understand that the Home Secretary has confirmed that it will be—the provision will soon be redrafted to cover both individuals and groups.

Like the Secretary of State, I look forward to further reports from the task force. It will be interesting to see how it manages to reconcile the differing views on issues such as ticket prices and pay-per-view television. I am sure that we all await those reports with interest.

Another welcome development—congratulations again to my hon. Friend the Minister for Sport—is endorsement of the Brighton declaration on improving sporting opportunities for women. In my capacity as shadow sports Minister, I was able in 1994 to be present at the launch of that international event and gave the official blessing of the then Opposition to its aims.

The declaration was a statement that struck a chord for all those who support the principle of sport for all. Sadly, the then Conservative Government ridiculed that important statement as mere political correctness, taking a very short-sighted approach. I am glad that our Government have not taken such a view and that the Brighton declaration will be at the heart of all their future sports development policies.

In only 13 months, the Government have implemented many of our pre-election pledges. Only this week, in the debate on the National Lottery Bill—this is where I take issue with the hon. Member for West Suffolk—the House heard helpful responses, which have already been mentioned today, from both the Minister for Sport and the Minister for Arts. The Minister for Arts assured us that there will be no reason to believe the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts cannot be involved in sports science or sports information technology. The Minister for Sport stated clearly, as he has done again today, that his Department will continue to press for lottery money for sport after 2001.

During the past year, there have been many positive steps forward, but I have a major concern on an issue that I think the Minister will have to get to grips with and which will certainly be his priority in the next few months—the structural problems, which have already been mentioned today, that face British sport. I had hoped that the Government would make a greater impression on the issue. In our document "Labour's Sporting Nation", the executive summary stated that we were committed to a "national strategy for sport dedicated to providing excellence at all levels."

I welcome the Secretary of State's assurance that, at a macro level, such a strategy is still being developed, but we have lost a good bit of time. Unfortunately, many of the benefits from development of an effective strategy will not materialise for the 2000 Olympics. I am sure that we all hope that we will not miss out again for 2004.

It is to be greatly regretted also that we do not have more movement on the development of regional academies of sport—or whatever we call them these days; I think that they have a new name now. From the central location in Sheffield, we need now to promote regional developments. Furthermore, there is not enough co-ordination between the United Kingdom Sports Council and the home countries sports councils. Each council needs to have a clearer understanding of its role. I agree with the hon. Member for West Suffolk on that.

Although I pay tribute to the skills of Sir Rodney Walker in taking on the role of acting chairman of the UK Sports Council, and of being chairman of the English Sports Council, surely it is now time to find a permanent chairman for that body to ensure a longer-term outlook.

The resignation of Howard Wells, which has been mentioned today, was a further disappointment. Anyone who has followed his career—especially the great work that he did in Hong Kong—will agree that he is sorely missed as a sports administrator in the wider sense of that role.

[Mr. Pendry]

There is not a great deal wrong with the current set-up for sport in the United Kingdom; it is only not being effectively applied. The United Kingdom Sports Council must be allowed to perform its role as the lead strategic body for sport in the United Kingdom, working in partnership with the home countries sports councils, which will be responsible for implementing policy and performing grant distribution work. I firmly believe that they could all work together.

Parties currently engaged in infighting and introspection have to be encouraged to show the necessary good will in overcoming rather than finding problems within the existing framework. A few heads should be banged together and reminded that it is output—the extension of sporting opportunities—that matters, not internal structures and positions. We have not only to accept the current structure, which regards devolution as the basis for sports policy making, but to appreciate the strength of it. Nowhere can a decentralised approach have a greater impact if correctly applied. Such an approach can be a source of great strength for sport. As we all know, athletes take pride in representing not only their country, but their town and region.

I should like to offer a practical suggestion on protecting playing fields to my right hon. and hon. Friends. As we know, under the Tories, some 5,000 playing fields were flogged off. After pressure from us—the then Opposition—the Government gave the Sports Council statutory consultee status on sales, but that did not help much in preventing the number of fields being developed as car parks and housing estates. Once lost, those fields will never be recovered.

I think that I am right in asserting that, at the time of general election, 2,600 playing fields were under threat of development. Thanks to moves introduced by our new Government, which tightened school playing field regulations—as an amendment to the School Standards and Framework Bill—the vast majority of the fields have been saved for the nation and the enjoyment of our school children.

I believe that we can go further still and protect all open spaces—including those owned by further education colleges, universities, health authorities and the coal boards. Open spaces are the nation's sporting assets and they should remain so. We stated on page 6 of our sports policy document:

"We will end the policy of selling playing fields."

We also did not distinguish whether a public body owned the fields.

I hope that the Minister will pursue that proposal, working in conjunction with his fellow Ministers at both the Department for Education and Employment and the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions.

I must gently chide my hon. Friends on the Treasury Bench for removing physical education as a compulsory subject in the national curriculum without consulting sports groups.

Mr. Chris Smith: I hasten to put my hon. Friend right. Sport and physical recreation remains a compulsory part of the curriculum. It must be taught in schools. That requirement remains firmly in place.

Mr. Pendry: I was about to say that I want to study the Secretary of State's speech more closely, but I am sure that Ministers will note that academic success is enhanced through physical education. According to a recent study,

"students who are involved in sport tend to perform as well or better academically than less active students, even though academic curriculum time is reduced".

Mr. Spring: I want to make this clear. Physical education has been removed as a core curriculum subject. That is a matter of fact: I have read the Secretary of State's statements. The reality is vastly different from what the Secretary of State is trying to tell us, and consequently there is a clear de-emphasis on sport in schools.

Mr. Pendry: I intend to accept what the Secretary of State is saying. Later, I shall have words with him about how we can get the message across to the many people who remain confused. Previous sports Ministers had difficulty conducting a sensible dialogue on sporting matters with their counterparts in the Department for Education. I hope that my hon. Friends are not experiencing that problem. In my view, we badly need a dedicated Minister in the Department for Education and Employment responsible for ensuring that schools are adequately catered for in physical education. PE should be central to the curriculum.

Conservative Members should not crow too much. During their reign, the number of PE teachers halved, from about 42,000 to 24,000, and Conservative Governments certainly did not place much emphasis on PE teaching.

Mr. Banks: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for allowing me to intervene, because it is important to nail down some of these points before they start to circulate. The Government are convinced of the benefits that physical education in sport gives children of all ages and we are pleased that PE remains a curriculum subject, while increased emphasis is given to the priorities of numeracy and literacy. It is a core curriculum subject. There is no question of primary schools opting out of teaching PE. It will remain a national curriculum subject and will continue to be taught in all schools. The changes will give primary schools new flexibility in how to approach the six non-core subjects, in respect of which teachers will be able to use their professional judgment to decide the right balance for the pupils they teach. PE remains, therefore, an integral part of the curriculum.

Mr. Pendry: I am grateful, and I am sure that the whole sporting world will be grateful, for those helpful interventions by the Secretary of State and the Minister for Sport. I am sure that everyone in the House will be grateful too, because they have enabled me to throw away five pages of my speech. There will be cheers all round, because time is short and many hon. Members wish to participate in this important debate.

I had hoped to emphasise the importance of the work of the British Paralympic Association, of which I am a patron. I had the good fortune to go to Atlanta, not only

for the Olympics but for the Paralympics, and see for myself the inspirational work that has been done by the BPA and the athletes who performed on the track and elsewhere. I know that the Minister for Sport greatly admires the BPA's work and that it may count on his continued support.

I am sure that the House wishes Glenn Hoddle, Craig Brown and their teams good fortune in the world cup finals. Will the Minister for Sport reflect on his decision not to attend the games that our teams play? I know that he took that decision in the best interests of the fans who will be unable to attend due to the scandalous lack of tickets, but I do not believe that any of those who will be deprived would want the Minister for Sport to be anywhere other than with our lads, cheering them on. The fans would wish him to learn from this world cup for 2006, when we host the competition. If that comes about, as we all hope, it will be in no small measure due to the Minister's efforts.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is nearly 11 o'clock. Have you received any application from the President of the Board of Trade or the Secretary of State for Scotland to make a statement on the cessation of nuclear fuel reprocessing at Dounreay? A statement was made to the press this morning—again, hon. Members learn about an important Government announcement through the media. A written statement has been made, yet the House does not have the opportunity to ask questions on a matter with important environmental consequences.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): I cannot help the hon. Gentleman. A statement in reply to a written question has been made this morning. There has been no application to Madam Speaker to make a statement.

10.55 am

Mr. Nigel Jones (Cheltenham): I thank the Secretary of State and the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry) for their helpful speeches. The Minister for Sport has temporarily left the Chamber, but it is good to know that, should he be offered the managership of Chelsea, or the England squad, after the world cup, an adequate replacement is waiting in the wings—and I say that not because I am one of his vice-chairmen on the all-party sports group.

The Secretary of State made a good and wide-ranging speech, and I thank him and the Minister for Sport for increasing interest in sport in the year since Labour came to power. The Minister for Sport once described his remarks on one sporting issue as "pub talk", but he brings welcome enthusiasm to the job.

I associate my party with the tribute that was paid to Lord Howell. For a short time, I was his vice-chairman on the all-party sports group, and we shall miss him, but I am sure that the new chairman will bring his own special knowledge to the job.

This is a timely debate, with the world cup about to start next week. However, I am grateful to the Secretary of State for focusing, not only on football—although it is important—but on a wide range of sports that need Government support.

On the world cup, there are many concerns about the security in France of fans—not only British ones. I am grateful to the Home Secretary and the Minister for Sport for the work that has been done. I am not sure that the advice to British fans not to go to France unless they have tickets has hit home, and I am worried that many people will go in the hope of obtaining tickets.

The ticket allocation system has been a fiasco, and some time ago Professor Stephen Weatherill from Oxford university pointed out that the allocation system contravened European competition law. I took that matter up with the Competition Commissioner, Karel van Miert, who said that it was against the rules, but that they were running out of time. We got some more tickets out of that, but I believe that court action is still in progress. I hope that, should we be fortunate enough to host the world cup in 2006, we shall ensure that our ticket allocation system complies with European law.

I have great respect for Glenn Hoddle. Obviously, I support Cheltenham Town, but Swindon Town is my league side, and Glenn cut his management teeth at Swindon and took the team up to the premiership for one glorious season, so I have much respect for his judgment. I am not sure that he took the right decision about Gazza, but I join other hon. Members in wishing the England team and the Scotland team good luck.

I congratulate the Secretary of State: for his team to achieve the double after only one year shows the remarkable power of the job. It was also remarkable for the Minister for Sport to bring the European cup winners cup back to Britain.

We should remember that there is football outside the top level and outside the premiership. It is right and proper in this debate to pay tribute to my side, Cheltenham Town, which, for the first time in its 106-year history, appeared this year at Wembley in the final and carried off the Umbro trophy by beating Southport 1-0.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. When an hon. Member is addressing the House, he should be listened to. If hon. Members wish to conduct conversations, they should go outside the Chamber.

Mr. Jones: There was some Government support for Cheltenham Town in achieving that Football Association Umbro trophy victory. One of the players—they are still called the YTS boys—Michael Duff, made the first team squad and played a remarkable game at Wembley. I thank the Government for the help that they give to teams in lower divisions. Derek Goddard, the football correspondent of the *Gloucestershire Echo*, said that he had wonderful memories of Cheltenham Town's first appearance at Wembley. He said that, while he had many great memories of the season, hearing the Cheltenham Town tractor song at Wembley was something special. I will not sing the Cheltenham Town tractor song, but I can give the words to the Minister later if he would like them.

I thank the Government for setting up the football task force, but I would like the Minister to examine several issues. Will he consider whether it might be possible to extend the play-off system further down the spectrum of football? The play-offs are an incredibly successful phenomenon, which has brought extra interest to the tail end of the season. It has meant that many clubs have

[Mr. Jones]

retained public interest until the last games of the season. I know that clubs in the GM Conference would like the play-off system to be extended to promotion to division 3—I say that not just because Cheltenham Town was a runner-up this time and narrowly missed out on promotion.

This year, the division 3 play-off—my hon. Friends the Members for Colchester (Mr. Russell) and for Torbay (Mr. Sanders) have asked me to raise this issue—was shifted from Saturday to Friday evening, and consequently a very small crowd attended. That game was very important to both clubs and could have been a real money-spinner, which would have assisted the clubs immensely. The clubs feel hard done by and would like some kind of compensation. I do not expect the Government to provide it.

Mr. Stephen Pound (Ealing, North): I think that the hon. Gentleman said that Colchester and Torbay were in the play-offs, but I believe that Colchester and Torquay played the play-off final.

Mr. Jones: My hon. Friend the Member for Torbay represents Torquay, and the hon. Gentleman is absolutely right: the team was Torquay United. The clubs would like to receive some compensation from somewhere, so perhaps the football task force can examine that matter.

I congratulate the Government on their action yesterday in closing down Great Portland Entertainments. I must not say too much, as the case is the subject of legal proceedings, but the company appears to have taken £2.4 million as payment for 40,000 World cup tickets that have not materialised.

The English Sports Council has produced some alarming statistics about general fitness in the United Kingdom. Some 49 per cent. of women and 25 per cent. of men fail basic training to become soldiers. Some 48 per cent. of men and 40 per cent. of women are overweight. Among 16 to 24-year-olds, 70 per cent. of men and 91 per cent. of women are below the activity levels for a fit and healthy life. We are storing up enormous trouble for later life and enormous costs to the health service by having an unfit nation. I am grateful that the Government will conduct a strategy review and draw up a national fitness strategy. The sooner we get on with it, the better.

Hon. Members have mentioned the connection between crime statistics and sport. The English Sports Council has produced some remarkable statistics in that area. The Commission on Social Justice stated that young men between the ages of 17 and 25 account for 70 per cent. of all adults convicted or cautioned for a criminal offence. Coopers and Lybrand estimates that the benefit to society of preventing a single youth crime would be a cost saving equivalent to at least £2,300. We could save an enormous amount of money by ensuring that young people—particularly those most at risk of falling into crime—have sports facilities available at an affordable price. Such facilities should be free in schools.

We should make schools more of a community resource. They must be properly staffed by people who have the right qualifications to teach sport and any other leisure pastime outside school time—at evenings, weekends and particularly in school holidays—as well as during normal school hours. Last summer, I was in Hesters Way road in my constituency where I met a group of youngsters who were bored because they had nothing to do, while just across the road there was an empty school playing field where they could have kicked a ball around or played a game of cricket. We must find some way of saving the huge amount of money that we spend on dealing with crime and youngsters who are out of control by diverting it into establishing a system of neighbourhood schools where properly qualified sports coaches can teach sport throughout the year.

I believe that the national curriculum is too tight in the area of sport. I spoke yesterday to Professor Margaret Talbot, who is the head of sport at Leeds Metropolitan university. She is certainly confused about the announcement by the Secretary of State for Education and Employment about primary education. Professor Talbot is a member of Speednet, the Sports and Physical Education Network, which has a wide range of member organisations, including the British Association of Advisers and Lecturers in Physical Education, the British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences, the British Universities and Colleges Physical Education Association, the British Universities Sports Association, the Further Education Colleges Network for Sports Education, the Higher Education/Schools Network for Initial Teacher Training in Physical Education, the National Dance Teachers Association, and so on.

Professor Talbot believes that the Government have de-emphasised sport in primary schools—she uses the word "marginalised". I am grateful to the Minister for his comments today, and I shall ensure that Professor Talbot receives a copy of *Hansard* for this debate. I hope that it will set her mind at rest. It is at primary school that youngsters learn whether they will be any good at sport and where they get into the habit of keeping fit. I spoke to the head of PE at Bournside school in Cheltenham who told me that he is very concerned that some 11-year-olds cannot run around the pitch—they do 50 yards and are puffed out. That is a serious situation and we must do something about it.

Trevor Brooking—with whom the Minister will be familiar—has told me that young boys, in particular, learn to kick a ball properly at ages six, seven and eight. He said that, if he is given youngsters at six, seven and eight, he can make them into decent players. I have a lot of respect for Trevor Brooking, and we must ensure that that sort of training is available in primary schools—perhaps through the network of out-of-hours school facilities—so that there may be a spin-off for the national game. We all know that the more people who take up sport, the greater the pool from which representative sides are drawn. It is true that if national sides do well, it adds to the feel-good factor.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, although the success of national teams is important, taking part in sport is central? Does he share my hope that the New Opportunities Fund, which has raided money that would otherwise have gone to sport from the national lottery, will be available to volunteers who organise after-school clubs that involve youngsters not only in traditional sports, but in adventure training? That will help to bring about the personal development and sense of achievement that go with sport, which we

want for all our children. Such clubs will enable sport to get a slice of the money that has effectively been taken away from it by the sixth good cause.

Mr. Jones: The hon. Gentleman has made his own point, with which I agree. Participation is vital. We must increase the number of people who participate, so that we can reduce health costs by keeping the nation fit, and reduce the number of young people who fall into crime and bad habits, such as drug taking.

Other hon. Members have spoken about playing fields. It is a disgrace that the previous Government allowed 5,000 school playing fields to be sold off. At my own school, which is grant maintained, the governors want to sell a piece of land in order to build new sports facilities. Everyone wants the new sports facilities, but what people do not want, especially those who live nearby—I live not too far away, so perhaps I ought to declare an interest—is the housing associated with the sell-off. Permission to sell the land has been granted by the Secretary of State, provided that half the money is given to the local education authority. We shall allow the planning process to go on, and I expect that there will be few grounds for refusal.

It is sad that during the previous Government's tenure of office, schools were so starved of funds and teachers became so alienated because of the run-down in funding that many of them withdrew from out-of-hours support for sport. We depend on teachers, especially PE teachers, to give up their weekends to deal with school teams.

Athletics, as the Minister knows, is in some difficulty. I met David Moorcroft at the schools national cross-country championships, which were held at a very muddy Cheltenham race course earlier this year. The issue is how we fund athletics properly, especially coaches and the facilities owned by local authorities. Because of the previous short-changing of local authorities by the previous Government, many sports facilities are in desperate need of refurbishment.

Professor Talbot tells me that the new track in Leeds is to be reopened next Wednesday, following a lottery grant of £1.6 million. Good luck to all the people who will use it. That is a sign that the Government are getting to grips with the rundown of those facilities. In other parts of the country, much smaller sums are needed quickly to maintain athletics tracks.

In my constituency, the Prince of Wales stadium track is owned by the local council and shared with the local rugby club. All of a sudden, the track has been declared unsafe, so the athletes cannot use it this season. They must go to Worcester, about 30 miles away, to train. It will cost £185,000 to relay the track. The work must be done in the summer, but the news that it was unsafe came too late for the local authority, which has a small budget of £12 million, to deal with a demand for £185,000, so the track is unlikely to be relaid this summer.

I have a letter from one of the local councillors, Dr. Adrian Jackson, who states that

"only Central Government can provide the financial clout to pay for this vital part of our recreational fabric."

I hope that the Minister will consider that plea. Dr. Jackson says that if the money is not forthcoming from Government, we will need

"a rich, altruistic entrepreneur with a spare £185,000 to donate to this worthy cause".

All the sports facilities throughout the country should be reviewed to see what urgent repairs are needed and to have them done quickly.

I reiterate what others have said about the lottery being a great boost for sport, but I have two questions for the Minister about the lottery. First, the Government take 12p out of every £1 ticket sold, which I consider too much. Will the Minister have a word with his Treasury colleagues and suggest that they reduce the amount that the Government take to 10p or 11p, making the extra money available to good causes? That would enable sport to receive a little more money.

The second question relates to a situation that was brought to my attention by a small cricket club that received a lottery grant—Overbury cricket club in Worcestershire, where I used to play when I was a boy. It had to raise a large sum in addition to the grant to pay for a new cricket pavilion, but when the bill came in, VAT had been added to it. Will the Minister ask his Treasury colleagues to consider whether sports clubs receiving lottery grants can be exempted from VAT on building bills?

There are further issues relevant to the financing of sports clubs. At present, rate relief is discretionary. The local authority can grant sports clubs rate relief if they have a suitable youth policy. That should be mandatory. Some local authorities are not granting the rate relief that sports clubs need.

There should be a tax break for companies that invest in sport. Mergers and takeovers of companies that subsequently move out of the area mean that the development of sports grounds is under threat. Those sports grounds may be used by as many people as school or local authority sports grounds. In my constituency, there is the Dowty sports ground where my son plays cricket, and M and G, which has been taken over by Swiss Re, has a large sports ground in the green belt. The company, which has moved out of Cheltenham, wants to dispose of the land and has granted an option to a building company, although it is not clear whether planning permission will be granted. We must preserve company sports grounds so that those facilities are not lost to local communities if the company relocates.

The Minister mentioned the Olympic games. I wish him all the best in bringing them to Britain in the not-too-distant future. If we are serious about bidding for the Olympics, we must ensure that we develop facilities for all sports. The Secretary of State mentioned rowing. Our only gold medal at the last Olympics was won by Redgrave and Pinsent.

My attention has been drawn to a proposal for a south Oxfordshire water park, just north of Reading. I understand that the Minister has also been briefed on that. It seems a wonderful possibility, although it will no doubt be controversial because housing is proposed, which will increase traffic. Local residents will want to have their say on the planning proposals. Such a project would boost our chances of hosting the Olympic games in the future.

[Mr. Jones]

I welcomed the elite funding last year, and I asked then what was being done about the delay in awarding elite funding to British divers. That still has not been resolved. The British high board champion, Leon Taylor, was at the last Olympics aged 18, having just completed his A-levels. He still has no elite funding, two years towards the next Olympics. I spoke to him a couple of weeks ago and it was apparent that the funding problem was really getting to him. He should be concentrating on his training for the next Olympics.

As for listed events, we know that terrestrial television can demand an audience in excess of 20 million for a key sporting event whereas Sky's largest audience to date has been 4 million. We are all aware of the knock-on effect. If a great sporting event is shown on television, youngsters will be seen shortly thereafter playing on the local field and emulating the players.

Mr. Derek Wyatt (Sittingbourne and Sheppey): Would the hon. Gentleman note that with soccer going to Sky, attendances at premier league and all other league games have increased? At the same time, there are more clubs and more people are playing. That has nothing to do with television coverage.

Mr. Jones: The hon. Gentleman makes his own point. I think that he comes from live television. We shall weigh things up when we consider what he has had to say.

I move on to women in sport—

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): Does the hon. Gentleman share my concern at the decision taken this week, as a result of which once again one of the satellite channels has managed to beat off terrestrial competition in relation to Scottish football? Once again, those who cannot receive or cannot afford satellite coverage are being denied access to major sporting events.

Mr. Jones: I am concerned about that, but I do not accept the point made by the hon. Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Mr. Wyatt). The wider the television audience, the greater the knock-on effect is likely to be. As I have said, young people like to emulate the players. It is all very well having the highlights shown on television at 10 o'clock at night, but it is not possible at 10 o'clock to go to a field to kick a ball around. Some key events should be protected so that young people can watch them.

I move on to women in sport. Girls are just as important as boys. I know Zena Moran, who has proposed a task force for women and girls in sport. I understand that she has received a helpful reply from the Minister for Sport. I do not know whether he has had a meeting with her yet.

Mr. Banks: I am due to have one.

Mr. Jones: It is essential that there is a focus on women and girls in sport because there have been one or two extremely disturbing cases recently of discrimination against women in sport. I do not know whether the Minister has had a chance to examine the industrial tribunal case involving the England and Wales Cricket Board and Miss Harrild—case No. 2203994/97. I have a copy of the report and it makes pretty awful reading. I am concerned that while some members of the England and Wales Cricket Board behaved disgracefully, no one seems to have been called to account. I accept that compensation has been paid to the applicant. I should like the Minister to examine the case to see what he thinks should happen.

I am pleased that the Government are to develop a comprehensive strategy for sport. I hope that the Minister will be able to tell us about the time scale for the consultation period. Given that sport is so important and crosses so many different Departments, I feel that the Minister for Sport should become a member of the Cabinet. The Minister would receive a pay rise, and health, education, crime prevention and the environmental issues associated with sport could be co-ordinated at the highest level.

I wish the Minister well in future and invite him, when he has time, to sample Vauxhall conference football with Cheltenham Town at Whaddon road.

11.23 am

Mr. Alan Keen (Feltham and Heston): I was delighted to hear what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State had to say, along with the responses and interventions of my hon. Friend the Minister for Sport. I am delighted also to see the hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) on the Opposition Front Bench, especially as we shall be planning the complete destruction of the other place later today—a policy on which we are in complete agreement. Before Opposition Whips dash off to telephone the Leader of the Opposition, I should explain that I am talking about the cricket team and not the other place in terms of its constitutional role.

We usually start with football and not cricket in these debates. I was beginning to worry about myself as a Middlesbrough supporter a couple of years ago, finding that I was willing on Newcastle to win the premiership and for Sunderland to be promoted to it. This season has been difficult to understand. I have hated Arsenal since I was a young boy. However, I must say that that wonderful manager, Mr. Arsène Wenger, has managed to exorcise that ghost of mine. Arsenal has played such wonderful football that I find it impossible to hate the team any longer.

Of course, there is still Manchester United. At the same time, look at what Chelsea has done to us in the past two cup finals at Wembley. I still have Chelsea.

I was in the Library a few weeks ago reading a back-page headline in the *Northern Echo* about Middlesbrough's most recent defeat by Chelsea. I glanced to my right and found the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) standing next to me. I drew his attention to the headline and he sympathised with me greatly, understanding that I was a Middlesbrough supporter. I said to the right hon. Gentleman, "I knew that you would sympathise with me because I spoke to the Minister for Sport this morning and even he sympathised with me." Obviously that has something to do with new Labour spreading throughout the Government Benches.

A year ago, I felt slightly guilty when I used the whole of my 10 minutes on the Floor of the House to make an appeal for the restoration of the three points that had been taken from Middlesbrough so unjustly. I wondered whether I was really justified in spending that amount of

time making that appeal in a busy House of Commons. However, as I had started with a 90-minute speech but cut it to 10 minutes, I felt quite justified.

I make no apologies for talking about something that I have mentioned before in these sports debates. However, it provides a wonderful illustration of what sport can do when there are difficulties. The town in which I spent the first 22 years of my life lies halfway between Middlesbrough and Redcar on the Tees. I was brought to tears by a BBC breakfast news in early 1993, which contained a news item about young children in the town who were taking cars and setting them on fire. They were even setting fire to houses. A town that once had a wonderful community—that was the position when I lived there—had been almost destroyed.

As youngsters, we used to spend almost all our time involved in sport. During the summer, in school holidays, we would go to the local recreation ground. I think that the charge for using a tennis court was 1 shilling and sixpence, for half an hour. We would go at about quarter-past 9 in the morning and ask for half an hour. The charge was ninepence, and eight of us shared the cost. We knew that people would not come to use the other courts until 7 o'clock in the evening, which meant that we could play all day for ninepence. We would play bowls after that. Sport took up almost all of our lives and gave us a real purpose in life.

I was in tears while watching the breakfast news. I have a particular interest in youth crime because of the Feltham young offenders institution in my constituency.

Three weeks ago, I was the guest of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. I was back again in Grangetown, celebrating the regeneration of the town. Part of that regeneration involved focusing children again on something more sensible than crime, and that was sport. Many people, apart from those involved in sport, did many other good things for the town. However, sport played a part.

Two of the football coaches who were working with kids that very morning three weeks ago were old friends of mine. One was Jim Platt, the ex-Northern Ireland goalkeeper, who despite the competition from his one-time rival, Pat Jennings, played many games for his country. The other one was Frank Spraggon, a former under-21 England player. In this world cup year, with the team, the squad and the management setting off in just under a week's time—not me personally, unfortunately, like the Minister—it comes to my mind that Frank Spraggon is the son-in-law of Harold Shepherdson, who, as is known throughout the world, was the trainer with England with Walter Winterbottom and then Sir Alf Ramsey. He occupied that position for more than 150 games. He was part of the management team when we last won the world cup in 1966. He worked and played for his own team of Middlesbrough for more than 40 years and he deserves a great deal of praise. Unfortunately, we lost him a couple of years ago. I look forward to entertaining his wife and two daughters next month in the House of Commons.

Like other hon. Members, I extend my good wishes to the England and Scottish teams. May I add my good wishes to the Jamaican team? Many of our nationals support Jamaica and anyone who saw the Windrush film on television this week will know what a wonderful contribution those who came from the West Indies have made to this nation's wealth over the years. For sheer enjoyment, being among their supporters in Europe will take some beating.

My constituency needs more sport. We heard this morning how the previous Government's actions have made it more difficult to provide the resources needed to create opportunities for everyone to participate in sport. Even since the general election, pressure on local authorities has continued. It is easier to decide to cut the finance for sport and leisure than for meals on wheels and similar social demands that need to be fulfilled immediately. Sport, however, has long-term health benefits. The Government must get involved through the sports councils and provide the money necessary to ensure that young people have the opportunity to benefit from a lifetime's participation in sport.

Many groups are able to raise money themselves, but need the extra support which must come from the Sports Council. We need to achieve evenness in the distribution of resources throughout the country. The National Lottery Bill will enable the Sports Council and others to take positive steps in that direction. Many people give a lot of their own time to sport and they need Government-funded agencies to provide the extra push and to reward their efforts. That would give them something to persevere with, especially given that many of them devote numerous hours to sport for the benefit of others.

This week in Hounslow, I assisted with the launch of an exhibition, which involved "Kick out racism from football", along with Brendan Batson from the Professional Footballers Association. Whatever progress we make, we must persist in our efforts to ensure that racism is thrown out completely from all sport in this country.

Other hon. Members have mentioned their local football teams. I have already said where my allegiance lies, and I have often regretted it over the decades. We have a saying in the north-east that we would not go to the end of our street to see so-and-so play; I have only to go halfway down our street to watch Brentford play. Brentford has hit hard times recently. I make a serious point when I say that the fans and some of the staff are still in a state of uncertainty nearly halfway through the holiday period because they do not even know who will run or own the club by the time the season starts. It is another case in which those who depend for their livelihood on football, and fans who put much of their own time into it, are being strung along by people with, I fear, financial considerations uppermost in their minds.

We need to give priority to areas of deprivation when we finance and encourage sport, but it is also important to understand that we want sport to be enjoyed by everybody, whatever their financial standing. We must ensure that everybody has an opportunity to continue participating in sport. I am delighted to hear that it is to be part of the primary school curriculum and that children will get a good start, but I am worried about the missing links. Many people are lost to sport when they leave school because they do not find a club with which to pursue the sport of their choice. The Sports Council can help to resolve that problem. When I think of the House of Commons football or cricket teams I realise that there is scope for people to continue enjoying sport after a certain age—perhaps more slowly. When people leave competitive sport and the league system that is run at all levels in this country, they must be encouraged to

[Mr. Alan Keen]

participate in veteran sport. Team sports need organisation. We can all jog round the streets—I was horrified to hear the other day that my son has entered me for the Great North Run this October, so I shall have to continue to plod round the streets of Brentford every morning.

I am particularly keen that the Sports Council should get involved with the social exclusion unit, because sport has a big part to play, in every sense, in giving people's lives a purpose.

I hope that the healthy living centres will pay attention to diet. I was appalled by a recent advertisement, probably by the British Meat Federation, which showed a picture of a beautiful piece of meat and two vegetables, described as "Vitamins and two veg". That was misleading because it could make people believe that meat is the only food to contain the goodness that we need. I hope that the healthy living centres will concentrate on improving people's diet.

My main concern is that we should keep people participating in sport throughout their lives. If we can do that, we shall save a tremendous sum of money for the national health service over the next 10 or 15 years, which can be used for people who, because of illness, cannot enjoy sport.

11.37 am

Mr. Archie Norman (Tunbridge Wells): I welcomed much of what the Secretary of State said, particularly his high aspirations for sport in this country. He discussed many of the high-profile matters, such as our application to host the Olympics, the world cup, and so forth. Naturally, those are welcome, but, listening to the debate, it is hard to avoid the impression that we have missed the point: while sport for all is a nice strapline, at present that is all it is. Sport in this country is in decline at the grass roots—in schools and among young people—and has been for a long time, and precious little is being done to deal with that fact in practice.

The Secretary of State said that the Government had achieved a great deal in the past year. It is extremely difficult to understand what he means by "a great deal" because there is no evidence whatever of a turnround in the fundamental problem of lack of participation in sport in schools and provision of sports facilities.

Sport is in crisis, and has been for many years. There has been a continuous decline in participation and provision in schools. Arguably, our level of achievement nationally has declined, but that is primarily a reflection not of lack of provision or Government support for major national initiatives, but of provision of facilities and encouragement for kids in schools.

School sports activity is poorly measured, so it is extremely difficult to tell what is happening, but the anecdotal evidence is of continuing decline. In 1995, the previous Government published as good a strategy for sport as there has been for many years, but it is unclear whether it has been followed up. It outlined the sorry state of participation in schools sport. The figures suggest that, in 1987, 72 per cent. of 14 to 16-year-olds did at least two hours of physical education a week; by 1994, fewer than 25 per cent. did so. Does the Minister have evidence that the figure has increased?

There are strong arguments, to which Labour Members have referred, for investing in sport, not only on education grounds, but on health grounds. Obesity in this country is increasing. "Health of the Nation", published by the Department of Health in 1997, found that, in 1980, 6 per cent. of men had a body mass index greater than 30; by 1995, the figure was 15 per cent. To cut a long story short, that means that the nation is growing fatter. On all the evidence, young people are growing more obese, which is a reflection not only of dietary habits, but of failure to exercise.

Hon. Members have discussed the national curriculum and the failure to provide children with a curriculum requirement for sport of two hours a week. That is the essence of the point and, at the very least, there is widespread confusion about the Government's real intentions. That was well illustrated by the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Mr. Jones), who quoted Professor Talbot of Leeds Metropolitan university. I received an honorary degree from it, in the distinguished company of Jack Charlton—not, I believe, on account of my footballing skills.

Fewer than 50 per cent. of children in this country do two hours of physical education a week. Instead of worrying, perhaps too much, about core curriculum and non-core curriculum activity, we should be concerned that the Government have sent out a confusing message on this issue. On the ground, the core curriculum requirement is not being delivered. We are falling behind by the standards of our past—the situation is getting worse, not better—and by international standards.

Britain came 13th out of 25 countries in a recent survey on physical education carried out by Exeter university. In France, the average number of children receiving more than two hours of physical education a week is approximately twice that in this country. In Germany, schoolchildren are expected to receive, on average, three and a half hours' sport a week, which is greatly in excess of any requirement to which we even aspire and currently fail to deliver.

British secondary schools spend less time doing sport than those of almost every other EU nation. The average 14-year-old spends an hour a week playing sport and 25 hours a week watching television. That is not a happy situation. My point is not political: hon. Members on both sides of the House should recognise it as a cause for urgent and robust action. Far from spending all our time worrying about flashy events to be held on the world stage, we should worry about the real future of sport—grass roots participation by ordinary working people and children across the country.

Children are taking less exercise than at any time during the past 20 years. It is hard to understand how the Government can claim that a great deal has been achieved in the past year if that is still the case. If it is not, and if there is a shred of evidence that the trend has been turned, let us hear that evidence—and figures should be published on exactly what progress has been made in schools in terms of substantive achievement.

I welcome the Government initiative on selling-off playing fields, although many playing fields have historically suffered not from underprovision but from underutilisation. Sporting activity is not only a function of having playing fields, but of having good and worthwhile facilities with the back-up and support, especially from

schools, to make use of them. In the past, playing fields have been redeployed not only into uses such as supermarkets, which is not always unwelcome, but into better sporting facilities, which makes for better land usage.

The other point to bear in mind is that an enormous determinant of the extent to which people and children participate in sport is funding of local authorities. As we cut back on and constrain it, sporting provision will inevitably be reduced. The same applies in schools. No hon. Member regrets the focus on the reduction of class sizes—we all support that—but singular focus on it acts to the cost of other school activities, and resources will inevitably be diverted from physical education.

Much physical education is provided from discretionary time available to schools and voluntary activity and support provided by teachers. As teachers are redeployed in the cause of reducing class sizes, worthy as that is, we must recognise that school activity in and support for physical education will further decline.

School sport depends substantially on volunteers and on shoestring budgets, which is not a happy state of affairs. The Government must address that question. We did not hear a word from the Secretary of State about a single practical measure for addressing resources and facilities, and for encouraging and measuring school activity in sport. That has been further exacerbated by steps that the Government have taken. For example, the sportsmark scheme, introduced by the previous Government, was perhaps not a fundamentally important initiative, but it was useful and was welcomed by the education and sports industries. It has not been extended to primary schools or expanded and built on by the Government. Perhaps the Minister will tell us his intentions for its future.

Under the previous Government, the publication of "Sport: Raising the Game" was a major breakthrough. It is a source of regret to all hon. Members that, as a nation, we did not fundamentally address the issue earlier. At that stage, the facts were on the table, and the crisis in sport was visible. It is not clear that serious progress is being made to address the problem. In the past year, the situation has, if anything, slipped backwards.

The Minister must address measurement of achievement. It is one thing to have nice straplines such as sport for all, and to claim that we have achieved a lot, but in the business world, where I come from, there is an old saying, "If you don't measure it, you won't do it." Conservative Members want the Minister to state his measures in sport for all, his measures of participation by children in sport in schools, and his measure of resources allocated to sport in schools. Has there been progress on any such measures, if there are any? The evidence is that there are not.

We are addressing not the past few months, but a trend of the past two decades which is fundamentally important to health, education and social policy. On that issue, it is hard to avoid the impression that political correctness and fashionable ideas of what is and what is not sport colour the Government's attitude. On the Conservative side of the House, our interest is in sport as it is capable of producing a productive result in terms of learning about behaviour, team work, co-operation and competitiveness in schools and among the youth of today, as well as in the health implications.

Mr. Wyatt: The hon. Gentleman has just defined what he thinks sport is. Where does horse racing figure in that?

Mr. Norman: I have not defined what sport is and I have no objection to horse racing. I am an absolute supporter of the horse racing industry, both personally and publicly. I do not know whether the hon. Member is suggesting that we should introduce horse racing to schools or that it would have a beneficial social effect if we were to do so—I rather doubt it.

I am prepared to be plain about this. I do not believe that individual participation in individual sports such as horse racing, has anything like the beneficial effect for the education of children and their preparation for working life as team sports, particularly competitive team sports. Government policy should be explicitly biased in favour of furthering and promoting team sports in schools and among the youth of today, in preparation for future employment.

As someone with some experience of employing people, I would far rather recruit a youngster with some achievement in team and competitive sports, who provides clear evidence of experience of working with others, team work, hard work and commitment, delivering results and competing with others, than a youngster with scholastic achievement of one sort of another. In many walks of life, once a basic level of academic achievement has been delivered, sporting achievement is an effective preparation for work and encourages morale and self-confidence. Those of us who have experience of business would in many cases far rather recruit great sportsmen than great scholars. We would rather have team players from a class of 31 than people with no experience of team work from a class of 29.

To sum up, my purpose is to bring back attention in the debate to the fundamental issue. I am not here to make cheap points about the football team that I or anyone else happens to support. That is all very well and the idea that we should bid for the world cup or whatever is not a matter of contention, but we have a crisis in sport in this country and we are facing long-term decline. That is not a matter for hilarity or good humour on either side of the House, or it certainly should not be.

The time has come to address the problem fundamentally. It will not be tackled unless resources are put into it, unless there is a real and explicit commitment to sport in the core curriculum and unless we set out to measure the progress instead of congratulating ourselves on having achieved a lot when there is no evidence that the Government have achieved anything in the past year.

11.53 am

Mr. Derek Wyatt (Sittingbourne and Sheppey): Before I start I must inform the House that I hold a single share in Richmond football club, which despite its name is a rugby union club—the second oldest in the world—and, on behalf of my son, shares in Charlton Athletic football club. May I take this opportunity to congratulate both Sunderland and Charlton on their amazing play-off game last week and the fans on their exemplary behaviour, especially after the game. I am pleased to report that Charlton is once again a happy Valley.

[Mr. Derek Wyatt]

The most important area of sport and the one that has a deep and lasting impact is what our children do at school in their physical education and games lessons. That is a matter not for the current Minister for Sport, but for the Minister for School Standards. If we are to give sport a chance, we have to look again at how strategy is made in the Government. The Cabinet is structured on a 19th century model and bears no relationship whatsoever to how modern states make decisions. If we are seriously to modernise our country, we must look first at our own back garden. No FTSE 100 company has 22 board directors, as the Cabinet does.

We have one example of how we might go forward with the new Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions. That should be our starter for 10. The Cabinet should comprise only eight members and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport should be part of a brand new Department that embraces education, training, employment, tourism, sport, heritage and the creative arts.

Once again, I shall remind the House how important sport is in our culture. FIFA—the governing body of soccer—has more members, with 191, than the United Nations, with 125. If we preclude the death of Diana, Princess of Wales last year, the highest ever television audience was for sport, when NBC transmitted the superbowl in January 1996 to an audience of 138.5 million viewers. That is how important sport is in our global culture.

We shall celebrate two world cups in the United Kingdom next year—cricket and rugby union, always assuming that the Cardiff stadium is ready. In Manchester in 2002, provided we get the funding together, we will host the Commonwealth games. We may also just nick the world cup for 2006, thanks to the amazing work of our present Minister for Sport. We ought to be laying down the plans to win the 2008 or 2012 Olympics by putting in a joint bid. I propose a joint bid between London and Paris, rather like the world cup in 2002, which is to be shared between Japan and South Korea. That would ensure the regeneration of the whole of east London and would finally resolve the channel tunnel rail link. It would also create a London-Paris software corridor to rival Silicon valley. That is what sport can do in our culture.

The Olympic movement is bereft of leadership and needs our presence. After all, it was an early form of entente cordiale that created the modern Olympic movement. The United Kingdom working party for the Olympics should already be working alongside the new millennium experience to ensure its future use is compatible with our joint bid.

The Minister for Sport said last week in *The Observer*:

"We have to accommodate the political reality, but that doesn't mean we can't produce a"—

sports—

"strategy for the UK".

On strategy, perhaps I may give my hon. Friend seven suggestions. First, can we ensure that he sits as the chief executive of sport and chairperson of the new United Kingdom Sports Institute? Secondly, the institute should become the overall strategy-making body for UK sport and the chief executives of the national sports councils, who will be the sports Ministers for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, and the Minister responsible for the regional development agencies in England, should sit on its board. To save us from too many members of the blazer brigade, those members would be matched by an equal number of sports academicians, who, by their nature, would be former Olympic gold medallists elected by their own members.

Thirdly, dare I suggest it, but as regards the lottery, could we reconsider the concept of additionality, especially with respect to sport? Fourthly, if it is possible, could a new Select Committee for sport be established in the House so that the world's most popular activity is given its proper political focus? Fifthly, could the UK Sports Institute be allowed to create a new public service sports channel, funded by the lottery in the digital terrestrial environment, serving schools, coaches and all sports, including women's and disabled sports? Our most successful sport in the past 12 years has been rowing—six medals in the Olympics and 17 medals in the world championships—and it received a derisory 11 hours last year on BBC sport. Why has not the BBC announced plans for a digital sports channel and a sports website?

Sixthly, given that more than 1,000 overseas coaches from 19 countries have undertaken the internationally famous Football Association courses, we should bolster that great strength by appointing someone as a full-time worker for the British Council who could be shared with the United Kingdom Sports Institute.

Seventhly, we should take a leaf out of the sport that I know best—rugby union. I mention a club that is not often referred to in dispatches, the Penguins international rugby club, which is now in its 40th year; it is run by the same two old stalwarts, Alan Wright and Tony Mason, who ran it when it was founded in 1959. For most of its history, the team has been run on a shoestring budget; it has survived the professional era thanks to the generous sponsorship of HSBC investment bank. It has just come back from Croatia, where it beat the national side by 60 points to 24, despite the fact that Croatia is about to qualify for the rugby world cup.

When it was not deemed politic, the Penguins toured on behalf of the Rugby Football Union places such as the Soviet Union, in 1977. They have played in or against teams from no fewer than 53 countries and have helped countless young people to further their international careers. They have been our greatest international sporting ambassadors, but few know anything about them.

To show how sport can be used, I suggest to my hon. Friend the Minister that we create an overseas system for sport on the lines of Voluntary Service Overseas. We should create, through the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts, 1,000 sports scholarships a year for all our sports teams to play, coach, lecture and referee overseas.

It would be remiss of me not to mention sport on television, especially what I believe to be the role of a public service—rather than a publicly funded—broadcaster. A decade ago, the BBC stood back from becoming a core member of the first digital television experiment, British Satellite Broadcasting, which had a dedicated sports channel. When BSB merged with Sky, the BBC lost its greatest opportunity to develop sports

programming. The BBC has never understood how, as a member of the European Broadcasting Union, it could make its share in Eurosport work.

In Japan, the NHK—the Japanese equivalent of the BBC, which, ironically, the BBC helped to set up in 1945—saw its future as a public broadcasting service when, in 1987, it asked the Japanese Liberal Democrat Government for two additional satellite channels, one for education and one, hon. Members will have guessed, for sport. Has anyone at the BBC really understood sport in the past decade?

We need to come clean about listed sport on terrestrial television. Although the world cup and the Olympics have been listed, we do not have not legal rights over them—they are not owned by a United Kingdom entity. Indeed, the EBU, which holds the soccer and Olympic rights, is one of the worst cartels; it acts against the spirit of the Rome treaty, which states:

"It shall be incompatible with the common market and prohibited in so far as trade between Member States is liable to be affected by it, for one or more undertakings to exploit in an improper manner a dominant position within the common market or within a substantial part of it."

The EBU case is now on appeal at the European Court of Justice in Luxembourg; should it fail, the rights to both the soccer world cup and the Olympics will not necessarily be returned to the EBU. It would be in everyone's interests if the Olympics were shared out among all UK broadcasters, just as has been tried with Wimbledon, which has had coverage on two UK cable television channels—first Wire television and then Channel One.

As we are not giving the England and Wales Cricket Board a special grant of £50 million to develop excellence, we shall handicap the sport for ever. I do not want England to fall further behind other cricketing nations and I do not want Kent county cricket club to be unable to continue its youth policy because it does not receive enough money from its parent body.

The future of sport lies always with its youth policy; if we do not want to fund that, we must allow the market to do so. To retain the Test matches as listed events is nonsense. The BBC—a publicly funded broadcaster—refused to broadcast our overseas Tests. It is unfair to continue to handicap cricket. Listed events should cover one-off events and finals, such as the FA cup and the Grand National—it should not cover series that stretch over three months. If the Government decide to continue to maintain the list, I hope that the England and Wales Cricket Board will be persuaded to take its case to Luxembourg, where it will win, as the list represents a restraint of trade.

I hope that, when we have our third debate on sport in a year's time, we shall be able to celebrate the fact that the Taylor report's work has been extended to cover cricket, rugby union and rugby league grounds and that a national audit of sports facilities in the United Kingdom will have been instigated and completed.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Before I call the next hon. Member to speak, I remind the House that, although we have some time left, it would be helpful if hon. Members bore in mind the fact that if their speeches are long, other hon. Members will be squeezed out. I want to be able to call everyone who wants to be called, especially as this is a Friday.

12.3 pm

Mr. Shaun Woodward (Witney): Over the next few weeks, much of the nation's attention will rightly be focused on matters in France and the world cup, the excitement of which all hon. Members feel. Some 2.5 million to 3 million seats will be available and, undoubtedly, many British fans will want to be present at the matches or to watch them on television. Unfortunately, as the Government know, the tickets for most of those seats were sold by 7 May, and a number of British fans feel that the allocation of tickets was gravely unfair.

Hon. Members may have read in *The Daily Telegraph* today reports about how the 3 million seats are being distributed. Of those 3 million seats, some 382,000 have not been allocated. That number is significant because it is more than twice the number of seats that were to have been made available on the hotline in April. The Minister for Sport aptly described the hotline as a bad situation made considerably worse by a telephone fiasco.

The significance of all this is that, as *The Daily Telegraph* has shown, the 382,000 unallocated tickets are going to two groups of people: to the press and to Ministers and visiting officials from all over the world. When there has been such a poor allocation of tickets, it is pertinent for *The Daily Telegraph* to ask who of the 382,000 will get tickets because they are, for example, members of the British Government. That need not have been the case if the British Government had done more, earlier to ensure that good information was available to British fans on how to get hold of tickets.

There is a Government campaign which says, "If you haven't got a ticket, don't go." On that basis, few British fans will make the trip across the channel. Some would say that they will probably be outnumbered by the Ministers who we hear are planning to go, in some cases more than once.

Mr. Banks: The hon. Gentleman can be assured that I shall not be using any tickets in France. He is right that the British Government might have taken more of a lead, but he is talking about the wrong British Government. He should be talking about our predecessors because the ticketing arrangements were put in place some years ago. It is easy to blame the French, but some blame must be extended to FIFA as well as to the current French organisers. To be fair, he should make that clear.

Mr. Woodward: I am grateful to the Minister, who makes a proper point. Undoubtedly even we, when we were in government, could have done more. Sadly, we have not been in government for the past 13 months whereas he has. Much more could have been done in those 13 months to ensure that the information was available to British football fans to allow them to have more than the official 15,000 ticket allocation.

The Minister also knows that, sadly, it was not the British Government, in any shape or form, who decided to press for action against the French officials who carried out their own allocation that meant that more than 40 per cent. of available tickets went to French fans.

Mr. Banks: Sixty per cent.

Mr. Woodward: I am grateful for the correction; 60 per cent. of seats are going to French fans. The

[Mr. Woodward]

Minister knows that we await today a judgment against the French that has been brought by 25 Members of the European Parliament that will argue that, under the rules of the single market, there should have been more open competition for the tickets.

It is a sad day when it is not the British Government but a group of 25 MEPs, only five of whom are British, that is fighting for the ticket allocation of British fans and for the rights of soccer fans all over the world. British fans are being told not to go. We should welcome the example set by the Minister for Sport, who will not be among the Ministers who take up seats being given away to visiting officials. However, will he tell us whether that self-imposed stricture applies to, for example, the Chancellor of the Exchequer? On 1 June, *The Mirror* carried a story saying,

"Brown: Tony won't stop my cup trip."

It adds:

"The soccer-mad Chancellor will defy Premier Tony Blair's 'one minister per match' order and be at the Scotland-Brazil opener in Paris on June 10."

I do not doubt that the Chancellor, who has a generous salary, will offer to pay his way. That is not the point. The opportunity to pay their way is not being extended to most British fans.

I pay tribute again to the Minister for Sport for choosing not to take any tickets, either for free or by paying. It is a noble example, but will it be followed by the Secretary of State for Scotland? I hear that he plans to visit the world cup, although British fans cannot go. I also hear, and was pleased to hear, that the Prime Minister will, as it happens, make a trip to Paris—I cannot, of course, see any connection—on the day before the Scotland-Brazil match. Perhaps the Minister for Sport can tell us whether the Prime Minister is arranging for his diary to be a little empty the following day so that he can go to the match.

We are all delighted that the Prime Minister stands up for British sport; we would be delighted if he felt it would be right to be there. I do not criticise a wish to be there, but British fans will not be able to join him. There will certainly be criticism of the Government if it is found that any Minister is not paying his or her way or is taking more than one ticket, free or not, for the world cup. That privilege is not being extended to most British fans.

We all know where this will lead. British fans will go to France, whatever Government advertising says. There will be problems when they cannot get tickets. They will be exploited and will have to pay ludicrous amounts of money for a poor ticket, yet British Ministers and officials will not, unless the Minister can tell us otherwise, have to deal with touts who want to exploit them, and they will take some of the best seats.

The Secretary of State talked about the importance of access for all. The only all who have access to the world cup are British Ministers. All does not include British football fans. I accept that the Conservative Government could have done more to ensure that information was disseminated, but we have been out of power for 13 months now. A great deal that could have been done has not been done. Few British fans have tickets and, far worse, many will go in the hope of getting one. Either they will not get one or they will be exploited.

Access to sport is crucial. No one—great sports enthusiast or not—should underestimate the importance of access, whether it is for the elderly, children, disabled people or anyone else. Access for all is the right motto for the House.

We must consider carefully the long-term interests of sport and access to it through television. That is a difficult subject, and it excites prejudice and hot emotion. It is in the long-term interests of sport that the right decision is made about listed events.

Nothing could bring home the danger of continuing to prosecute the present policy better than the BBC's current problems of industrial disruption caused by the Broadcasting, Entertainment, Cinematograph and Theatre Union. Most hon. Members will have seen reports in the newspapers this morning that the BBC has admitted that coverage of the world cup is under threat from strike action by the technicians. BECTU believes that it can win the support of French workers in the media industry to prevent pictures of matches being transmitted to Britain. As BECTU's broadcasting official said this morning:

"There is no question that we can take these matches off the air with French support. We could also stop the Radio 5 Live coverage of all the matches without outside help."

What a great thing that would be. British fans are being discouraged by the Government from going to France. If they go and try to get a ticket they will probably not succeed unless they are prepared to pay several hundred pounds, and now fans face the prospect of the BBC technicians union blacking the screens for them.

It will be possible to switch channels to see matches, especially the earlier ones, but the problem is significant and it should be a warning to the Government when they think about coverage of listed events in the future. They must think hard about whether it is sensible and in the long-term interests of sport to continue to pursue a policy that is effectively a very closed shop.

At the beginning, it was right that only the BBC and ITV showed sporting events such as the world cup because they were the only two channels that could do so, but that situation has changed dramatically. We now have Eurosport, Sky Sports, Channel Five, BBC Five Live, Live TV—the list is endless and it will grow because extraordinary changes are taking place in television technology with the advent of digital and cable, for example. The Government must bear that in mind when they think about future access to sport for all.

At present, most people feel that the BBC and ITV should hold onto major events because watching them is effectively free. People have access for the modest amount that they pay for the licence fee. Set against that is the horror of the suggested £10 per match to watch football on Sky. I accept that, at first sight, that is a horrible prospect, but the reality is that the BBC and ITV show matches, games and other events on a highly subsidised basis. Sadly, events are not subsidised by the Government.

The Government are not handing out money to football clubs, tennis clubs or whatever else—lottery money is a separate discussion. Events are being subsidised at the expense of the sports themselves. Many sporting clubs and fixtures want wider competition for their events because they know that in those circumstances they would be paid more. They want to be paid more because they want to invest in their sport.

We all know that the Minister for Sport genuinely believes in investing in sport. There are few people in the House who have been more passionate and have more conviction about the importance of investment in sport than the Minister, but the truth is that unless that investment is made, sport will not develop or flourish in Britain.

The Government must separate the short-term interest in keeping things as they are, and perhaps playing to current prejudices, and the long-term interests of sport, which may require some unpleasant and difficult decisions. Taking such decisions is one of the tasks that Governments have to face. They sometimes have to make unpopular decisions in the long-term interests of the subjects that they are required to deal with. I believe that it is important to open up many events to greater competition. If the Government decide in the next few weeks not to do so, I beg the Minister for Sport to do the responsible thing: if the Government want to prevent fair, open competition, which means a proper sum of money going to those sporting fixtures, they must acknowledge that they should adequately compensate the sports that will lose money from that decision—which would be a Government decision—because they will still receive only limited sums from the BBC and ITV.

I totally endorse the Government's policy of access for all. It is a shame that, for the world cup, access for all means access for all the Cabinet, but not for all of Britain. I hope that, in addressing the long-term questions of television access, the Minister for Sport will take the brave decision and recognise the importance of greater competition. If, regrettably, he does not take that decision, there must be far better subsidy for the sports that cannot get increased money through open competition.

12.20 pm

Mr. Andrew Reed (Loughborough): We have heard many hon. Members mention their local football team. One of the great delights of representing Loughborough is that the university is well known for its sporting interest and the excellent sportspeople who have come from it. The previous hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne, Mr. Seb Coe, came from Loughborough. I am sure that we taught him a lot.

I agree with some of the earlier comments about ensuring that sport for all becomes a reality at an early age. The structures for sport for all during the week exist at all levels from primary school to college. I am pleased that there is a sports college in my constituency—Burleigh college. However, when people leave school, where the structure to participate in sport is around them, and go to work, it is much more difficult for them to participate, especially in team sports.

Mr. Spring: We all understand that the hon. Gentleman has a genuine interest in and love of sport. He has mentioned sport in schools. We have had a lack of clarity from Ministers on that important issue, so I should like to read him the definition of the role of sport in school. The Secretary of State for Education and Employment has said that

"primary schools will however not be required to follow the current prescribed programme of study in the six non-core National Curriculum subjects of design and technology, history, geography, music, art and physical education."

He repeated that by saying:

"The detailed statutory requirements of six non-core subjects will be lifted."

That is at the heart of our objection to what has happened. I very much regret that both Ministers here today did not seem to understand the impact on sport of that change.

Mr. Reed: I am glad to have given way to that intervention, which adds to the confusion of the quotes that have gone backwards and forwards this morning. I have asked written questions on the issue in the past few months to discover the number of hours that pupils, particularly in primary schools, spend on physical education. I have visited each of the 36 schools in my constituency in the past year and I am keen to ensure that they all provide adequate physical education. I shall not comment on what the hon. Gentleman has just said before weighing it against all the other quotes that have been chucked backwards and forwards this morning. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will be able to clarify the matter later.

There are other developments in primary schools, and I am proud that Loughborough is involved. The Youth Sports Trust receives more than £7 million of lottery support and private sector money from British Telecom. The Tops programme in primary schools has been an enormous success for an organisation that has been running for only a couple of years. It will go from strength to strength. Its annual report from last year shows that more than 2,500 primary schools had already benefited in the first 18 months, and 10,000 teachers had received additional training in how to teach sport in schools. One of the fundamental problems is that a very limited amount of initial teacher training relates to sport, and that problem is then passed on to primary schools.

I am keen to ensure that, whatever wording we use, we send a strong message that physical education and team sport plays a vital role in primary schools from the start of education. I hope that the importance of that will be clarified today, because I want to send that message.

As the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) rightly says when we pass each other in Westminster gym—not many of the hon. Members here this morning regularly join us, which is a shame—sport plays a vital role, even in the House. This is a good opportunity, with my hon. Friend the Member for Hove (Mr. Caplin) sitting in front of me, to mention the wonderful goal scored in the recent England *v.* Scotland game at Upton park.

Mr. Bercow: I accept the importance of the House of Commons gym. Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the Living Well health club—which is, as he will know, part of a chain—at 4 Millbank, is used by the Chancellor of the Exchequer and, much less importantly, by me, not for its gym, but for its swimming pool? I go four times a week and swim 40 lengths, which is all I can manage.

Mr. Reed: I am pleased that the Chancellor and the hon. Gentleman are taking part in that activity. I am sure that many other hon. Members do so. I know that the hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) will race off this afternoon to play in a cricket team. The opportunity to participate in such activities is important not only for the sporting life and health of veterans in the House, but for younger Members.

[Mr. Reed]

However, there is a crucial difficulty. In my constituency, I play rugby every Saturday afternoon. Unfortunately, my team has experienced difficulties this season because sport has not been played in schools for a decade or so. At the grand old age of 33, I am one of the youngest players in the team. I broke my shoulder playing rugby just before Christmas and I was unable to participate until March or April. I could talk the House through my injury. It is significant that there is a 10 or 15-year gap between us and those who are starting to play rugby at local schools. There is a generation of people who will not join the club, and so it is likely that it will fold in the next two or three years, which is a great shame.

As I said before, the problem is that pupils leave the structure of the school environment and need the structure of local clubs to pick them up. I worry that, if that structure is missing, a whole generation will be lost to competitive and team sports.

The social exclusion unit will work to include sport in economic regeneration, and the health benefits will be felt among school pupils and older people. Hon. Members who participate in football games have been mentioned. The oldest player in the House of Commons and House of Lords rugby team is 65, and I have to admit that he is one of our better players. He has obviously lost nothing over the years.

There is a difficult legacy. I started my political career on Birstall parish council. I was one of two Labour members, and there were 20 Conservative members, who graciously elected me chair of the playing fields committee, at the grand old age of 22. The legacy that we had been left meant that we had great difficulties in ensuring that existing facilities remained available. That was a very small local authority, with a healthy budget of £75,000 for playing fields alone. However, facilities that had been built in the 1960s were in decline. For example, the tennis courts that had been free and open to the local community were lost to individual use, which was a great shame. That process has been going on ever since.

If people travel to France in the next few weeks and stay in small towns, they will see that those towns have a municipal stadium. In Germany, towns have municipal stadiums that allow one to participate in many team sports.

A few elements are key to the future of sport. We must first ensure that we get school sports up and running again. The work of the Youth Sports Trust will be crucial in achieving that objective. I know that the Minister is aware of the trust's work, and that he has already praised its work. I hope that it will receive even greater support.

Secondly, we must also ensure not only that time for sport is made available for teachers in initial teacher training but that the importance of school sport is emphasised.

Finally, we have to build a partnership in sport between central and local government, and the private and voluntary sectors. I was pleased to hear today that there will be a strategy on building such a partnership. We have to be able to pull together, to fill all the gaps that I have described in the individual's move from school to club, and, later in life, from the first, competitive team to veteran sports—which should be emphasised.

As we have heard, there has been decline in sport. But there has been some very good news, too. In my own area, in 1995, Labour took control of Charnwood borough council. Although, nationally, local government spends about £1 billion on sport—which is about £19.50 per head—in Charnwood we inherited a situation in which the previous Conservative administration spent only £2.45 per head on sporting facilities. Pulling up our local authority to match other authorities, even in our own county, was therefore very difficult. We had much further to go to meet the national average. However, the appointment of a sports development officer has started to make a significant difference. There is also now a feeling that we can deliver decent sports facilities and coaching in Charnwood.

I welcome the provision in the National Lottery Bill that allows us to take a strategic view of the type of sports facilities required across the country. Loughborough is endowed with some great facilities, which are unfortunately on the university's campus and—despite the university's best efforts—not readily accessible to the community. For large parts of the year, those excellent facilities are not made available to the community. We have to ensure that when that national strategy is developed and deprived areas are identified, areas such as Loughborough are not excluded. Although some places have excellent facilities on their doorstep, they are nevertheless disadvantaged if the facilities are not accessible.

On a genuinely private point, I welcome the announcement on the institute of sport, as it is currently called. I am sure that the Minister will welcome my comments urging that the move to regional centres should happen as quickly as possible. On Monday, I met the vice-chancellor of Loughborough university, who is very pleased with some of the progress that has been made. However, I should dearly love the facilities to be developed on the university's campus, because we could really deliver. It is a pity that we did not get the headquarters—I still think that Loughborough is the best place for it—but I accept that the decision has already been made. Nevertheless, we may come out of it much better, because we will have the regional centre, and will get a lot more money out of it.

I hope that the Minister will take on board those comments on the centres.

12.32 pm

Mr. Robert Syms (Poole): It can be profoundly shocking for most hon. Members—who are very politically inclined—to discover that most of our constituents think that sport is far more important than politics. I am sure that we have all spent Saturday afternoons regretting that we are knocking on doors at a particular point in the calendar. However, most of my constituents who watch Question Time in this place consider it a form of sport, and rather enjoy the spectacle of events in the Chamber.

Sport is an important subject, and it is a pity that we do not debate it more often. It is vital to the health of our nation that we engage in sport. On 27 June 1997, the Secretary of State stated that 48 per cent. of men and 40 per cent. of women are overweight. That cannot be a good thing. Sport is vital to the morale not only of our nation—to the various nations of the United Kingdom

—but also of our communities. It builds teamwork, discipline and confidence, which lead to better performance in other pursuits.

I have always been struck that, sometimes, people at school who are not the most academically inclined have good confidence when leaving school and going into work—throughout life—if they find a sport in which they excel.

The previous Government's record on sport was pretty good because the Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major), took sport very seriously. I am glad that sport has moved up the political agenda on both sides of the Chamber. In his years on the Opposition Benches, the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry) did much to promote sport. I also associate myself with the comments about Denis Howell, who was an excellent Sports Minister—and is fondly remembered as the Minister for rain. He is the only person who could be appointed one week and have it rain the next. He was a substantial character in the House.

In 1995, my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon promoted "Raising the Game", with its 15-point plan. It made an important proposal that Ofsted should look into what happens in sport and ensure that governing bodies report on sport in their annual reports. The national lottery was one of the most important aspects of what the previous Government did. It is fashionable to kick Camelot and the national lottery, but the lottery is extremely successful—the most successful in the world. It was up and running quicker than anyone expected, raising far more money than anyone expected for a range of good causes, including sport.

Mr. Spring: Did my hon. Friend notice that the Minister for Sport made an intervention on financing of sport by the lottery, repeating what he had said during consideration of the National Lottery Bill? On Report, the Minister said that

"the Government have no plans beyond those which they have announced already . . . to alter the funding of the existing good causes"—[*Official Report*, 1 June 1998; Vol. 313, c. 99.].

Does my hon. Friend agree that Sir Humphrey Appleby is alive and well? Is this not in contrast to the firm pledge in "Labour's Sporting Nation" that sport would be a permanent good cause? He has reneged on that.

Mr. Syms: I noticed the Minister's comments, and I agree with my hon. Friend's telling point.

Of course, with all these things one has a debate and double counting, but it is a pity that, as I believe, the Government have started to move funds away from sport through the lottery, because they are rifling the lottery and directing money into many other areas.

Mr. Spring: In that vein, the Secretary of State made an interesting comment about the role of NESTA being paid for from the lottery. NESTA may indeed provide some money for work on sports science and sports medicine, but the Secretary of State did not say that this was a matter of discretion for NESTA's chairman and board. That is obviously at odds with the Labour party's commitment, made before the general election, that it would not fund the development of athletes in that way. That is another broken pledge.

Mr. Syms: I am glad that my hon. Friend brought that important point to my notice, because it had escaped my attention. He made a telling point, and I hope that the Minister will make a detailed response to it.

It is a pity that the new Government dropped the sportsmark for primary schools. We had some debate about the impact of the proposals by the Secretary of State for Education and Employment regarding PE as a core curriculum element in primary schools. To enable me to know the exact position when I attack the Government next week, perhaps the Minister will circulate us with a letter of what he considers to be the exact position on PE in primary schools.

Mr. Bercow: A signed confession.

Mr. Syms: Indeed. I believe that the Government have promoted things in that area as well as they could.

Playing fields were mentioned. It is right and proper that we do our best to maintain playing fields. However, as I served on a county council for several years, I know that, in many instances, playing fields are badly drained and can be used for only part of the year. I know of many schemes whereby part of a playing field has been sold, and the money spent on all-weather pitches, which are used much more intensively by children in the school. It is not necessarily accurate just to quote the number of playing fields that have gone. In many instances, local authorities have done their best to get the best value that they can and the best sporting facilities for their children.

I welcome the establishment of the United Kingdom Sports Institute, but I think that progress has been far too slow. It was originally intended to be a springboard for the Sydney Olympics, and I hope that the Government will speed up progress not only in Sheffield but on the regional centres. I hope also that team sports will retain an important place within the institute. Small and minor sports are important, but the process should pay due regard to team sports such as rugby, cricket and football.

It is important to promote sport in education. We are all aware of the recruitment problems facing the Army because of the general standard of physical education among school leavers. We must substantially improve sport provision in the early years. Sponsorship is very important. Last year, £320 million in sponsorship went into sport, so it is a vital area. As a member of the Health Committee, I think that it is sensible to move away from tobacco sponsorship, over time. However, we should remember that formula one—which is a sport—is a £1 billion industry which employs many people. The sport is very successful in the United Kingdom and we should not take it for granted. Many people throughout the world follow formula one and it makes a tremendous impact.

Horse racing was mentioned earlier in the debate, and it is also widely supported. I think that one can underestimate the value to the British economy of investment by foreign owners of horses. They create employment, and their investment is vital to this nation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Woodward) referred to the crown jewels and listings. It is important that those sports that do not have the ability to sell to the highest bidder are compensated so that they may have seedcorn money for development.

[Mr. Syms]

We have a tremendous record in the disabled Olympics. I think it is a great pity that, in the past 12 months, the House voted to prevent disabled .22 calibre pistol shooters from continuing their sport. I remember clearly the Division on that issue.

I shall not speak for too much longer as many hon. Members wish to participate in the debate. In his speech on 27 June 1997, the Minister for Sport said:

"My role is to serve as the long-stop, for those who are cricketers, or as the sweeper, for those interested in soccer. I see myself as perhaps the Ruud Gullit of the Government team".—[*Official Report*, 27 June 1997; Vol. 296, c. 1125.]

I hope that, when there is a reshuffle and the Minister renegotiates his contract, he will not pitch too high as I would be delighted to see him on the Front Bench replying to sports debates for the foreseeable future—at least until the next general election.

12.42 pm

Mr. Ivor Caplin (Hove): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough (Mr. Reed) on scoring the first goal in our game against Scotland. I am disappointed that my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Murphy) is not present today. I specifically asked him to join us for the sports debate so that I could once again talk him through my winning goal for England in the Members of Parliament game against Scotland.

Mr. Pound: It was you.

Mr. Caplin: Yes. That game proved that people of a more senior age can play a little football occasionally.

I have served on Committees with the hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Woodward) and I thought that he was a reasonable man, but I am afraid that I found his speech today carping and unnecessary. It did not address the question of sport, but was more about whether Ministers will go to the world cup. This is a Government debate on sport as a whole, and I am afraid that his speech today rather let the side down.

Mr. Woodward: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman is so ungracious in his remarks—that is uncharacteristic behaviour. Does he genuinely believe that several hundred thousand British fans wanting to see football matches in France is of no significance when the Government are trying to promote a policy of access for all?

Mr. Caplin: The hon. Gentleman should have waited, as I shall speak briefly about the forthcoming world cup. The ticket allocation has been a scandal, but that is partly down to the role of FIFA and the French organisers. The hon. Gentleman's attacks on the Government were unnecessary. The Government are rightly telling people to stay at home, so that the world cup is peaceful and successful. I hope that that is what all hon. Members want.

When the hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) gets together with my hon. Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston (Mr. Keen) to discuss the House of Commons cricket team, I hope that, notwithstanding the England game that afternoon, I will get the chance to bash the Lords around the Oval. I can think of nothing more enjoyable to do for a whole Monday.

Mr. Hawkins: I can tell the hon. Gentleman that we have had our meeting and he need have no worries.

Mr. Caplin: There is nothing like selection from the Dispatch Box.

To return to the world cup, this has been a delightful debate, because for three hours and 10 minutes we have not mentioned those five letters. I am sure that the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) will be delighted to say more about Gazza, who I believe lives in his area.

Mr. Bercow: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making that observation, but as far as I am aware, Gazza is not one of my constituents. If I am blissfully ignorant of his presence, I apologise to the House and to Gazza.

Mr. Banks: The hon. Gentleman cannot remember.

Mr. Caplin: I agree. I believe that Glenn Hoddle made exactly the right decision on the England team, and I hope that it goes on to win the world cup on 12 July. I disagree with the views expressed by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State this morning in only one respect: I do not extend the same strong good wishes to Scotland as I do to England.

I shall deal with an important issue that has impacted on many thousands of my constituents over past years, and has recently resulted in my local authority receiving more than 42,000 representations on the matter of Brighton and Hove Albion football club. Many of my hon. Friends in particular will be aware of the problems that the club has had since its ground was unceremoniously sold by a former chairman and, I regret to say, the Liberal Democrat Member for Eastbourne in a previous Parliament, who tore the ground away from the supporters and left the club homeless. That meant that we had to play in Gillingham this year, a 150-mile round trip for supporters.

Recently, the local authority approved a planning application for the club to return to Brighton, so we hope that this autumn Brighton and Hove Albion will be coming home. The planning application has been approved for the sharing of an athletics stadium north of Brighton. Last September, many of my hon. Friends joined me in playing at that stadium, when unfortunately we lost to the national press by seven goals to four in an enjoyable game before the Labour party conference.

It will be an important event when the local authority meets a week today to finalise a decision on Brighton and Hove Albion. Those few NIMBYs who live around the area of the stadium have objected and made representations to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. I am confident that he will find no grounds to call the matter in, but perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister will deal later with the question whether there should be special regulations for football clubs, notwithstanding the work done by the previous Government on PPG17.

The task force could look into the possibility of a more sympathetic planning process for football, cricket and rugby union clubs that want to develop better facilities in their communities. Had that existed, the Secretary of State

would not even have entertained the suggestions made by some local residents. I hope that, in the next few weeks, my right hon. Friend will support the many, not the few, in Brighton and Hove.

I wish to talk about sport generally, but particularly about the 2006 bid, which is important to England especially. The bid is widely supported by the Government and all parties, especially the English Sports Council, which contributes a significant sum from the lottery to the Football Association's fighting fund.

Over the past year, I have enjoyed the work of the all-party football group, under the chairmanship of my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton), who is not in the Chamber. My hon. Friend has kept the group very much at the forefront of the agenda for world cup 2006, culminating a month or so ago—my hon. Friend the Minister for Sport was present—with a presentation to Members of the bid by Geoff Hurst and Garth Crooks. It is important to recognise the role that we as Members can play in delivering that bid for England in 2006.

The partnership goes much wider than Members. Some major British companies are now onside, including British Airways, Marks and Spencer, the Nationwide building society and Umbro. They are supporting the 2006 bid. I take on board what my hon. Friend the Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Mr. Wyatt) said about next year's world cups in the United Kingdom in both cricket and rugby union. We hope that those events will be a successful way forward to the football world cup in 2006.

I welcome, as I am sure do many of my hon. Friends, the conversion on the road to Damascus of the Conservatives on school playing fields. Never has there been quite as much hypocrisy as we heard this morning from the Conservative party. The Conservatives sold playing field after playing field for 18 years. The Labour Government have introduced new regulations. I am delighted to receive the support of Conservatives, but we cannot forget what happened during their 18 years in office.

Mr. Hawkins: The hon. Gentleman will know that a number of Conservative Members spent many years, both before and since coming into the House, campaigning to keep school playing fields. Will he recognise that many of the sales of school playing fields were carried out by Labour local authorities? The Labour party does not have a monopoly of virtue on this matter.

Mr. Caplin: I am grateful for that intervention. However, it is a Labour Government who have introduced new regulations that will make it that much more difficult for playing fields to be sold. I recognise that there are Conservative Members who campaigned long and hard, as the hon. Gentleman said, and I recognise his particular contribution.

I wanted to comment to my hon. Friend the Minister for Sport, who has changed his persona briefly, about the possibility of regulating football. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State touched on the matter this morning. We must recognise, however, that if football cannot regulate itself through the Football Association and/or through the Football League, it will need some Government intervention to stop, for example, the disgraceful hikes in ticket prices that we are seeing in the premier league. I hope that the FA will take on board what is being said about that issue and the various reports that it has commissioned, and start the proper regulation of football.

I welcome the announcement made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State about a sports strategy. I think that that will provide a good debate for the House and I look forward to contributing to it. I hope that we shall have a wide-ranging debate that will impact on women in sport. It is rather disappointing that, with the exception of my hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Janet Anderson), who has just arrived in the Chamber, no women Members have contributed to the debate.

I tabled an early-day motion on the MCC vote and its refusal to admit women. Women have an important role to play. As sports lovers, we all have an important role in trying to develop the role of women in sport. Conservative Members, many of whom may be MCC members, might like to tell us how they voted on women membership. I am especially disappointed that the shadow Secretary of State, the hon. Member for East Surrey (Mr. Ainsworth), only five days into his appointment, has chosen not to be with us today. If he had been present, I could have asked him directly how he voted in the MCC ballot. I do not know whether the hon. Member for Surrey Heath can answer that when he makes his speech. The 1994 Brighton declaration on women in sport has played a crucial part in taking sport forward for all. That is the Government's aim, and I very much welcome it.

12.54 pm

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): I am grateful for the opportunity to make a brief contribution to this debate. First, I declare an interest—I am an amateur enthusiast for sport. I recognise and respect the distinguished sporting record of the hon. Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Mr. Wyatt). I do not suggest for a moment that I could compete with it, and I am conscious that other right hon. and hon. Members, whether present today or not, can boast of great sporting accomplishments. My background in sport is threefold: I have been a fan of Arsenal football club since January 1971; I am a keen swimmer, and swim four times a week at the Living Well health club, where 40 lengths is as much as I can manage; and, for the past 15 years, I have been a qualified tennis instructor.

I respect the enthusiasm and commitment of the Minister for Sport. Nobody doubts that; indeed, it is widely acknowledged. The debate between us is not about objectives; it is about outcomes. I wish to focus on four particular concerns. The first is that of the effective abolition of physical education as part of the core curriculum in primary schools. There has been an attempt to misrepresent the truth of what has transpired in recent times. That misrepresentation was eloquently exposed by my hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring), but it is important to be specific about what happened.

On 13 January this year, the Secretary of State for Education and Employment declared that physical education would no longer be part of the core curriculum in primary schools. That physical education should still be taught is a quite different point. There has been a change—the Government's intention now is, supposedly, to concentrate on what are considered to be core subjects and not on physical education.

I happen to believe—I think that the view is widely shared by people of all political persuasions and of none—that, however well intentioned, that judgment is

[Mr. John Bercow]

mistaken and short sighted, for the simple reason that if children play less sport in schools, they are likely to have less incentive to play much sport outside schools. As the late Enoch Powell would have said, that is so blindingly obvious that only an extraordinarily clever person could fail to see it. That is what will result from the change that has taken place. Moreover, it is out of kilter with the Labour party's position in opposition.

Labour's document, "Labour's Sporting Nation", published on 24 April 1997—precisely a week before the general election—said that the national curriculum made inadequate provision for physical education. The Minister will correct me if I am wrong, but I believe that that statement was made on page 8 of that document. Even given the fondness for misrepresentation that has come to characterise those who specialise in spin on the Government Benches, the Minister is not in a position to dispute the argument. That is the evidence of the change in position—a change for the worse—undertaken by the Government since they came to office.

Most people think that it is a change for the worse. The Central Council of Physical Recreation and the National Association of Head Teachers, to name just two organisations, are united in recommending that children in primary schools should undertake at least two hours of physical education a week.

Mr. Caplin: The hon. Gentleman has mentioned the CCPR. Under the heading "Labour's Manifesto Commitments", it has stated:

"The government is to be congratulated on its endeavours so far."

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made that point this morning.

Mr. Bercow: I am interested that the hon. Gentleman should intervene on that point, though it is supremely unwise of him, first, because the CCPR and the NAHT have recommended a minimum time to be spent on physical education, and it is a minimum which is not being met by the Government, and, secondly, because the need is extremely pressing—primary schoolchildren in Germany spend three and a half hours a week on physical education and in France the figure is three hours. Until recently, the figure in the United Kingdom was one and a half hours. As a specific consequence of the change of stance undertaken by the Government, the hon. Gentleman cannot gainsay that there is no minimum time requirement for primary school children to spend on physical education.

As the hon. Gentleman has chosen, rather unwisely, to invoke the CCPR in support of his argument, I must indulge myself a little further and quote Mr. David Oxley, the chairman of its executive committee—I recognise the hon. Gentleman's pain, but he must reckon with it. It is documented world wide that young people of primary school age who receive regular physical exercise perform better in key subject areas such as reading and arithmetic. If he will forgive me, it is game, set and match to the Opposition on this point. The Government stand exposed as having broken their promise and betrayed trust. They are letting down the children of this country. I hope, even at this stage, that they will reconsider their position.

My second point, which, regrettably, is also critical of the Government, follows that of my hon. Friend the Member for Poole (Mr. Syms) and relates to the previous Government's sportsmark scheme, introduced in secondary schools in October 1996. Its objective was to ensure recognition for schools that provided high-quality physical education and sports programmes. As the Minister will doubtless acknowledge, the enthusiasm that schools showed for the scheme is reflected in the fact that, within two months, 471 had applied for sportsmarks, which were organised and administered by the English Sports Council. There were 133 applications for the sportsmark gold award.

The idea that there was no take-up, little enthusiasm and disaffection with what the previous Government were doing simply does not hold water, and I hope that the Minister will not attempt to argue such a case. The scheme was good; doubtless, it could have been improved, but surely, in the light of the enthusiasm expressed for it, it would have been sensible for the Government to consider its extension to primary schools. It is regrettable that they have failed to do so, and I ask him, with all the politeness at my command, to reconsider his decision.

The third area of concern, especially for Conservative Members, is the lamentably slow progress on the United Kingdom Sports Institute. There is cross-party agreement that it is a good idea, and I do not doubt the Minister's commitment to it, but the Government cannot, in all seriousness, be congratulated on their record, which is deficient.

Mr. Reed: Will the hon. Gentleman comment on the delays caused before the general election by the previous Government, even in shortlisting the three bids? They left the Government with the mess of a British academy of sport that no one knew what to do with.

Mr. Bercow: I accept part of the hon. Gentleman's criticism, but not all of it. If he is saying that there was too much delay before the election, I readily concede that. I was frustrated by the delay, but I do not accept the charge that a great mess was left. Certainly, we were too slow; it should have been dealt with, and it is regrettable that it was not attended to properly. The difference is that we Conservatives have no difficulty in acknowledging that mistakes were made. The lickspittles on the Government Back Benches are interested only in always, everywhere and without exception slavishly adhering to the Government's official line.

The truth is that, in February 1997, the previous Government drew up a shortlist of three contenders for the British academy of sport. When the new Government came into office, they indicated that a decision would be made soon. Indeed, on 27 June last year, the Minister for Sport said, in column 1126 of *Hansard* if I remember rightly, that he hoped a decision would be reached soon—I hope the hon. Gentleman enjoys having his words quoted at him. He hoped that it would certainly be by the end of "August or September".

Mr. Wyatt *rose—*

Mr. Bercow: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman with great pleasure, if he wishes to intervene.

Mr. Pound: What is his home phone number?

Mr. Wyatt: Ex-directory. Will the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) note that the delay was caused

during the previous Government because the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) was the only person left in that Government who wanted a single national United Kingdom institute for sport? The then Minister for sport did not. That is why there was the delay. The whole of the sporting world wanted what we have delivered.

Mr. Bercow: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for intervening, but, unfortunately, once again he makes a poor point, for two reasons. The first is that if it was not going to be feasible to have a decision until December 1997, why did the Minister for Sport, whose words we should be able to take as an indication of what the Government would do, say that it would be reached by the end of August or September? That was utterly misleading, although I do not suggest for one moment, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that it was deliberately so. The Government simply failed to deliver. They were feeble and incompetent. They beat about the bush and they did not get things done. That is why we say, "Stop messing around and get on with the job."

The second reason why the hon. Gentleman's intervention was unfortunate is that he referred to the Government's objective of having regional centres. In view of the alleged centrality to the Government's whole thinking on the subject of regional centres as opposed to a centralised mass, why is it that, after all these months, we have still not had an announcement of the sites for the regional centres? Believe it or not, it is now 5 June 1998 and it is six months since the announcement, but the Minister for Sport is sitting there apparently without embarrassment at the continued delay.

There is a third objection to the Government's position. Despite the mealy-mouthed rhetoric that they deploy in self-defence, they do not intend that competitive team sports will have a big role to play in the new UK Sports Institute. Many people in the sporting community believe that that is wrong. I simply invite the Minister in all humility to reflect on the possibility that he has got it wrong. There is no shame in the Minister making a mistake, but only in failing to recognise the possibility—the mere possibility—of having done so.

Mr. Banks: I am more than ready to apologise if I think that I have made a mistake. On this occasion, I have not. It is a matter for consultation and we are listening. We believe, as do the sports bodies, that team sports such as football, rugby and cricket should have their own sport-dedicated academies and that is something that the Government are supporting them in establishing.

Mr. Bercow: Unfortunately, there comes a point when the listening has to stop and the decision making has to start. As far as this Government are concerned and reaching the destination of establishing regional centres, the analogy has to be with Kafka and "The Castle", where for every step that the main character thinks he is taking towards it, he seems in the end to be going one step further away.

The Minister is right to say that listening has to take place and I do not cavil at that. Ultimately, however, decisions must be made and announcements given, and progress must take place. None of those things has happened since the election and that is a source of regret. The hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Pound) is chuntering from a sedentary position for all the world as though he were the village idiot, but I shall seek not to be distracted by his burblings.

Mr. Pendry: My hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough (Mr. Reed) was right on both counts. Many months before the general election, we were urging the then Minister for sport to discuss the institute across the party divide—he refused to do so until the very morning that the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) went to Buckingham palace to ask that Parliament be dissolved. That is why my hon. Friend the Minister for Sport was left with such a great mess to clear up—no doubt very early on he believed that it could be cleared up.

Mr. Bercow: I have the highest respect for the hon. Gentleman, but that is not my recollection. Before I was selected as the prospective Conservative parliamentary candidate for Buckingham, I briefly served as special adviser to the Secretary of State for National Heritage and worked regularly with the former Minister for Sport, Iain Sproat, who has immense regard for the hon. Gentleman's integrity and judgment, as he probably already knows.

Mr. Pendry *rose—*

Mr. Bercow: I shall give way once more before I make my final point.

Mr. Pendry: For the record, I have the same feeling for the former Minister for sport. However, he admitted on Radio 5 that my account of events was correct.

Mr. Bercow: I shall not comment on a radio interview that I did not hear, especially as I am coming to the conclusion of my speech. Suffice it to say that the Government have had 13 months in which to make progress—it simply will not wash for the hon. Gentleman to try to extricate them from their difficulties by praying in aid a radio debate that he had with the former Minister for sport. The Government have the power, they have the limousines, they are drawing the salaries, so theirs is the responsibility, which the Minister for Sport must now discharge.

Mr. Pound: I was waiting for this little volley across the net to end before I responded to the hon. Gentleman's untypically ungracious comment about village idiots. In the village where my ancestors lived, the third most stupid person was undoubtedly the village idiot. The second most stupid person was the poundkeeper, who had to lock up the pigs that strayed from the common ground—that was an honourable job, and I accept the title. The most stupid person was known as a Bercow, a word that was usually abbreviated to its first four letters.

Mr. Bercow: The hon. Gentleman has a well-established and well-deserved reputation for wit and invective but, whereas the first two parts of his story were good, the conclusion was lamentably predictable and unoriginal. I am disappointed with him, but I hope that, in the future, he can improve on his sporting performance.

A number of people have expressed concern to me about sailing. The Secretary of State has tried to reassure the House that lottery funding for sport would be

[Mr. Bercow]

maintained and that previous commitments would be kept—we wait to see whether that will be the case. I invite the Minister to acknowledge that there is real concern that lottery funding for some sports could go into decline.

Sports clubs are deserving recipients of lottery funding for two reasons: first, they are good at providing the matching funds that are required, and, secondly, they are effective in raising funds to meet their running costs. The main problem that they face is that too few of their applications are accepted. The Royal Yachting Association is concerned that funds could be cut and that, if they are, many recreational sailors will suffer. Edmund Whelan, the association's legal and Government affairs manager, wrote in a letter dated yesterday, of which I have a copy, that top-class competitors are worried about world-class performance funding. Such competitors contend, and I think that the Minister will agree, that that funding has given a tremendous boost to our top sailors. It delivers excellent value for money. I would welcome a reassurance from the Minister for Sport today that they have no reason whatever to fear that that funding will either cease or be reduced.

The serious concerns that I have expressed are widely shared and were highlighted by other hon. Members. I ask the Minister for Sport to respect the fact that those concerns exist, to listen to them and to seek in his policies to address them. If he does, I for one, in the spirit that should characterise debate on this vital subject, will say, "Well done and three cheers"—but he has a long way to go.

1.14 pm

Mr. Graham Stringer (Manchester, Blackley): I declare an interest as a non-fee-earning director of the committee that will organise the Commonwealth games in Manchester in 2002. I shall return to that project.

I welcome the Secretary of State's comprehensive speech, which rested on three legs. He said that grass-roots sport would be supported, that elite competitive sport would be supported and—importantly, because it is often forgotten—that our country's ambition to host major international sporting events would be supported. Many hon. Members have said, in many different ways, that sport is important to people's individual development, to health and to the economy. Sport has for too long played the Cinderella role.

Many people have been looking back to 1966, which is becoming a date better known by schoolchildren than 1066. The Government's financial commitment to the world cup then was a mere £800,000. Taking away the money distributed via the Sports Council, that was the only major Government support for sport until Manchester's 1992 bid to host the Olympic games in 2000. The then Prime Minister announced £55 million for that bid, and I pay tribute to him for putting sport further up the agenda.

During that time, a bid for the Commonwealth games by Leeds, bids for the Olympics by Birmingham and Manchester and bids to host many prestigious world championships and major events had gone without Government support. It is important to acknowledge that that has changed and to welcome the Secretary of State's statement.

I should like to take issue with the hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells (Mr. Norman). I do not deny the first part of what he said. There are no longer the facilities for sport for young people that used to exist. Like many Conservative Members, he has forgotten the reason. As someone who had some influence in running a local authority, I know that sports facilities are not as they used to be because the people responsible for local authorities were faced with grants being cut viciously year after year. We were left with a straight choice: to close a swimming pool and save £500,000 or to take money from children in care or the elderly. Most reasonable people took the decision to protect the most vulnerable members of society. That is why the sporting facilities provided by local authorities, which are still the main providers of such facilities, are not what they should be.

There is a second point on which I take issue with the hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells, who is not in his place. Having noted that sports facilities are not as good, without acknowledging why, he argued that while we all want to bring major events to this country, it is not the main issue. He said that we must get grass-roots provision right and get all people fitter and healthier through participation in sport.

I agree with the hon. Gentleman's objectives, but I do not agree that there is any contradiction in the three strands of policy announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, as each supports the others. If we are successful in international competition, either by hosting major events or by having great athletes and successful teams, we will encourage grass-roots support. If more young people participate in sport as a result, we will be more likely to be successful at international events.

The Commonwealth games will be held in Manchester, and England, in 2002. I want to explain what will happen and to talk about the Commonwealth games in general. This year's games will take place in Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia in September, and they will change the nature of the Commonwealth games. The Malaysian Government have declared their intention to use the games to say that their nation has come of age and is moving out of the third world and into a richer economy. That statement has plainly been affected by what has happened to the ringgit in recent months, but the intention remains the same. Hundreds of millions of pounds have been spent on creating the best ever facilities for the Commonwealth games.

The Malaysian intention is clear. The games are not just about prestige, but about telling the English-speaking world and south-east Asia that Kuala Lumpur is a good place for sport, that the area is increasingly affluent and that it is a good place to do business. We neglect at our peril the side of sport that allows us to project our country's image. We have not done that enough in the past, and we must do more. Our economy, as well as our national spirit, will get better if we do.

We intend to put on an extremely good Commonwealth games in Manchester. The Government talk a lot about changing the image of England and Britain abroad, and about giving us a younger look and a more modern appeal. I agree with that. I have represented Britain abroad and have often found that people view us as stodgy old colonials. Sometimes they enjoy turning us down when we apply for business. We should use the Manchester games to change that image.

We have already put together important facilities, and I thank my hon. Friend the Minister for Sport for coming to Manchester to see them. I was pleased to show him round, but did not expect him to respond as he did. When we showed him the velodrome, which has the world's fastest track, he said, "We don't have one of those in London." So we showed him the indoor arena, which is the largest in Europe, and he said, "We could do with one of those in London." Then we showed him the concert hall that we have opened recently, and he said, "We don't have anything this good in London." I am glad that he showed so much admiration; what we need now is a stadium that he can envy from his seat in London.

The hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) asked about the financing of the games. We have a balanced budget, which partly depends on a grant of £113 million from the Sports Council. With sponsorship and television rights, which will improve considerably after the Kuala Lumpur games, we will be able to put on a games in the tradition, if not of Kuala Lumpur, of previous games such as the 1994 Victoria games.

Frankly, I do not think that that is good enough if we want to project this country. We are in discussions with the Government and we have met various Ministers. I believe that we should hold the games in a state-of-the-art stadium, not a temporary one. They should show our country off to the best and show the best in current English architecture. If we are to do that, there will have to be some extra funding. When asked by Ministers how much, we say that that depends on what quality of Commonwealth games the Government and the Prime Minister want. I believe that the country and the House should want to see the very best Commonwealth games that we can possibly put on.

It is interesting to note how the Commonwealth games are being used to bring people forward. One aspect of games that is not often talked about but is relevant to getting people into jobs is the extraordinary number of volunteers required to help run a Commonwealth games—up to 30,000. It is possible, with the right scheme, to integrate some of that voluntary work into the new deal. We could use young people's enthusiasm to be involved in a major sporting event—they may have been socially excluded—to enable them to obtain qualifications such as national vocational qualifications at levels 2 or 3. That is one way in which a major sporting event can dig right down to people who have been socially excluded.

The local authority and the Sports Council have also ensured that in key sporting areas trainers and courses have been put together so that people not only in Manchester but in the whole of the north-west can participate in the sports that we have opened up. We do not want the facilities to go to waste once the games are over. We have talked to the Sports Council about putting together a critical mass of elite sports facilities that will have a spin-off for jobs, health and sports medicine. The facilities that I mentioned at the beginning of my speech have been run down. We should refurbish them so that they can be used by the local community and people benefit from the games.

We estimate that a successful Commonwealth games will create 2,500 or so local jobs if we put together that critical mass of facilities. We hope to be a regional centre of the UK Sports Institute. That is just one example of how we hope to ensure that English and local people in Manchester and the north-west participate in the games.

My final set of points is in support of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's statement about his desire to bring the world cup to Britain in 2006 and to bring the Olympics here. I have tried as hard as it is possible to try to bring all the major sporting events to this country, but I caution against one thing—perhaps two things. First, there is an assumption—it is not stated publicly but people talk about it in private—that if Britain is to host the Olympics or the world athletics championship it will have to be in London. I do not agree. When London has competed before, the sports bodies that nominate cities to be the Olympic or Commonwealth games host city have, by and large, chosen Birmingham or Manchester.

Mr. Banks: One of the problems that London has experienced when making a bid and competing against Manchester and other cities is that there were two London bids because there was no single local authority for London to represent the city. That was the fundamental objection that flawed our bids. That problem will be resolved by the setting up of the new Greater London authority.

It is not my partiality that is involved: the International Olympic Committee and the British Olympic Association have made it clear that the only city that they are prepared to nominate for an Olympic bid is London. As my hon. Friend must know, that is not my decision but the decision of the BOA and IOC.

Mr. Stringer: I am partially grateful for that intervention. I agree with my hon. Friend that the Balkanisation of London by the abolition of the Greater London council put London at a disadvantage and other cities made hay at London's expense during that time. The answer is to have elected mayors in other big cities as well.

I also agree that the choice is a matter for the BOA and the IOC. I am not aware that those decisions have been taken finally. They should be subject to influence so that there is proper competition and consideration when the decision is taken.

I add my tribute to Lord Howell. I competed with Denis Howell for the right to represent Britain in the bid to host the Olympic games—I represented Manchester when he represented Birmingham. He was a tough competitor and did not like Manchester getting the nomination because he had put a lot of effort into Birmingham's very good bid. Anyone who tries to bring the Olympic games or the world cup to this country should bear in mind his comment that we shall have the most immense difficulty until there are some British people involved at the highest level of international sport. We are almost devoid of representatives in all the world federations. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will say how he will encourage our sports administrators and politicians to get involved at that level. We all want to bring those events here, but until our people are involved at the highest level, we shall not do so.

1.31 pm

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Manchester, Blackley (Mr. Stringer). I acknowledge the great contribution that he has made to his city and our country in championing the Manchester Olympic bids, which have resulted in a successful

[Mr. Crispin Blunt]

Commonwealth games bid. That is a good example of how sport can bring a community together around an objective in a wider political arena.

I declare an interest as an honorary vice-president of Raleigh International, because I want to widen our debate on sport to include adventure training and recreation, which, like sport, does much to develop an individual's sense of purpose and achievement. Our central objective as politicians is what sport can do for individuals.

When I was the organiser of a sports team in the Army, some people thought that I had become a professional cricket organiser, perhaps to the exclusion of the more military parts of my responsibilities. Much of taking part in sport depends on the enthusiasm, energy and drive of the enablers—the people who give their time voluntarily to organise sport and make it happen for others.

I should like to indulge myself a little with the Minister for Sport. I am sure that he will talk on the phone to Glenn Hoddle before England begin their world cup campaign. If I remember rightly, Germany have not lost a game of football on penalties since being beaten by Czechoslovakia in the European championship final in 1976. England have not won a game on penalties since before Italia 90. Having seen the lackadaisical performance in the recent penalty shoot-out against Belgium, I am horrified that our footballers will not have the skill of burying the ball in the corner of the net at 80 mph honed to perfection, given the likelihood that some of our games will have to be resolved in that way. I should therefore like the Minister for Sport to ask Glenn Hoddle to make sure that those skills are honed to perfection.

Many hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Blackley in his speech about the Commonwealth games, have talked about the necessity for international success, which is one of the twin pillars of the Government's policy, which I welcome. However, I hope that we recognise that, in a sense, that aim is subsidiary. We need international success to draw people into sport by example, but our aim as policymakers should be to enable people to take part. A sense of achievement, self-confidence, pride and leadership comes from taking part in sports, particularly team sports.

There has already been much discussion about the changes to the national curriculum, which are unfortunate. I would rather view the discussion in an international context. My hon. Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells (Mr. Norman) said that in Germany the school curriculum contains three hours of sport a week. We should aim to do better than that. People who take part in sport and adventurous training activities develop themselves and that helps them achieve success in other areas, including academic subjects.

I accept that the Conservatives' record on playing fields was lamentable and that we should have protected them when we were in government. The blame, as my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) said, should be shared because it was in the main Labour-controlled authorities that were selling off playing fields. Let us put that behind us and make it clear that from now on we want to increase resources for playing fields, the curriculum and teachers to be used in the organised life of schoolchildren. We should give teachers physical and monetary resources—

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Worthing, West): And recognition.

Mr. Blunt: Indeed. That would give them the enthusiasm to take part and enable children to participate in those activities.

I want to concentrate on the contribution of volunteers, which has not been mentioned. It is they who work, outside the hours of schools and sports clubs—which are, by and large, voluntary—to enable sports and adventure training to take place. I hope that the money that we are taking out of sport by creating a sixth good cause will be replaced by allowing after-school clubs to get money for sport from the New Opportunities Fund.

My great worry is that we have already imposed on people who voluntarily organise activities for young people and others a level of regulation about how to conduct those activities—particularly in adventure training—that is driving many of them simply to give up. Last night, I attended the annual general meeting of Reigate and Banstead district scouts, where I was told that it is becoming more difficult for the scouts to organise outdoor activities, particularly at the more challenging end of the spectrum, for venture scouts. That is true not only for all adventure training pursuits but for sporting pursuits.

People will be killed playing sport and taking part in adventurous training. People will be killed on the rugby field. There will be accidents. What frightens me is that when deaths occur there is a reaction of shock and horror, and the temptation for politicians is to impose a disproportionate level of regulation. By loading that layer of regulation on to people who are giving up their time to organise activities, we make it too difficult for them to bother.

I ask the Minister to review those burdensome regulations and to be sympathetic when he is approached by sports organisations and sports organisers to do so.

Mr. Bottomley: My hon. Friend has raised an important point. However, for balance, does he agree that schemes of organisations, such as the Royal Yachting Association, to develop proficiency and train instructors—and to encourage younger people who are good at what they do themselves to become instructors—is a good way of raising standards and participation without imposing the burden of regulation? If he agrees with that, I should like to ask him whether, if he is a dinghy sailor, he would like next Thursday to join the House of Commons team at Westminster boating base? We are still short of one or two crew.

Mr. Blunt: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his intervention.

My request to re-examine regulation is not a cry for bad practice. Good practice should be led by volunteers themselves, who organise the organisations. It is in their own interests that their sports and recreations should be well organised and safe. Neither the organisers, nor hon. Members nor our joint objectives will be well served if the House tries to legislate, to regulate or to cover every

contingency because hon. Members do not want the embarrassment of having to say, "We could have prevented it had we passed legislation or regulations." We have to be prepared to stand up for those people, to enable them to make the fantastic contribution that they do in enabling young people to participate in their sport.

I hope that the interests of volunteers, as the enablers of so much United Kingdom sporting activity, will be at the forefront of the Minister's mind during his tenure in office.

1.41 pm

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas (Harrow, West): It is perhaps appropriate that this debate should be held on the same day as that classic sporting event, the Oaks, at Epsom. Although I cannot give any guide to this afternoon's form, I know some men and women who can. I am delighted to have within my constituency the headquarters of Ladbroke Racing Ltd., which is playing a crucial role in ensuring that horse racing enthusiasts have high-quality races to enjoy daily.

I draw the House's attention to the United Kingdom's Olympic performance in the past 20 years. In 1980, we finished ninth at the Moscow Olympic games. Five Olympic games on, in 1996, we had plummeted to 36th place. Our decline in medals has been even more dramatic, with the British team winning only one gold medal in Atlanta, compared with five such medals won four years earlier at Barcelona. We won 34 medals at the 1988 Seoul Olympic games; in 1992, at Barcelona, we managed to win only 20. By 1996, at Atlanta, our total medal haul had dropped to only 15.

Against that background—and after listening to what athletes wanted us to provide—the decision to establish the United Kingdom Sports Institute, and the excellent world-class performance programme, offer hope that our decline as a sporting nation will be reversed. Funding of our bobsleigh team undoubtedly helped to provide the right training environment for it to achieve its excellent bronze medal at Nagano.

I pay tribute to the work of Sir Rodney Walker in the past three years at the English Sports Council. The council's funding of the world-class performance programme is helping to provide much-needed support to governing bodies in modernising their infrastructure, systems and services, and in helping them to focus on achieving the international success that we all desire.

I echo the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Blackley (Mr. Stringer) on the need to develop sports administration. We have to continue modernising and professionalising our approach in working with elite sportsmen and sportswomen. I hope that the Minister will keep up the pressure on sports governing bodies, to encourage high standards not only in sporting performance and coaching but in management and administration.

I seek specific assurances that my hon. Friend the Minister is monitoring the issues raised by the trial of the former general secretary of the Central Council of Physical Recreation and the collapse of the British Athletics Federation. We need to ensure that sports bodies that receive grant in aid money in addition to lottery money use their moneys wisely and are properly financially accountable.

The world-class performance programme is extending opportunities to the most talented sportsmen and sportswomen, identified by sporting bodies, so that we do not rely only on those who, as well as being talented, can afford to compete. I look forward to the development of the programme. Further schemes for supporting talented young people are in the pipeline. We urgently need a talent development system that identifies future medal-winners.

Harrow School of Gymnastics, in my borough, is in an excellent position to help in such a system; in the past 10 years, it has been an excellent nursery for much of British gymnastic talent. It currently has two Olympic prospects in Kanukai Jackson and Paul Morris. Recently, British Gymnastics awarded the school's head coach, Carol Ford, the status of elite coach of the year.

As many of my hon. Friends have said, in the approach to the general election we knew that grass-roots sport in communities and schools was under considerable pressure. In schools, extra-curricular sporting activities had declined by more than three quarters under the Conservatives and, thanks to the previous Government's now notorious policy on playing fields, more than 5,000 fields had been lost. I commend the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) for having the courage to take responsibility for that failure.

I welcome the plans of the Minister for Sport, in conjunction with the Department for Education and Employment, to develop proposals for community sports co-ordinators, to build and support links between schools and sports clubs. I hope that, in his speech, he will detail the progress of those plans.

It is essential that local authorities produce a leisure strategy, setting out their plans to encourage and facilitate sport in their area. Sadly, not every local authority does so. I hope that the Minister will take action to encourage local authorities to develop their sport strategies as a matter of urgency.

Encouraging young people to take up sport is always made easier when high-profile sporting events take place in our country. I commend the Minister for Sport on the excellent campaign that he is waging to host the 2006 world cup. It holds out real hope that, at long last, the world cup will return to Britain.

I support the case for a British Olympic bid. That bid should be for the 2012 games, and should be London based. I urge the Minister, while he is campaigning for the world cup bid, to consider the need now to start actively planning an Olympic bid. Long lead times to develop the sporting stadiums and the Olympic village, and to confront the considerable logistical challenges that such a bid would pose, need to start now. As the Minister said, we have taken a key step along the Olympic route by winning the referendum on the London mayor and Greater London authority. At last, we shall have the political structures to facilitate an effective bid.

We also need to get right the structure of our sports bodies in this country. A strong United Kingdom Sports Council is essential to ensure effective support for our international teams. Such a United Kingdom Sports Council must reflect our commitment to devolving powers to communities where appropriate. A strong UK Sports Council—working by partnership, not diktat—will be crucial in supporting an Olympic bid.

[Mr. Gareth R. Thomas]

I welcome the Secretary of State's confirmation today that he will consult on a sporting strategy for Britain. I make a special plea to him to consider adventurous outdoor sports as part of that programme. Again, I commend the hon. Member for Reigate for raising that issue. Ofsted's 1996-97 report, published earlier this year, identified continuing weaknesses in provision for outdoor and adventurous activities. For example, according to the British Canoe Union, canoeists continue to be denied access to the overwhelming proportion of waters in Britain.

I commend the Ministers for the excellent start that they have made in the past 12 months. There is much work to be done, but it is in safe hands.

1.49 pm

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): It is a great pleasure to speak at the Dispatch Box when you are in the Chair, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I know of your strong enthusiasm and support for sport. Your son—who is a successful sportsman—and I attended the same school at different times, and it is good to know that you have sporting connections.

I join the tributes rightly paid from both sides of the House to the late Lord Howell. I got to know Denis Howell over the past six years, and particularly well in the past 12 months when I became one of the three deputy chairmen of the all-party sports group. He was a great man and a great sportsman, and I am sure that he would have been pleased by the high calibre of today's debate. The Minister may be interested to know that, on the day that Lord Howell's death was announced, I was on my way to Stamford bridge with my two sons to watch Chelsea beat Sheffield Wednesday. The car radio was tuned in to BBC Radio 4 and at the beginning of the one o'clock news it was announced that Denis Howell had collapsed. The programme was then interrupted to announce that Lord Howell had died, and many tributes were paid to him.

All who knew Denis Howell will acknowledge that we must carry on his work in the House. It is good to see that every member of the all-party sports group has participated in today's debate. I know that Denis Howell would have approved of that. My last memory of him is from just before the Easter recess when he left me a message saying that he agreed with a letter that I had drafted jointly with the hon. Members for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry) and for Cheltenham (Mr. Jones) to the Secretary of State on the important subject of listed sporting events. Lord Howell said that he was looking forward to seeing us again shortly after Easter, but, sadly, we did not have that meeting.

I must send a message of congratulations to another great sports personality. Hon. Members may have noticed in yesterday's papers that our great Olympian, Sally Gunnell, has had a baby. I gather from the press reports that mother and baby are doing extremely well, and I am sure that all hon. Members send their best wishes to Sally, her husband and their baby.

I turn to the important subjects that have been raised in this debate, and in particular to the concerns expressed on this side of the House. I shall expand upon the remarks of my hon. Friends, and in particular on the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) in opening the debate for the Opposition. We believe that the structure of sport in Britain needs further attention. The Secretary of State referred to the recent rather sudden departure of Howard Wells and wished him well in the future. We also send those good wishes, but wonder whether the Minister and his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State agree that the proposed review of the current administrative arrangements requires a radical overhaul of the sports councils so that the governing bodies, member clubs and local authorities can work more efficiently. The Secretary of State and the Minister will be aware that that is the view of the Central Council of Physical Recreation. I am sure that the Minister shares my view that David Oxley and his colleagues at the CCPR, such as Nigel Hook, do a terrific job promoting important issues in sport and furthering the debate.

It is a pleasure to look across the Dispatch Box at the Minister. I do not know whether he remembers, but he followed my maiden speech in the House in 1992 and he will now follow my second appearance at the Dispatch Box. So there is a certain accidental continuity at work. Even though the Minister and I disagree slightly about some issues, as my colleagues said earlier, he is genuinely committed to sport. He is probably the best known football fan in the country and he has carried on the important work of the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde to whom I pay tribute and with whom I always enjoy working. It is fair to say that there is much common ground on these issues, but I hope that the Minister will consider the concerns raised by hon. Members, including many Labour Members, in the debate. In particular, at a time when the national governing bodies of sport are being asked to devote more of their energies to developing programmes for youth sport, the sports councils have reduced the levels of grant in aid. Does the Minister agree that the governing bodies of sport deserve that grants be maintained, at least in line with inflation?

I am especially concerned about the position of the British Olympic Association. Unlike most other countries, our Olympic association receives no Government funding and must therefore raise its own funds. It does a fantastic job, raising funds primarily through sponsorship. In addition to the representation of Britain at the Olympic games, the BOA has an extensive education programme in schools, in which I take a particular interest, and uses most of its income to provide services to governing bodies' elite squads.

As the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) rightly said, we are all concerned about the reduction in the number of medals that we have won at recent Olympics. There must come a time when the BOA plays a more central part in the Government's thinking and perhaps in Government funding. I hope that the Minister will deal with that. If we are to bid successfully for a future Olympics and for the world cup, the BOA will as has rightly been said, play a key role.

I echo the comments of several hon. Members about the importance of Paralympic sport. In recent years, there has been widespread support, including support from all parties in the House, for our Paralympic athletes. The Minister is well aware from conversations that we have had on the subject that I have been involved in fund raising for our Paralympic fencers and swimmers. My contact with Paralympic athletes has reinforced my view

that we must continuously improve facilities. I know that the current Government are committed to that, as were the previous Government.

I am particularly concerned that all our sporting arenas should be made accessible to Paralympic athletes and spectators. We heard earlier about the importance of ensuring access for the disabled at all our sporting venues. I hope that the Minister will comment on progress in that regard.

I hope that we can continue to improve facilities for sport for all. I agreed with the remarks of the Secretary of State, but it is clear from subsequent interventions and speeches, while he was understandably absent from the Chamber, that there has been a reduction in the Government's commitment to sport in schools. Whatever the Secretary of State, the Minister and Labour Members may say, the decision by the Secretary of State for Education to remove compulsory PE from the core curriculum—the crucial word is core—was a step in the wrong direction.

Chairmen and deputy chairmen of local authority education committees will pay close attention to this debate and will want to know that PE is valued as much by this Government as it was by the previous Government.

Mr. Chris Smith: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will give me the chance to clarify the matter once and for all. The distinction that the Opposition are trying to draw between a core curriculum and a non-core curriculum with regard to physical education is fallacious. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment announced that there will be one specified hour of literacy and one specified hour of numeracy in the school day every day in primary schools. There will be flexibility for the school in determining when during the school week the other subjects, including PE, are taught, but there remains a clear requirement for schools to teach it.

Mr. Hawkins: I hear what the Secretary of State says, but it does not wash. None of the sporting bodies accept what he has just said. He does not have to take that from me. He has only to consider all the concerns that have been expressed by all the national sporting bodies about the decision announced by the Secretary of State for Education. As my hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk said, it sends all the wrong signals. It says that this Government, unlike the previous Government, no longer regard PE as fundamental and compulsory. It makes sport discretionary, rather than compulsory.

Mr. Chris Smith *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Hawkins: The Secretary of State may shake his head, but he should look at the reaction of the sporting bodies. We know that the Secretary of State lost the battle to the educationists in the Department for Education and Employment. That is what really happened. The Secretary of State's weasel words will not get him out of that.

I turn to a subject on which I agree with the Secretary of State. In this instance, I accept that the right hon. Gentleman and I are singing from the same hymn sheet. The right hon. Gentleman sent his congratulations on the successful first day and best wishes for continuing progress for the England team in the test match. Earlier in the debate there was news from the front— *[Interruption.]* I gather from the Minister for Sport that the score, when he last received news, was 326 for four.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth (East Surrey): It has gone up.

Mr. Hawkins: I understand that it is now 344 for five. As usual, the Conservatives are first with the news and more accurate than Labour.

In getting the score brought to them, the Secretary of State and the Minister for Sport are following in a great tradition set by my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major). I remember vividly when I happened to be in the House for a meeting in the Committee Room Corridor, long before I was lucky enough to be elected to this place. My right hon. Friend had just become Chief Secretary to the Treasury and was taking his first Finance Bill through Committee in that role. I saw large numbers of civil servants rushing in and out of the Committee Room, and wondered what dramatic developments were taking place.

It happened that one of the civil servants had been a university friend and contemporary. I asked her what all the rushing backwards and forwards was about. She replied, "It's all right. The Chief Secretary just wants to make sure he knows exactly what the current test score is every five minutes." I am sure that the Secretary of State and the Minister will continue to recognise, as was said earlier in the debate, that far more people in this country are interested in sport than in politics. That is something which no politician should ever forget.

It is important that we have these debates, and this has been a good, well-attended debate. The debates show that we as Members take an interest in the interests of those we represent.

I recognise that we need to consider carefully some of the issues that will be of great interest to voters in future. One of those issues is undoubtedly the continuing debate about our national sporting events on television. I think that the Secretary of State would accept that he has delayed his decision on more than one occasion. I was told only a few weeks ago by the hon. Member for Selby (Mr. Grogan), who cannot be in the Chamber today, that he had been promised by the Secretary of State that the final decision—the right hon. Gentleman's response to his own advisory panel—would be taken by mid to late May. We understand that, yet again, the decision will be delayed for a few weeks. I hope that the decision, when it comes, will be in the interests of all sports enthusiasts.

I say to the Secretary of State that the concern of many Labour Members and that of Members on the Opposition Benches was that the chairman of the advisory panel, Lord Gordon, the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey) and the distinguished athlete Steve Cram were all saying that they felt constrained in coming to a particular recommendation by the very tight wording of their remit. They expressed concern that they might have come to different recommendations if the wording of their remit had been different. The Secretary of State may be needing to reflect for longer partly because of that wording and what was said publicly by the three individuals to whom

[Mr. Hawkins]

I have referred. I see the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry). He was present at the all-party sports group meeting.

Mr. Reed: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hawkins: I certainly give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Reed: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the wording meant that for test cricket, for example, the decision that would be made was inevitable because of the criteria? Does the hon. Gentleman agree also that, especially for rugby, the idea that next year's rugby world cup at Cardiff, if we had an England-New Zealand final or even an England-Wales final, would have no "national resonance", as the report states, is plainly ridiculous?

Mr. Hawkins: I know that the hon. Gentleman has forcefully made those comments to the Secretary of State and the Minister for Sport. We shall hear in due course when the Secretary of State finally makes up his mind.

The constant delay in making important decisions is starting to become rather typical of the Secretary of State's stewardship of his current responsibilities. We had exactly the same thing with the UK Sports Institute. The Minister for Sport, within a couple of months of his appointment was saying, "It will not take too long to reach a decision." He was giving answers in the House stating that a decision would be made in August of last year. August went by, followed by September, October and November, and no decision was made. Finally, in December, we got the decision.

Those of us with long memories, who remember the disaster and cost overruns of the world student games in Sheffield, might be slightly concerned that history is repeating itself. However, we all want a national centre of sporting excellence. Conservative Members have repeatedly expressed concerns that too little prominence was being given to team sports and that the Secretary of State was perhaps reducing the importance of involving team sports like cricket and rugby union in the new national centre of excellence. We want it to succeed—make no bones about that.

We are extremely concerned, however, that since the decision was made there has been little further progress. Written answers that my hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk received recently have made it clear that no contracts have been put out to tender. Nothing has been done except an announcement that the main academy would be in Sheffield and that there would then be some regional ones. It is taking far too long. The Secretary of State has continued to suggest that the academy will have a positive effect on the performance of our Olympic team in Sydney in 2000, but it will now not even open until 2000.

The Government must therefore recognise that sporting bodies, as well as hon. Members on both sides of the House interested in sport, want much more progress made more quickly. I know that the Secretary of State and the Minister want to attract major sporting events to this country. The Secretary of State referred to the team of Bobby Charlton and Tony Banks getting the world cup for Britain—*[Interruption.]* As the Minister says, it might have been a better team had it consisted of Bobby Charlton and Gordon Banks, but I was quoting the Secretary of State. It causes me grave concern to read in the press that the way in which the decision for the venue of the World cup in 2006 will be reached is by the different candidates for the presidency of FIFA trading off different countries' support, with candidates saying, "We shall definitely give it to Africa" to ensure that they get the African nations' support for their candidacy.

I am sure that the Minister will reflect that grave concern in his campaign. We do not want such horse trading. Everyone knows that that often happens in major international events, given their commercial significance, but I am sure that the Minister and the Secretary of State share our grave concern about it.

I wanted to take up some of the other points made in the debate because we have heard some good speeches. Many sporting bodies have expressed the concern about sponsorship. We all understand that the Government have their views on tobacco sponsorship, but, in a debate on sport we should ensure that the sporting bodies whom the Government say will have their main source of sponsorship taken away—sports as diverse as snooker and showjumping—will have a proper replacement. In the past, the Secretary of State promised a task force. The sporting bodies need to know when that task force will meet to help sports that were previously supported by tobacco sponsorship find alternative non-tobacco sponsors. They are concerned that, once again, little progress seems to have been made. Like so many announcements from the Government, there are many fine words but no progress follows.

Concern has also been expressed about the decision to chip away at the additionality principle of funding from the lottery. The Secretary of State said today that the sporting bodies would get what they thought they would get. However, the sporting bodies legitimately expected that, given that the national lottery introduced by the previous Government was more successful than anybody anticipated, they would benefit from the extra money raised. Instead, the Government have decided to take away that extra money to subsidise core Government programmes, thus undermining the additionality principle. Submission after submission from sporting bodies has stressed that continuing concern.

In the few remaining minutes, I wish to reinforce one or two concerns that were expressed by other speakers. The hon. Member for Cheltenham (Mr. Jones) spoke about the importance of continuing to provide opportunities for minor sporting clubs to take advantage of funding. He rightly referred to his pleasure at seeing his team, Cheltenham Town, appear at Wembley. The opportunity for smaller clubs to appear in the play-offs has been a great success. The hon. Member for Feltham and Heston (Mr. Keen), whose kind words I appreciated, and I were lucky enough to see the wonderful first division play-off game between Charlton and Sunderland, which was probably the finest football match that I have ever seen. It ended in a four-all draw with the first 12 penalties all being scored. Everyone contributed to the great success of that game, but we want small sporting clubs around the country to be supported, whether through their own success or by their success in obtaining lottery grants.

We want school sport to continue to be supported, as my hon. Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells (Mr. Norman) rightly made clear, and we want the concerns of the fans to be responded to, as my hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Woodward) said. We must ensure that sport is considered as part of the health strategy in this nation: as my hon. Friends the Members for Poole (Mr. Syms) and for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) rightly made clear, people are coming out of 10 or more years of compulsory state education far less fit than people in the 1950s and 1960s. The Army has to provide remedial training for recruits, because they simply are not fit enough. As my hon. Friend the Member for Poole rightly said, 48 per cent. of men and 40 per cent. of women are regarded as overweight. In an excellent speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate mentioned the importance of widening the debate to include adventure training in sport.

This has been an excellent debate. I look forward to the Minister's response to our concerns, and to his reflecting on the fact that there must be more action, not only words.

2.10 pm

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Tony Banks): May I say straight away that the score is 333 for five? No doubt it will change as I make my speech.

I thank the hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) for his kind words and constructive approach, which has characterised the debate. Of course there are differences of opinion between us, and some things have been said that we may find a little harsh, but, as debates in this place go, the sports debate is one of the better ones.

Yet again, I have been given an impossible task in my winding-up speech: I have to try to cover all points in 19 minutes. Hon. Members whose points I do not address can be assured that I shall write to them to answer as far as I can.

I join the tribute paid to the late Lord Howell by hon. Members on both sides of the House. He is an impossible act to follow.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry) reminded me that I said on my appointment that becoming the Minister for Sport was like going to heaven without the inconvenience of dying. I have discovered that there is more than a little bit of hell involved in the job and there are a considerable number of frustrations. First, I am not in a position to take the executive action that hon. Members continually demand that I should, because I simply do not have the power. I do not like delays any more than any hon. Member, but there are a lot of frustrations in this job. For aspiring candidates, I shall quickly run through the litany.

First, about £50 million comes into the Department for sport, and £49 million goes out immediately to the Sports Councils, which operate an arm's-length policy and carry out the fun decisions that we spend our time winning elections to achieve. I am the Minister for Sport, but sports policy and activities are involved in the following Departments: Education and Employment—crucially, as we have heard so often in the debate; Environment, Transport and the Regions; Defence; the Foreign Office; the Home Office; Trade and Industry; International Development; and Health. Add to that 112 recognised sports, 413 governing bodies, five Sports Councils and four Ministers with sports responsibilities, and I hope that my hon. Friends will appreciate the complexity.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde said that the politics of sport are more complicated and dangerous than Westminster politics. I appreciate that, probably more than anyone. Enough elephant traps are being dug for even the most careful of Ministers to avoid. I certainly could not be accused of being especially careful.

Sports politics presents a byzantine complexity that would have made Machiavelli take up macramé. I should dearly love to knock heads together, and I can assure hon. Members that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I are determined to do what we can to secure greater coherence in sport in this country and to secure a strategic plan for United Kingdom sport—but the obstacles are enormous.

I see no reason why I should use honeyed words, so I shall be honest with the House. One of the reasons is that I am the political equivalent of a tea boy. It is an honourable task, but it is not an overpowerful situation. It is a job which is heavy on influence, I accept, but light on executive authority. Essentially, I see my job as being an advocate for sport inside and outside Government, with the greater emphasis being on the internal aspects of the job.

The hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring), who has gone to his constituency—we accept that—referred to the problems of horse racing. That is a matter for the Home Office, not for the Minister for Sport, although I clearly have an interest. I certainly have an interest in the Derby. The hon. Gentleman wanted a tip and I will give him one: Second Empire; put a few quid on it.

Other hon. Members referred to the imposition of value added tax on a number of sports-related activities. We all know that that is a matter for the Treasury. On the 12.5 per cent. take from the lottery by the Treasury, I now know what "It's you!" means. As far as I can work out it means, "It's you, Chancellor of the Exchequer", every single week. However, that was a decision that the Conservative party made when in government, so there is not much point Conservative Members whingeing about it now. I can assure the House that my Department has made, and will continue to make, representations to the Chancellor on sport. Personally, I believe that we should devote more of our national resources to sport. It is one of the finest investments that we can make because it is an investment in youth, fitness, health, education and achievement.

The vital element of my job is to campaign for more resources. As we all know, the Chancellor is notoriously tight with our national resources. I often get the feeling that he sits in the Treasury at night counting the money himself, and a very good job he is making of it. If we are to get more resources for sport, we need to make a case in the House for sport. Through debates such as this, which show the all-party consensus that exists throughout so much of sport policy, we can win politically the case for sport, pushing it higher up the agenda and, therefore, enabling us to get greater resources.

I fundamentally disagree with the hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells (Mr. Norman), who said that sport was in crisis in this country. Frankly, that is nonsense. The lottery has transformed sport at all levels since its

[Mr. Tony Banks]

inception. To date, some £812 million has been spent or pledged to more than 4,000 projects in the United Kingdom. That is money that would have been undreamt of four years ago. If one had said then that in four years' time sport would have had £812 million handed out to it, people would have thought that one had escaped from a lunatic asylum. Now, that money has been discounted, as often happens; I understand that. People say, "Yes, fine, we know all about that, but what about some more?" and I understand that as well. With all that money going into sport now, it is bordering on the grotesque to describe sport as being in crisis. That money is making a fundamental difference to sport in this country and I am pleased to acknowledge the role of the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) in getting the lottery up and running, supported by many Labour Members when we were in opposition.

A number of hon. Members mentioned giving an undertaking on sport continuing to be one of the good causes in the lottery. All that I can do is to repeat my assurance that the Government have no plans to alter funding of existing good causes before 2001 or, indeed, beyond it. I must tell the House—I want hon. Members to listen carefully to this—that if there were any proposals to remove sport as a lottery good cause, I would stand down as Minister for Sport. Indeed, under those circumstances there would be precious little need for such a Minister. What more can I say to try to reassure Conservative Members?

The hon. Member for West Suffolk mentioned the bipartisan approach in sport, and I welcome that. Of course, we have differences, but we all share a common concern for the good and the advancement of sport, which is something that sport should welcome. That shows the House at its most constructive and best. We all want sports activities to flourish at all levels of our society, from primary schools right through to the Olympic podium. Indeed, if sport is not flourishing in the primary schools, we can forget any achievement at the Olympic podium. We will get one or two geniuses coming through, but we will not get the consistent success rate that the House and the country demand.

Mr. Bercow: In the light of those remarks, does the Minister believe that there should be an irreducible minimum number of hours available to primary school children for sport?

Mr. Banks: An irreducible minimum is an interesting concept. Three hours seems to be the norm—it is consistent with what applies in those countries that we regard as our sporting competitors—and that is the figure that I would have in mind. That is only a minimum, however. I should like to see far more.

I hope that the House has been reassured by what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said about the national curriculum. We are making it absolutely clear that sport remains compulsory in the curriculum. The national curriculum for primary schoolchildren has been relaxed to ensure that our numeracy and literacy targets can be met, but there is no way that primary schools should stop teaching all the other subjects. The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority is advising us on how we can maintain a curriculum that not only is broad and balanced, but allows us to meet our important numeracy and literacy targets.

On the UK Sports Institute—I apologise to the House for gabbling through my speech—yes, there has been delay, but we make no apologies for that. We have waited for years—indeed, for generations—for a proper focus for elite sport, and the Government are determined to get it right. When I was advancing various dates, I said that they would move if we believed that the proposals were not right.

I do not want delay as a matter of course, but I am not prepared to rush the decision, which must be right. We have set dates, however. We said that, by 30 June, the corporate structure for the ownership and management of the UK Sports Institute headquarters would be agreed; we said that we would progress to interim lottery application by 31 May—that has been done—and to full application by 31 October. We also said that, by 30 September, we would commence implementation of the UK Sports Institute programme of support for selected athletes.

Progress is being made, much of which involves negotiation of contractual arrangements. If one is not always saying that progress is being made, the House should not assume that nothing is being done. If nothing is being done, I wonder why I am working so damned hard running around all over the place.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: So do we.

Mr. Banks: The hon. Gentleman says, "So do we." He is a latecomer to our feast, but his presence is none the less welcome. In fact, much is being done. Conservative Members should not assume that, in the absence of announcements, there is a lack of activity.

Much is going on in our schools, particularly our junior schools. I pay tribute to the Youth Sports Trust for all its Tops initiatives in providing equipment to primary schools. It needs more resources, and we are trying to find ways in which to give them more, but I pay great tribute to Sue Campbell, the director, and to John Beckwith, the chairman, who is putting a lot of his personal money into the trust—such people are doing much for sport in this country, and we pay due tribute to them. However, we must always acknowledge the vital role that the Government have to play.

The hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Woodward) made a robust, eloquent and, I thought, dangerous speech about world cup tickets. I mean that it was dangerous for me, as I should not get involved in the subject—I know a poisoned chalice when I am offered one, and I do not intend to sup from it this afternoon. The Government have been making representations to the French authorities about ticket allocation since we first learned about it only in February. The Football Association, backed by the Government, pressed for an increase in Britain's original allocation of 9,128 tickets for the first three matches—I accept that that figure was ridiculous and pathetic. I spoke to the French Minister Mrs. Buffet on a number of occasions and registered the Government's strongest feelings about the problem. As hon. Members will know, the allocation was increased to 14,800. That is a 60 per cent. increase, which sounds like a lot, but 14,800 does not even begin to match the demand in this country, especially as the official FA travelling club has 32,000 members.

There were never going to be enough tickets to go round, but it would be wrong to blame only the French, as some of our newspapers have. FIFA, the national football associations, Governments and agents must all take a share of the blame. Ticket allocation is a mess, and one larded with injustice. Hon. Members who saw the recent Channel 4 "Dispatches" programme will realise how alarming the situation is if only half the programme was true. It probably was only half. The Government have acted quickly. Yesterday, my colleagues in the DTI moved against Great Portland Entertainments which had to tried to sell tickets that it did not have and which it was not authorised to sell.

It is no consolation to me to say that the problem is essentially out of my hands. We are determined to use our influence to ensure that it does not happen again. If we secure the 2006 world cup, I assure the House that it will not. I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and to hon. Members for the nice things that they said about my involvement in the 2006 campaign. It is a relatively easy part of my job because it has a clear objective. It is well focused and well funded.

Mr. Chris Smith: It is all over the world.

Mr. Banks: As my right hon. Friend says, it is all over the world. That is the way it goes. Even my colleagues are cynical. I pay tribute to Alec McGivan, the director of the 2006 campaign, and his staff, and to our three football ambassadors, especially to my good friend Sir Bobby Charlton. I also pay tribute to the chairman of the FA, Keith Wiseman, and Graham Kelly, its chief executive.

Mr. Stringer: Does my hon. Friend agree that the expectation, and reality, of a successful Commonwealth games will only add to a successful bid for the 2006 world cup?

Mr. Banks: I could not agree more. If I get the time, I hope to say a few words on the Commonwealth games in Manchester, which we all want to be a great success. We must ensure that they are, for the city and, more importantly, the country.

Our campaign for 2006 is going well; we are in front. I have great pleasure in telling the House that this morning the English FA publicly endorsed Sepp Blatter as our candidate for the presidency of FIFA. The hon. Member for Surrey Heath asked about the 24 members of FIFA. The crucial vote is on Monday. Keep an eye on it, because we believe that Mr. Blatter would be more impartial on our bid than Mr. Johansson.

The UK Sports Council was mentioned by my hon. Friends the Members for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Mr. Wyatt) and for Stalybridge and Hyde. I also pay tribute to Howard Wells, who is standing down as chief executive, and to Sir Rodney Walker for standing in so well as acting chair. Howard is a friend. We see eye to eye on the problems of British sport. The council's future structure has taxed me greatly. The Secretary of State and I advanced a proposal to our ministerial colleagues in the other home countries. In the light of their opinions, we have amended our proposals and will submit them.

All that has to be done by negotiation and agreement. It is time consuming, but, again, we are again determined to get it right. Subject to no sudden, unexpected difficulties, we are optimistic that a full statement on the future structure and funding of the UKSC, and the announcement of a new chairman and pro-tem chief executive will be made this month. It will be responsible for giving our fragmented sports structure a UK dimension and for the world-class performance programme on which we depend so much for future medal success. However, the programme will have to be in place for at least 10 years for us to see the continuing benefit that it will produce. The UKSC will be responsible, as at present, for the overall policy direction of the UK Sports Institute. It will be our main vehicle for attracting major international sports events.

My hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Blackley (Mr. Stringer) mentioned the Commonwealth games in 2002. The English Sports Council has committed, I think, £113 million so far. We will continue to discuss and monitor outstanding problems as they arise. The games must succeed. We all understand their importance.

On the Olympic games, it is the British Olympic Association which will make the bid. The Government want it to make a bid. Opinion seems to be coalescing around a date of 2012. The location is for the BOA and the International Olympic Committee. Ultimately, I get the impression that the BOA is only prepared to nominate London. We have to accept that, because the IOC has made it clear as well.

My final point, although there are many that I want to raise, is about medal success in the Olympic games. The one area in which we remain successful is the Paralympics, and we are doing tremendously well. My hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde rightly, and generously, pointed out that that is a passion of mine. I maintain close contact with the British Paralympic Association, which will be an integral part of the UK Sports Institute.

Yesterday, I helped launch a campaign by Scope, the organisation for people with cerebral palsy. Their survey, "Shouting from the sidelines: disabled children on sport", is a poignant record of what the kids say. A kid with physical disabilities said that his best day was when he scored a goal. In other months, his worst days were when he had to watch other boys at school play football and he could not join in although he wanted to. Whatever one's disability, sport offers liberation. The Government, supported by the Opposition and by the hon. Member for Surrey Heath, will make sure that disabled sport gets the resources it richly deserves.

It being half-past Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

FINANCE AND SERVICES

Ordered,

That Mr. Peter Ainsworth be discharged from the Finance and Services Committee and Mr. Patrick McLoughlin be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Dowd.]*

MODERNISATION OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

Ordered,

That Mrs. Gillian Shephard be discharged from the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons and Sir George Young be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Dowd.]*

Knoydart Estate

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Dowd.]*

2.30 pm

Mr. David Stewart (Inverness, East, Nairn and Lochaber): This debate is about not just a 16,500 acre estate on a west highland peninsula, but the future of a community. There are important wider questions too, about land management, ownership and control. I aim to outline the background problems and the history of the estate, and to consider the way ahead. The hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Inverness, West (Mr. Kennedy) may also wish to contribute to the debate. My hon. Friend the Minister for Education and Industry, Scottish Office has a fine track record on the subject, and I look forward to hearing his reply.

The 2.30 slot on a Friday afternoon is not one which encourages hon. Members to flock into the Chamber. It is very much the graveyard slot. However, I am grateful for the opportunity to raise the matter. As a highlander, I have had an interest in the land debate for many years, ever since I was old enough to hold up my first copy of the *West Highland Free Press.*

The Knoydart peninsula has had a chequered history. Following the highland clearances, more than 500 people were forcibly evicted from the estate, and were shipped to America and Australia. Sixteen brave families stayed on, fleeing to the hills until they were tracked down by the factor and removed to America. In those days, economics dictated that sheep were more important than people.

In 1948, seven men from Knoydart staked out 65 acres of arable land, in defiance of the hated landlord, a millionaire brewer named Lord Brocket. He was a Nazi sympathiser who had met Hitler, and who hosted dinners at Knoydart for senior Nazis, including von Ribbentrop. The land raid was unsuccessful, but the incident has been immortalised in song and verse, and it has become a symbol of the highland land question.

In 1985, Surrey property dealer Philip Rhodes bought the original 58,000 acre estate for £1.2 million. In 1993, he sold the last 16,500 acres—the estate we are debating today—to the jute company Titaghur. The owner, Reg Brealey, was the first person ever charged with insider dealing, although his trial collapsed. He recently sold the estate to the current director, Stephen Hinchliffe. Bizarrely, the two of them were directors of Sheffield United football club, which follows on the sporting theme of the day.

Mr. Hinchliffe was the chairman of the Facia retailing empire, which collapsed in 1996 with alleged debts of more than £100 million. The Serious Fraud Office is investigating, and the Department of Trade and Industry has made one referral to the High Court. The disqualification of directors is possible. Two other referrals are in the pipeline.

I contacted Mr. Hinchliffe at his golfing holiday hotel in Portugal this week. He made it clear that he wants to develop, and stay on, the estate. However, if the community is not behind him, he will consider selling it. For that, he deserves considerable credit. In fairness to him, he has agreed to meet representatives of the local foundation at Knoydart to discuss their fears about a history of failed directorships and his long-term commitment to maintain and improve the estate. They worry about his lack of communication. They worry about the sacking of the estate manager, Mr. Ian Robertson, who was allegedly not paid for more than two and a half years.

Which way forward? Where do we go from here? I believe that the community can control its own future by purchasing the estate. Mr. Hinchliffe has agreed to negotiate the sale if all else fails. My vision for the estate is not as a sterile zone, but as a thriving, dynamic, innovative community that keeps its isolated charm and protects its natural assets.

I visited the Knoydart estate during the recess, accompanied by the impressive local councillor Charlie King. I met Eilidh Klemm, the head teacher of Inverie primary school—the most remote school on mainland Britain. It nestles in a bay overlooking Loch Nevis and relies on hydro-electricity and generation power for fuel. I met the class of five pupils and was struck by the commitment of the teacher and the animation of the children. I believe that they deserve a fresh start. I met Bernie Evemy, the local postmaster and chairman of the Knoydart community association. He has worked tirelessly for the cause of the local community and for land reform. I believe that he deserves a fresh start. I met Ian Robertson, the ex-estate manager and the owner of the Old Forge pub. He has the respect of the local community and he is a man of energy and expertise. I believe that he deserves a fresh start.

I invite my hon. Friend the Minister to visit Knoydart, to add his strength and contribution to the work of the John Muir Trust, the Highland council and the community land unit. I believe that, together, we can create an environment in which a development plan can be created and a bid to buy the estate can be made possible.

Finally, simply and passionately, I make a plea for the owner to sell, for the Royal Bank of Scotland—the main creditor—to sell and for the Government to support the community in any and every way that they can to follow in the footsteps of the Stornaway trust, the Assynt crofters and the islanders of Eigg, who have created benchmarks for good community land management practice. By working together, we can create new opportunities for the dream of the Knoydart community to be realised.

2.37 pm

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): I am grateful to my neighbouring parliamentary colleague, the hon. Member for Inverness, East, Nairn and Lochaber (Mr. Stewart), for giving me the opportunity to contribute a few words in support of what he has said this afternoon. A small part of the Knoydart peninsula falls within my constituency boundaries and I participated in the visit that the hon. Gentleman convened in the parliamentary recess, by coincidence rather than by design. If I did not gatecrash it, I suppose that I "boatcrashed" it because I was visiting the area in a private rather than a parliamentary capacity. I was fortunate in being able to attend the public meeting that the hon. Gentleman convened along with Councillor King, the chief executive of Highland council and other relevant representatives of public bodies and statutory authorities. Very impressive it was, too.

The sheer complexity of the difficulties that face so many local people on the estate is daunting, but the hon. Gentleman is right to say, and I wish to underscore, that

there is no doubt about the calibre of personnel involved and the genuine commitment of those people, if they are given the proper opportunity to have more of the future of the estate in their own hands and to plan on a more rational basis with a view to the future.

Knoydart is just one of a litany of names and locations in the west highlands that have become synonymous over the years with the most gratuitous difficulties of landlordism when it appears in its least reputable fashion. The Isle of Raasay is one, the Isle of Eigg is another. We have seen commendable breakthroughs in Assynt more recently and Orbost on Skye in terms of community ownership and crofting trusts. That is something which I very much support.

It will not be easy, as the hon. Gentleman made clear, to resolve the myriad financial and legal complexities. I do not doubt that that in itself is an inhibition for any Minister. I hope that, in having rightly raised the debate, the hon. Gentleman will have given further profile and impetus to a worthy and long overdue cause.

2.38 pm

The Minister for Education and Industry, Scottish Office (Mr. Brian Wilson): I am delighted that we have a little time this afternoon to discuss this subject. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, East, Nairn and Lochaber (Mr. Stewart) on securing the debate and on his choice of youthful reading. He has raised a case study that symbolises the land issue in the highlands, which has been such a long-running sore and source of offence to many. The matters that my hon. Friend and the hon. Member for Ross and, er—

Mr. Charles Kennedy: Whatever it is now called.

Mr. Wilson: Whatever it is now called, but it includes a bit of Knoydart. The matters that they have raised are crucial to the community of Knoydart, but they also have a resonance that stretches further afield. From the days of the MacDonnell clearances, through the era when ex-service men returned from the second world war to find themselves denied land by the pro-Nazi Lord Brocket, down to the more recent speculative activities, Knoydart has come to represent the unacceptable face of highland land ownership. Like Raasay, Eigg and many other communities in recent decades, Knoydart's fate has acquired symbolic importance as well as immediate relevance to the future of the people who live there.

My hon. Friend has done well in promoting not only the interests of his constituents but the more general case for land reform in Scotland—a policy on which the Government are already engaged on several fronts and to which I have a long-standing attachment.

Formally, that part of Knoydart on which today's debate is centred is no longer on the market. That creates a difficult dimension to the debate, but I am very interested in what my hon. Friend has said about his recent contact with Mr. Hinchliffe, one of the key figures in the current ownership structure. If the consortium recognises that ownership that nobody living in the place wants or has confidence in is unacceptable, that is a step forward. Let us see what progress can be made from there. I join my hon. Friend in recognising the importance of securing a future ownership of the estate that best ensures that local interests are not overlooked or overridden.

My hon. Friend visited the estate and met the current principals and local people last week in the company of Highland council and Highlands and Islands Enterprise representatives. A range of organisations, including the Highland council and the community land unit of Highlands and Islands Enterprise, have a continuing commitment to supporting the interests of the community of Knoydart. The community land unit has established close links with the Knoydart Foundation. It is my sincere hope that those continuing efforts by all concerned about the interests of the people of Knoydart will lead to the future that we all wish for the estate, which has been too long delayed.

My request to Highlands and Islands Enterprise last year to establish a dedicated unit to give advice and support on community land purchases was a key immediate measure to tackle land problems in the area. Already a number of significant community purchases have been supported, such as those on Eigg and at Abriachan, with which my hon. Friend will be familiar. HIE has purchased the estate of Orbost on Skye to promote a range of developments with and for the community. The enterprise agencies have an important role in applying their resources and expertise in support of development opportunities following any successful land acquisition on behalf of the community. On Eigg and at Orbost the local enterprise companies are working in partnership with the communities on framing and implementing sustainable development measures. That is the way ahead for many other parts of the highlands and islands.

On the more general issue of land reform, last October we set up the land reform policy group, chaired by my noble Friend Lord Sewel. He and other members of the group are delighted at the strong response to its first consultation paper. More than 360 written responses have been received from across the country. It is the most comprehensive and significant review of land ownership and use in Scotland this century. I am proud of the Government's prompt establishment of the group with such a radical remit, as well as our other measures on land.

Among the many dimensions of the land issue, Lord Sewel's group is considering the need to tackle existing barriers to community involvement in ownership and management. Even where there are willing sellers, it is clear that such barriers exist—for example, the lack of access to capital and scarcity of management experience.

The group is also reviewing the existing powers of compulsory purchase and whether they are in need of amendment or replacement. The events at Knoydart represent precisely the kind of situation that the land reform policy group is examining closely to find out what lessons can be learned.

The group is also analysing carefully all the responses to the questions asked in its consultation and the issues raised by respondents. It will consult again in the late summer. The group intends to issue its final report by the end of 1998. The aim is to complete the work in time for its conclusions to inform the elections to the Scottish Parliament, but it is possible that further actions may be taken sooner. Either way, that work will provide the Scottish Parliament with a vital thought-through agenda for early action on land reform.

[Mr. Wilson]

I am well aware of the strong arguments that have been advanced in support of the suggestion that greater use might be made of heritage lottery funding to support community bids. In fact, I have been known to advance them myself. I am delighted that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport is here to listen to the debate.

As I am sure my hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, East, Nairn and Lochaber will appreciate, Ministers are not in a position to influence formally the consideration of particular applications by lottery distributing bodies. Nevertheless, policy directions issued to the UK distributing bodies by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport are able to suggest the broad approach that the bodies should take in considering applications, subject to the overall legal constraints on their scope for giving grants. That matter is under active consideration within the context of this debate. After devolution, the Government intend that it should be possible for Scottish Ministers to give separate policy directions covering the involvement of UK distributing bodies in devolved matters in Scotland.

I also advise my hon. Friend that the national heritage memorial fund has decided to set up a separate Scottish committee to advise on applications from Scotland. The levels of delegation to that committee are likely initially to cover only small grants, but that development reveals a growing sensitivity within the national heritage memorial fund to distinctive Scottish needs.

It is, perhaps, appropriate to remind all concerned on an occasion such as this that the memorial fund started life as the national land fund, established by Hugh Dalton in his post-war Budget as a memorial finer than anything hewn from stone or cast in bronze to those who had fallen. Many of the properties and areas throughout the United Kingdom to which public access is enjoyed today were obtained for the social interest during the brief operation of the national land fund. That is a magnificent illustration of what can be done if resources are available.

The national land fund was hated by the Tories and they eventually got rid of it, but the land acquired under the fund was not for the state to own. The state was the conduit through which the land passed to organisations such as the National Trust, the Youth Hostels Association and the Ramblers Association. They preserved and developed those areas, to which the public still have access. The national heritage memorial fund therefore has a strong pedigree that should never be forgotten. It goes back to Dalton's great visionary act in the post-war Labour Budget of putting aside £50 million—an astonishing sum at that time—for the national land fund.

I am putting in hand today arrangements for Highlands and Islands Enterprise to establish a land purchase fund with access to appropriate resources. Its purpose will be to provide a source of funds to support community-based land purchases or purchases by the highlands and islands network. There is already close collaboration with other bodies, such as Highland council, that have a close interest in community land purchase and may also be able to provide financial support. There is clearly scope to develop co-operation and joint approaches in appropriate cases.

In announcing the proposal to establish a land purchase fund, I must make it absolutely clear that the fund will be used to support the last brick in the wall approach that has been developed by the community land unit. There are no blank cheques and I have given a very strong direction that the fund should not be used at all where exorbitant price demands are insisted on by current owners.

Mr. Charles Kennedy: I do not wish to overintrude in another hon. Member's debate, but on the interesting new development that the Minister is describing, I should like to know whether decisions made under the final brick in the wall approach will be full-board ones at Highlands and Islands Enterprise level, with Highlands and Islands Enterprise acting as ultimate arbiter, or whether the Minister will make the final decision? How will the decision-making work?

Mr. Wilson: As I said, I am initiating today the fund's detailed arrangements and foresee no practical difficulties in the decision-making process. The community land unit is firmly within Highlands and Islands Enterprise, which is answerable to me and to the Secretary of State for Scotland. Highlands and Islands Enterprise has great autonomy within certain spending limits and I do not expect money allocated under the programme to exceed those limits. Equally, however, in cases in which there is sensitivity or public interest, I should expect that there will be consultation on recommendations of the community land unit, as routinely happens between Highlands and Islands Enterprise and me.

As I said, there will be no blank cheques, and the fund will be used only on the basis of a fair price. It will not meet exorbitant price demands by owners. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, East, Nairn and Lochaber will agree that that measure represents another valuable step forward. However, I should also like to make absolutely clear that all such measures should be regarded as complementary to the far more fundamental work of the land reform working group under Lord Sewel.

I should like now to mention the possible use of compulsory purchase powers by Highlands and Islands Enterprise to acquire land where there is evidence that its current ownership presents a barrier to economic development or frustrates the well-being of communities. As everyone involved in the debate will realise, in such circumstances there are considerable doubts about whether Highlands and Islands Enterprise's current compulsory purchase powers would enable acquisition of extensive areas of land for the local community—which has been the problem for the past 35 years since the legislation creating the Highlands and Islands development board bestowed rather less radical acquisition powers than had been popularly supposed.

Consequently, there must be some uncertainty about whether use of a compulsory purchase order would be possible in the case of the Knoydart estate, even if such a step otherwise commended itself. Moreover, as with the compulsory purchase powers of Highland council, use of CPOs in individual cases must, in the first instance, be a matter for the organisation concerned. Regardless, use of CPO powers in that context would involve a major policy change.

Although I am not unsympathetic to such a policy change—I do not imagine that anyone would expect me to be—the matter is being considered by Lord Sewel's group as part of a wider land reform package. The Government's view is that it will be necessary to consider a range of measures rather than use compulsory purchase powers in isolation.

Even when the use of CPOs is intra vires, exercise of such powers can take many months, particularly if contested. I think that we would have to conclude that there must be doubts about whether CPOs present an immediate answer to the problems of Knoydart. I should say that, in certain circumstances, Scottish Natural Heritage's powers also include the compulsory purchase of land.

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport may know better than anyone else in the Chamber, Knoydart is one of the wildest and most beautiful areas in Scotland. It is also one of the best remaining examples of wild land in both the British Isles and Europe. For those reasons, it has been designated a national scenic area. Scottish Natural Heritage is charged with protecting the natural heritage of Scotland. If the natural heritage value of Knoydart were to become threatened, I have no doubt that SNH would have to consider taking appropriate action.

I again pay tribute to the commitment of my hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, East, Nairn and Lochaber in securing a sustainable and productive future for the Knoydart estate that takes account of the interests and aspirations of the local community. I am grateful for the thoughtful and helpful way in which he has raised these matters today and for the supportive comments of the hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Inverness, West (Mr. Kennedy).

I take this opportunity to restate the Government's commitment to the principle of supporting communities that are committed to securing their future by taking responsibility for local land. A key factor in delivering on our commitment is the strategic priority that we have asked Highlands and Islands Enterprise to attach to assisting initiatives that aim to bring development opportunities. Its community land unit and the new land purchase fund that will now back it up are important instruments of that policy.

Although it is for Highlands and Islands Enterprise in the first instance to consider the precise supports that might be available in individual cases, I am happy to assure my hon. Friend that both we and HIE will continue to look closely at the prospects for assisting the Knoydart community and other similar cases.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at five minutes to Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 8 June 1998

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

COMMITTEE OF SELECTION

Ordered,

That Mr. Peter Ainsworth be discharged from the Committee of Selection and Mr. James Cran be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Kevin Hughes.]*

Oral Answers to Questions

SOCIAL SECURITY

The Secretary of State was asked—

Women's Website

1. **Ms Dari Taylor** (Stockton, South): If she will make a statement on the impact of the women's website in increasing access to Government information for women. [42926]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Ms Joan Ruddock): The Ministers for Women's website is another demonstration of our genuine commitment to improving the dialogue between Government and the women of this country. It has attracted responses from women across the UK and beyond on a wide variety of policy, including child care, education, rape, women's and men's health, Northern Ireland and the website itself. It is another way of connecting women to Government, improving the flow of information and complementing the more traditional forms of communication.

Ms Taylor: I am reassured by your response this afternoon, Minister. Like you, I see the website as a clear complement to a woman's life. Whether she is a traditional woman who has to, or feels she has to, stay at home, or a fast-tracking woman, this is an excellent source of information. In developing the website, will you consider Stockton borough council's website and its availability? It is free at the point of use to most women, to all people who are unemployed, to all who are unwaged and to all children. I see the website as an incredibly good service to offer. When you are considering the development of the website—

HON. MEMBERS: "Order."

Madam Speaker: Order. Hon. Members are getting somewhat distracted. The hon. Lady should speak through the Chair of the House and not directly to the Minister. Hon. Members are right to be disturbed about the matter.

Ms Taylor: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am sorry.

I hope that, when the Minister is developing the service, she will see the important link between all local women's organisations and the Ministers for Women's website.

Ms Ruddock: I thank my hon. Friend for her question, and I congratulate her local authority on what it is doing. Since creating the website, we have decided—as my hon. Friend suggested—to explore the feasibility of establishing a women's electronic interactive network. The feasibility study is looking at how women's organisations—local and national—might have greater access to hardware and training. When we get the results of the feasibility study, we will decide whether to commission a pilot project, whereby we could link selected women's organisations to one another locally and to us here in government.

Occupational Pensions

2. **Mr. Tim Collins** (Westmorland and Lonsdale): What steps she has taken to improve the framework for occupational pensions. [42929]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. John Denham): We fully recognise the importance of occupational pensions in providing income for retirement. The pensions review is looking at ways to strengthen and support these schemes. We want people to understand their benefits, and we are developing proposals for a quality in pensions award to find ways of acknowledging the best in occupational pension schemes and of encouraging others to meet the standards of the best.

We will also be consulting widely on proposals to make pension schemes easier to operate, without reducing security for their members, by simplifying a number of requirements.

Mr. Collins: Given that, why was the chairman of the Association of Consulting Actuaries so bitterly critical of the Government recently?

Mr. Denham: The welfare reform Green Paper has made it clear that occupational pension schemes are one of the welfare success stories of the century. It is widely recognised that the way in which we pay pensions in the future will depend on the economic wealth that our economy generates. The package of measures in the Budget last year and this year are designed to create the economic conditions that will provide us with the wealth to pay all our pensions in the future.

Family-friendly Working Arrangements

3. **Helen Jackson** (Sheffield, Hillsborough): If she will make a statement on the actions the Ministers for Women are taking to ensure that new employment opportunities are designed to fit in with family responsibilities. [42930]

11. **Jane Griffiths** (Reading, East): If she will make a statement on the Government's plans for family-friendly working arrangements. [42938]

The Secretary of State for Social Security and Minister for Women (Ms Harriet Harman): Family-friendly employment is a Government priority. We are encouraging good practice and underpinning it with a legal framework of rights to enable parents, both mothers and fathers, to balance their home and work responsibilities.

Helen Jackson: Does my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State agree that there will not be full-time full employment in the 21st century and that the fact that partners in families choose to work three or four days a week is good for families and for job opportunities? Will she ensure that future legislation—on sickness, holidays and pensions—offers incentives to partners in families who choose to take up part-time employment?

Ms Harman: We want to ensure that people have as much choice as possible in how they balance their responsibilities to care for their children at home with their need to provide for their children by going out to paid work. Part-time work is an important option, which is particularly taken up by women when their children are young. It is important not only that part-time work is available but that women are not discriminated against in terms of pay and conditions when they take up the option of part-time work.

Jane Griffiths: Is my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State aware that my constituency of Reading is one of the few places in the country where there is nearly full employment? Does she agree that employers should be aware that the long hours worked by both men and women are causing considerable difficulty to family life and that they should take steps to make their employment practices more family friendly?

Ms Harman: That is absolutely right; it is one reason why we are implementing the working time directive, which puts a ceiling on the hours that people can work. When parents are at work, they need to be sure that their children are well cared for, which is why we have a national child care strategy: we want to ensure affordable, accessible and quality child care. Parents need not only good child care, but time with their children—around the time of birth, if a child is suddenly taken ill or if there is a family crisis involving an elderly relative. When half the work force are women, and most of those women are somebody's mother or somebody's daughter, the world of work needs to recognise that people have family, as well as work, responsibilities. We must have a competitive economy that recognises the importance of strong families.

Mrs. Theresa May (Maidenhead): The Secretary of State will be aware that, despite all the Government press releases and glossy brochures, the first Government action to help mothers to take up employment opportunities—many of which are part time—by helping families with the provision of child care was the tax break for places in workplace nurseries, which was introduced by the Conservative Government. Is the Secretary of State also aware that the Inland Revenue is now revisiting many of those workplace nursery schemes, removing the tax benefits and causing financial disadvantage to many working women? Does that not give people a mixed message about the Government's real intentions in helping with the provision of child care for women in the workplace? What representations has she made for working women to the Chancellor of the Exchequer on that issue?

Ms Harman: I welcome the hon. Lady to the Dispatch Box, and I particularly welcome the point that she has raised. She has highlighted not only child care, which is important, but the tax treatment of workplace nurseries. She is absolutely right: a problem has emerged, which we are discussing with the private sector, particularly with those people who have done most to develop nurseries. We are also, of course, discussing it with the Inland Revenue and the Treasury—I shall keep the hon. Lady informed. She has come to the Dispatch Box and raised an important point.

Women's Interests

4. **Laura Moffatt** (Crawley): What steps the Government have taken to ensure that women's interests are taken account of in each Government Department. [42931]

17. **Mrs. Maria Fyfe** (Glasgow, Maryhill): What plans she has to ensure that Government Departments take proper account of women's interests. [42944]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Ms Joan Ruddock): Men and women lead substantially different lives and the Government need to be aware of the different impact that our policies have on women. On 18 May, I launched our mainstreaming initiative to put women's interests at the heart of Government via a simple three-stage process to identify the impact of policy, consult on the impact and act on what we find to ensure that policies are delivered equally for women and for men.

Laura Moffatt: Mainstreaming is the best way forward to ensure complete equality throughout Government policy, but I must raise one issue—monitoring. How will the House know that those issues are properly monitored throughout the lifetime of this Parliament to ensure that, at every turn, that policy is brought to the Government's attention and is part and parcel of everything that they do?

Ms Ruddock: I thank my hon. Friend for her question. One way in which we are already ensuring that that happens is by having Ministers for Women such as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, who is demonstrating the way forward in our proposals for pension sharing on divorce—a clear response to the needs of women. All Departments and their policy makers will in future have access to training on those issues. The women's unit will produce quarterly bulletins to share good practice and to publicise successes. We will work with colleagues from all Government Departments to establish a monitoring regime, which will feed into an annual report, so that my hon. Friend's concerns can be properly addressed.

Mrs. Fyfe: Did my hon. Friend notice the bravehearts in the Scottish National party this weekend scoring an own goal by rejecting any positive measures to ensure

equal representation of men and women in the Scottish Parliament, leaving Labour the only party in Scotland holding the trophy for the fight for equal rights for men and women? This morning, I saw many of the tartan army set off for France, and noticed that the Lord Chancellor was not among their number. I suggest that he might like to join in, even at this eleventh hour, because, while he is in France, he could take the opportunity to discuss the equal treatment directive, which has proved no obstacle to French politicians, but seems to be an insuperable obstacle, for some reason, to many of our Law Officers.

Ms Ruddock: I thank my hon. Friend for her question. The Equal Opportunities Commission recently conducted a consultation exercise in the United Kingdom on our equality laws, which included their relevance to political parties. When the EOC reports to the Government, my hon. Friend can be assured that the Ministers for Women will engage in discussions with all our right hon. and hon. Friends on that matter. I very much note, as she does, that ours remains the only party committed to achieving equal numbers of women and men candidates for the Scottish Parliament, unlike the Scottish National party and other Opposition parties.

Income Support (Lone Parents)

7. **Mr. Tony McNulty** (Harrow, East): What action the Government have taken to help lone parents on income support get into work. [42934]

The Secretary of State for Social Security and Minister for Women (Ms Harriet Harman): We have established the new deal for lone parents to help them get off income support and into work so that they and their children can have a better standard of living than they could have on benefits. The early results of the new deal have been encouraging. More parents are going into work and lone parents and their children are better off by, on average, £39 a week and the taxpayer is better off by, on average, £42 a week.

Mr. McNulty: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, despite all the blather, under the new deal lone parents are significantly better off than they ever were under the Tories? At the same time, will she join me to condemn the intolerant and extremist language used at the weekend about lone parents by the shadow Secretary of State for Health?

Ms Harman: Our concern is to help lone parents do what they want to do, which is to provide a better standard of living for themselves and their children. Ours is not to judge how it came to be a lone parent family. Such families arise through many different circumstances and many parents never set out to be lone parents. What is encouraging is that, in the past three months, 30,000 fewer lone mothers have been on income support than previously. That shows that they are moving into work, combining their work and family responsibilities. They are then better off; we have discovered that, on average, they are better off by £39 a week, which is more than they could ever have been paid on benefits.

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): I welcome any efforts that the Government may make to encourage opportunities for lone parents to get back into work where they wish to do so. However, is there not a problem for lone parents who have children under five and who may wish to choose not to go into work? Given the benefit cuts for lone parents—partly offset, admittedly, by child benefit increases—what further effort does the Secretary of State intend to make to allow such lone parents a real choice of whether to go back to work?

Ms Harman: The problem in the past was not that lone parents did not have the choice to stay at home—more than 1 million of them stayed at home on income support, bringing up 2 million children—but that too few lone parents were able to go out to work. The Government's policies of giving advice and support to help them into work, ensuring help with the costs of child care and ensuring that quality child care is available, provide the choice that was previously not available. The new deal for lone parents is directed at those with children over five. If the hon. Member examines the figures, he will find that more than half the number of married mothers with children under five go out to work. No one is forcing them to do so. They have the choice, and they are taking the opportunities. We are making sure that lone parents can do the same, be better off and save the taxpayer money.

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford): As the Secretary of State has invited the House to consider the figures, will she, too, consider them carefully? Will she express concern that 75 per cent. of lone mothers who receive a letter calling them for an interview totally disregard the invitation? Does she recognise that, of the 6 per cent. of lone mothers who are getting jobs, 15 per cent. fall back into unemployment and on to state benefits in the first three months? To help to offset those statistics, will she consider bringing in a compulsory element for lone mothers to attend the first interview, although I do not suggest a compulsory element, a la Wisconsin, for the whole scheme? Will she accept that that would help to prevent her baby—her brainchild since 1 May 1997—from becoming an expensive, failed soundbite?

Ms Harman: The problem that we have had with the new deal for lone parents—although the early results have been encouraging—is that we have had to phase the roll-out, and do it slowly and at a measured pace to keep up with demand from lone parents for the advice, information and support that we are offering. The hon. Gentleman has it wrong: the problem is not that we have personal advisers aplenty, specially trained but drumming their fingers as they wait for lone parents to come in, but that a great number of lone parents who have never before been offered a service want to take it up.

Mr. Burns: Seventy-five per cent. are ignoring it.

Ms Harman: We are well on target toward meeting our expectations and costings. I must say to the hon. Gentleman that his Government never recognised that lone mothers wanted to work. If lone mothers did struggle into work, it was despite, rather than because of, that Government. The new deal is welcomed by lone parents and employers, and it is making a difference. Our interim findings show that more lone parents than would otherwise have got into work are going into work as a result of the new deal.

Retirement Incomes

8. **Mr. Desmond Swayne** (New Forest, West): Pursuant to the Green Paper on welfare reform, what calculations her Department made to assess adequate levels of income for those in retirement. [42935]

The Minister for Welfare Reform (Mr. Frank Field): Although the debate about adequacy is important, the Government's priority is getting additional funds to pensioners. The Government have today published proposals on pension sharing on divorce, which will ensure that many more women will have more adequate pensions when they come to retire than they would otherwise have had.

Mr. Swayne: May I turn the Minister's attention to stakeholder pensions? What guarantee can he give to investors in such pensions that they will be able to buy an adequate annuity, given the nature of such instruments, the prices and values of which can fluctuate?

Mr. Field: The aim of stakeholder pensions is to improve—substantially, we hope—on what is currently offered in private personal pensions.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): Does my right hon. Friend accept that the least satisfactory way of getting extra income to pensioners is through more means-tested benefits? Pensioners, more than any other section of the community, have great difficulty with claiming such benefits, as they think that it is demeaning. If we rely on such benefits to get money to the poorest pensioners, many of them will lose out and suffer as a consequence.

Mr. Field: I totally agree, and that is why the Government have emphasised the importance of reducing value added tax on fuel and have introduced the winter fuel bonus. If I may, I will pose the question back to my hon. Friend: what should the Government do when a million pensioners—the poorest, oldest and frailest—fail to claim income support? Should we not be concerned to ensure that they claim what they are entitled to? We believe that we should be, and we are.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): Given the Minister's comments a few seconds ago, and the report last week that said that the Government would not reach the targets necessary to provide income for the poorest people, will he tell us whether the Government can absolutely rule out doing what his hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) suggested might be done, and rolling together and means-testing all income for retired pensioners? Will he rule that out until after the next general election?

Mr. Field: The hon. Gentleman misleads the House. The report says—

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is not misleading the House. Would the Minister choose another form of words, as I am sure that he does not mean that?

Mr. Field: He misled me, Madam Speaker, and to ensure that my mind is sorted out, perhaps I could explain the matter to the House.

Last week's report suggested that, if we continued the policies of the previous Administration, we would not reach our targets, and that is why we are undertaking a review and will publish a Green Paper, and why we will make a fundamental change.

Mr. Duncan Smith: I am asking the Minister a simple question, which he has not answered: will he now take the opportunity absolutely to rule out means-testing the basic state pension by rolling it up with all income for pensioners, so that pensioners can rest at ease?

Mr. Field: I am grateful for the fact that the hon. Gentleman has twisted and turned in recent weeks, to enable him to drop the previous Government's commitment on the basic state pension, but the Government's position is clear: we gave a manifesto commitment that we would not means-test the basic state pension during our stewardship.

Benefits (Scotland)

9. **Mr. Tam Dalyell** (Linlithgow): What discussions she has had with local authorities about the delivery of benefits in Scotland. [42936]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Keith Bradley): As part of our active modern service programme, officials have met the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to discuss a number of ways in which closer working between the Benefits Agency and Scottish local authorities can improve services to customers and help to tackle fraud.

Mr. Dalyell: Local officers of the Department have worked extremely well and satisfactorily in recent years with the local authorities, but, with the unbundling of the United Kingdom and the dewiring of the whole tax system—as the Minister will have found on his recent welcome visit to Edinburgh—are not certain problems posed by devolution that should be discussed early by the directors of social work?

Mr. Bradley: I thank my hon. Friend for that question. Clearly, the discussions will continue, but, on my recent visit to Edinburgh, where I spoke at a conference with staff from the Benefits Agency and took the opportunity to meet representatives of other agencies, it was clear that the good working relationships would continue. Under active modern service, we will develop new initiatives to ensure a better service for all customers in Scotland.

Mr. John Swinney (North Tayside): Bearing in mind the success of some local authorities in boosting the take-up of benefits, does the Minister envisage any role for the Scottish Parliament in drawing together the work of those local authorities and in the discussions with the Department, so that those in Scotland who are entitled to benefits receive sufficient information and advice to ensure that they get them?

Mr. Bradley: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will ensure that that item is on the agenda of the Scottish Parliament when it is established.

Pensioner Poverty

10. **Mr. Bob Blizzard** (Waveney): What assessment she has made of the extent of pensioner poverty. [42937]

13. **Mr. Lawrie Quinn** (Scarborough and Whitby): If she will make a statement on Government action in respect of assistance for the poorest pensioners. [42940]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. John Denham): For today's pensioners, the policies of the previous Administration created growing inequality and widespread insecurity. One in four pensioners are forced to depend on income support, or fail to receive it. We have commissioned research to find out why those people do not make a claim and we are running pilots in nine areas to find the best ways of getting more automatic help to them. The introduction of pension sharing on divorce, on which we have published draft clauses today, will also help to ensure that women are able to enjoy their fair share of pension income in retirement.

Mr. Blizzard: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Does he agree that that answer implies that people simply cannot live on the basic state pension alone? Indeed, last week's Ross report told us that 2.5 million pensioner households are on less than a third of average earnings. Is he aware that, in my constituency, 30 per cent. of the population are of pensionable age and that, having seen the new deal for the young, the long-term unemployed, lone parents, disabled people and schools, many of those pensioners are looking to the pensions review to provide a new deal for today's pensioners?

Mr. Denham: My hon. Friend is right: most people who enjoy security in retirement have two sources of pension income—the basic state pension and a second pension. That is why we want to extend the range of those people who can enjoy access to a good, value-for-money, second pension. The position of pensioners, on which we have already taken action through the cut on value added tax on fuel, the increase in the basic state pension and the introduction of winter fuel payments, is, of course, a key part of the pensions review, and my hon. Friend is right to draw attention to it.

Mr. Quinn: I do not know whether the Minister realises this, but, in the county of North Yorkshire, some 14,000 people over 60 are failing to get the extra support that income support offers them. I find many times at my surgery that people from more rural and sparsely populated parts of my constituency of Scarborough and Whitby are failing to realise that those benefits are available to them.

On the pilot studies that the Minister mentioned earlier, I wonder whether some consideration might be given to those rural constituents, to find out whether they can have extra help in understanding what their entitlement is.

Mr. Denham: I can assure my hon. Friend that the pilot project areas cover a range of urban, suburban and rural areas and that we are working with local authorities to find the best ways of getting more automatic help to those pensioners. We are particularly keen to use the information that is already available to the Benefits Agency or local authorities, and the information that exists on retirement pensions, to identify those older people who are most likely to be entitled to income support and to find the best ways of approaching them to encourage them to make a claim for that income support.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Does the Minister recall seeing the headline in *The Independent* on Friday, saying that millions face poverty because of pensions inadequacy? Does he accept that part of that problem was caused by the Chancellor's raid on pension funds? What will the Minister do to alert pensioners to the need to add much more to their pension provision to receive the same return that they would have had before the Chancellor's raid? Will he also bear in mind the predicament of the Secretary of State for Social Security, who is being widely leaked against as likely to be pensioned off by the end of the summer?

Mr. Denham: I believe that I am right in saying that Friday's newspaper headlines were reporting the conclusions of the pensions review group, which showed clearly what a pensions problem we face because of the policies of the previous Government. That includes the many people who were mis-sold personal pensions because the previous Government got it so badly wrong. The group also confirms that we are right to attach the importance that we do to introducing a new framework for second-tier pensions and stakeholder pensions, and the measures that we have announced today on pension sharing on divorce, as ways of tackling under-provision.

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): When the statistics for the first year of the new Labour Government become available, does the Minister believe that they will show that pensioner poverty has risen or fallen?

Mr. Denham: People will look at the record of our first year and will recognise that the basic state pension was put up by more than the previous Government had provided for; that for the first time a Government made winter fuel payments—10 million of them to 7 million households; and that for the first time a Government have set about practical action to tackle the problems of pensioners who do not claim income support, to find the best way of getting more automatic help to them. That is a record of which we can be proud.

Mr. Malcolm Wicks (Croydon, North): Does the Minister agree that some of the poorest pensioners are those who, during their working lives, gave up their careers to care for members of their families—perhaps a spouse with dementia or an elderly relative? As this is the start of Carers Week, can the Minister reassure the House that the Government will have regard to the pension rights of Britain's carers, so that some of our most responsible citizens no longer have to pay a penalty in poverty?

Mr. Denham: I begin by paying tribute to my hon. Friend's work in introducing the Carers (Recognition and Services) Act 1995 during the previous Parliament; it represented a major step forward in recognising the rights of carers. My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to this issue. We, in turn, are right to explore ways of establishing a citizenship pension for carers, to enable

those of them who are unable to contribute to a second pension to avoid being on means-tested benefits in retirement.

We are also right to introduce pension sharing on divorce. That will ensure that women—it is generally women—who do not build up their own pension rights because of family responsibilities can share fairly in the pension rights that the household builds up while they support a family at home.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Grantham and Stamford): I am afraid that the Minister has already given the House a rather disingenuous response. It is not true that the Government have put up the state retirement pension by more than the Conservative Government would have done. The Conservative Government would have put it up according to increases in prices, and the Labour Government have done exactly the same—despite pretending, when in opposition, that they would restore the earnings link.

Is it not correct that the proposed stakeholder pension will do absolutely nothing for the poorer pensioners who, according to the Government's own pension provision group report last Thursday, will continue to depend on state means-tested benefits?

Mr. Denham: I welcome the hon. Gentleman to the Front Bench, although he has already had a few dry runs in previous debates.

The Government have honoured their manifesto commitment to raise the basic state pension at least in line with prices. It is a matter of fact that we had to find substantially more resources to meet that commitment than the previous Administration had budgeted for.

We believe that stakeholder pensions will provide an opportunity for millions of people on modest incomes and for those with intermittent working patterns to obtain value for money via a flexible second pension. They cannot do that at the moment, either because they do not have an occupational pension, or because personal pensions can be inflexible and subject to high charges. Of course we recognise, as the Secretary of State did last Thursday, that there are those who will continue to need the support and help of the state if they are to avoid poverty in retirement—we have always recognised that.

Mr. Bill O'Brien (Normanton): I congratulate my colleague on the work he is doing to bring about pension fairness for people on low incomes. We should take no lessons from the Conservatives; it was the Tories who cut the link between wages and pensions, thereby costing a single person about £22 a week.

Will the Minister seriously consider resuming the link between wages and pensions? The gap between them needs to be examined to put right the damage done to many pensioners by the Tory Government.

Mr. Denham: Of course, the future uprating of the basic state pension is one of the critical issues for the pensions review. I hope that everybody in the House and outside will carefully read and study the report by the pension provision group chaired by Tom Ross, which was published last Thursday. It is the first time a Government have set out clearly an independent analysis of the pensions challenge that we face.

The decisions that need to be taken in the pensions review, which will be published later this year, on issues such as the uprating of the basic state pension, will have to take into account the conclusions of the Ross report.

Pensions Review

12. **Mr. Bob Russell** (Colchester): When she expects to publish the pensions review. [42939]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. John Denham): As set out in the Green Paper, "New Ambitions for our Country: A New Contract for Welfare", we will publish a Green Paper on pensions later this year. There will then be a period of further consultation before final, detailed proposals are developed.

Mr. Russell: That would be counted by every pensioner as a disappointing response, especially bearing in mind the Minister's reply to the hon. Member for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard), in which he referred to the growing inequality and widespread insecurity among pensioners in this country. Does he agree that today's pensioners are more interested in today's pensions than in yesterday's Government or tomorrow's pensioners? Does he also agree that the manifesto pledge to assist pensioners has been somewhat forgotten?

Mr. Denham: I do not agree that the Government have forgotten today's pensioners. No previous Government have introduced winter fuel payments—spending £200 million last winter and another £200 million next winter is an act of support for today's pensioners that would not have been made by the Conservative party, had it won the last election. Nor would the Conservatives have cut VAT on fuel to 5 per cent.—indeed, as we know, they wanted, more or less, to double the rate of VAT on fuel. In our first year, we have achieved a great deal for pensioners, we have invested more in the national health service and in public transport and we are tackling the problems of crime and disorder through the Crime and Disorder Bill.

The pensions review is of great importance for today's pensioners and for tomorrow's, but it is essential that we get it right, because we have seen the mistakes made under the previous Administration, who made pensions changes that led to millions of people leaving occupational pension schemes and millions of people suffering from pensions mis-selling. We are determined to make sure that the decisions we take, for today and for the future, are right.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): In the review, will my hon. Friend bear it in mind that between 1990 and 1994, the value of annuities fell in real terms by 34 per cent., which means that those with a personal pension lost one third of it? That is in addition to the problems caused by the mis-selling of pensions and by between one quarter and one half of contributions being taken in charges. It has been proved that those who mis-sold pensions provided pensions of poor value that were a gamble, with the lottery of money purchase at the other end. Can my hon. Friend give an assurance that when the new stakeholder

pensions, which are very necessary, are introduced, they will not be run by the same people who robbed millions of people in the personal pensions scandal?

Mr. Denham: I am sure that my hon. Friend will welcome the action being taken by my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to clear up the problems of pensions mis-selling that we inherited from the previous Administration. He raises the question of annuities and I can confirm that ways of translating pension savings into retirement income are an important issue for the pensions review and one that we are examining. In developing stakeholder pension schemes, we have said that we wish those to be collective schemes which reach high minimum benchmark standards and that, through trusteeship or a similar mechanism, we shall ensure that they are run in the interests of their members.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): Will the Minister take this opportunity to rule out, once and for all, compulsory saving as a basis for the new pensions era? Does he accept that, were a pension scheme—perhaps a properly run one—to go bust for one reason or another, the state would be, in honour, obliged to step in if people had been forced to save into the scheme? Because it would be most likely to occur at the worst possible moment in the economic cycle, that would represent a huge increased risk to the public purse, as well as an unfair extra hidden tax on many people on modest incomes.

Mr. Denham: There are already compulsory contributions to the basic state pension for all those earning above a minimum income and to a second pension for other employees, so employees are in either the state earnings-related pension scheme or a funded, invested second pension. We made it clear in the welfare reform Green Paper that there had been many representations calling for an extension of compulsion, either to raise the level of pension benefits or to extend their coverage. We said in that Green Paper that we shall seriously consider those proposals. In a number of speeches and seminars I have called for a better-focused debate on whether there should be an extension of compulsion and we shall report our conclusions on that in the Green Paper later this year.

Women (Violence)

15. **Mr. John Heppell** (Nottingham, East): If she will make a statement on the guidance issued by her Department to local authorities in respect of violence against women. [42942]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Ms Joan Ruddock): The Ministers for Women are working across all Government Departments to ensure that best practice is followed in tackling all forms of violence against women. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security recently issued guidance to local authorities, reminding them of the help available from the housing benefit scheme to victims of domestic violence. However, we are aware that women are not always offered the full range of support services that they need, so we are developing a national strategy to prevent violence, to protect women and to deliver justice for women.

Mr. Heppell: I am well aware of some of those initiatives. Indeed, £94,000 of lottery funds will be given to Nottinghamshire domestic violence forum and more than £280,000 will be used to set up a network of child contact centres to allow parents access that they would not otherwise have to their children. Will the Minister tell me how those local initiatives will be developed into a national Government strategy to deal with violence against women?

Ms Ruddock: I congratulate the people in my hon. Friend's area who are running such vital services, which we would like other areas to provide. In trying to find out where the best practice exists, the Ministers for Women have recently written to all local authorities and chief constables asking them to tell us precisely what they are doing, and 102 local authorities have already responded, as have 41 of the 43 chief constables. I am happy to tell my hon. Friend that in his area the police and the local council have responded. The police there tell me that they have a strong policy of intervention in domestic violence cases with the expectation of arresting perpetrators, which is precisely what should be done. We shall make the survey results available to hon. Members. I hope that in the meantime, all hon. Members will take the trouble to find out what local provision there is to tackle this most pernicious of crimes.

Disability Living Allowance

16. **Mr. John McAllion** (Dundee, East): How many claimants in receipt of disability living allowance have been subject to the benefit integrity project, to date. [42943]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. John Denham): As at 31 March 1998, a total of 72,470 cases, including 14,815 renewal cases, had been examined under the benefit integrity project. A more detailed monthly statistical report can be found in the House of Commons Library.

Mr. McAllion: A few months ago, figures supplied to me by a Government official showed that for every claimant who had benefits increased as a result of the benefit integrity project, 10 had their benefits reduced or stopped. Will my hon. Friend tell me whether the situation has improved since then, by which I mean that fewer claimants are having their benefits cut or stopped? If it has not improved, will he tell the House whether the Government share the view of the Social Security Committee, which in its recent report called for the project to be put on six months' probation, with a view to closing it down if it does not stop putting people with disabilities at an even greater disadvantage?

Mr. Denham: First, no one who is entitled to disability living allowance should have anything to fear from the benefit integrity project. It is important that we make the right decisions about benefit entitlement, which is why my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State introduced new procedures into the project in February, and further improvements have subsequently been made. The report of the Social Security Committee is important. We are considering it and we shall respond to the House in the normal way in due course.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): As a member of the Social Security Committee, I ask the Minister whether he has managed to improve control mechanisms in his Department. We must never again see the sort of anguish that was caused by the introduction of this project. The Minister responsible heard about it only a month after its introduction, by way of a telephone call on Preston railway station.

Mr. Denham: The report raises several important issues that we shall address in future. The benefit integrity project was designed under the previous Administration. The Government have taken a series of steps that aim to improve the operation of the benefit integrity project and to ensure that the correct decisions are taken. I hope that the hon. Gentleman recognises that it was necessary for us to take that action and will commend us for doing so.

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): A few months ago, I raised concerns in this place about the way in which seriously mentally ill people were being treated by the benefit integrity project. At that time, the Secretary of State kindly informed me that she was involved in discussions with Mencap. In view of the fact that seriously mentally ill people in my constituency continue to lose disability living allowance, will the Minister say whether those discussions have concluded and, if so, whether any special treatment will be given to the seriously mentally ill who are losing DLA contrary to medical advice?

Mr. Denham: At this stage I can confirm that we have agreed to exclude some further categories of people—particularly those aged over 65 who will not be contacted—from the benefit integrity project. My right hon. Friend has agreed to consider the possibility of extending the groups exempt from the project, but I cannot give my hon. Friend the direct response that he seeks this afternoon.

18. **Mr. Damian Green** (Ashford): What discussions she has had with representatives of disability groups concerning the taxation of disability living allowance. [42945]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. John Denham): Any discussions have been of a general, rather than specific, nature—for example, in the recent meetings arranged by Mencap. We have made it clear in our Green Paper that DLA will remain a national and universal benefit and, as such, will not be subject to a means test. Taxation is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, but we have no current plans to tax DLA.

Mr. Green: I must press the Minister a little further. Will he rule out definitively, once and for all, any prospect of the Government taxing disability living allowance?

Mr. Denham: I must repeat the reply that I have given. Taxation is always a matter for the Chancellor of the Exchequer, but I can confirm that we have no current plans to tax DLA—and nor was there any suggestion of taxing it in the welfare reform Green Paper.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Is the Minister aware that all hon. Members will welcome his comment that there is absolutely no justification for taxing disability benefits, which are not taxed at present? One trusts that that will remain the Government's position now and upon their re-election.

Mr. Denham: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments.

Child Care Disregard

19. **Jackie Ballard** (Taunton): What representations she has received about child care costs disregard for carers in receipt of family credit; and if she will make a statement. [42946]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Keith Bradley): The child care disregard is regularly raised in correspondence about family credit and we have acted to improve the help available. From last Monday, we increased the limit on help for families with two or more children from £60 to £100 and extended the age limit for one year. For the future, we have announced our intention to introduce a more generous child care tax credit, which, for a couple earning £23,000 a year with two children, could be worth £45 per week. We have also launched the working benefits campaign, which I know will be successful in improving the take-up of in-work benefits.

Jackie Ballard: I thank the Minister for that reply. What advice would he give to my constituent who is a single parent and works shifts as a nurse at the local hospital? A nanny is the most flexible and appropriate form of child care for her, but the costs of nannies are not disregarded when calculating family credit. Do the Government intend to change that arrangement because a nanny may be the most appropriate form of child care for many people, particularly lone parents? If the reason for not counting the costs is that nannies are not a registered form of child care, will the Government introduce a national registration scheme for nannies?

Mr. Bradley: I am obviously aware of the problems that the hon. Lady raises. We are anxious to ensure that standards of care are maintained, that all child care is quality child care, and that it is accessible and affordable. We shall consider registering nanny agencies, and I shall study the hon. Lady's argument with care.

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland): May I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on her new deal for lone parents? The child care package is crucial to its success. Does the Minister agree, however, that as 40 per cent. of lone parents lack any educational qualification, education and training will be crucial to prevent them from being locked in the poverty pay sector?

Mr. Bradley: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for raising that point because—as I am sure that he is aware—in the pilot areas we have invested £10 million in training to tackle that problem. We are carefully studying the results of that investment, to ascertain the best way to proceed, and to ensure that that difficulty is properly addressed in the national roll-out.

Pensioners' Incomes

21. **Mr. John Hutton** (Barrow and Furness): What assessment she has made of inequality of income among pensioners. [42948]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. John Denham): We want today's and tomorrow's pensioners to enjoy security in retirement. Income inequality between the best and worst-off pensioners has grown since 1979, and estimates show that this inequality is set to widen in future, on the basis of current policies.

A key objective of our pensions review is to tackle the growth in pensioner inequality, to ensure that pensioners have an adequate income in retirement and that they share fairly in rising national prosperity.

Mr. Hutton: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that reply because it confirms that it is the Government's policy to reverse the widening trends of pensioner inequality. What progress is being made, in the nine pilot projects, in determining why 1 million pensioners currently fail to claim their income support entitlement? Will he make it his policy to reverse the appalling legacy that we inherited from the previous Government, so that pensioners, especially in my constituency, may look forward to dignity and security in retirement?

Mr. Denham: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the importance of the pilot projects. For 18 years, the previous Administration made no attempt to ensure that the poorest pensioners received the support to which they were entitled. It is important that we find the best ways to get more automatic help to those pensioners. I am informed that it is a little early to draw conclusions from the pilot projects, which started in April; we shall get the full report when they have run for six months. However, if we are able to report on early progress and early lessons, I shall certainly wish to keep my hon. Friend and the House informed of that progress.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): I hope that the hon. Gentleman will agree that in seeking—rightly—to tackle inequality among pensioners, it is important to avoid giving assistance to those pensioners who do not need it, are not entitled to it and, in many cases, do not want it. In that context, can he tell the House today how many cheques for winter fuel payments were sent out in error, the cost of that error, and the proportion of that unwarranted cost that has been written off by his incompetent Department?

Mr. Denham: I shall write to the hon. Gentleman with the exact figures, but my recollection is that about 10,000 payments were made that were not in accordance with the legislation and regulation at that time. That is regrettable, but it was a tiny proportion of the 10 million payments that were made to pensioners in 7 million households. Regarding recovery, each case is being treated on its individual merits, and that is obviously the right way for us to proceed.

Family-friendly Working Arrangements

22. **Lorna Fitzsimons** (Rochdale): What were the Belfast EU presidency conclusions on women and employability relating to family–friendly working arrangements. [42949]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Ms Joan Ruddock): Family-friendly working arrangements are a key issue of our time and are important to women and men across Europe. The conference provided a valuable opportunity to explore the opportunities for achieving a successful balance between paid work and family life, and to share examples of good practice which member states can consider in the context of their own policies.

Lorna Fitzsimons: I thank the Minister for that reply. As I understand it, the Belfast summit issued a communiqué. As a result of the listening to women exercise, the Ministers for Women identified as a priority the fact that some of the good policies that were identified at Belfast and mentioned in the communiqué were not mainstreamed at a United Kingdom level. Does the Minister agree, therefore, that if the communiqué is to achieve something—which is important for women in my constituency and elsewhere—it should be mainstreamed throughout the European Union? What efforts are the Ministers for Women making to ensure that the valuable discussions in Belfast and the communiqué on family-friendly employment have wider effect throughout the European Union?

Ms Ruddock: The full text of the Belfast communique is available in the Library and I hope that hon. Members will go to get a copy. We found at the conference, first, that quality child care, parental and other forms of leave and family-friendly working practices are essential to women and men if we are to combine paid work with family life and, secondly, that equality between women and men must be mainstreamed into all employment policies—as my hon. Friend suggests—both nationally and throughout the European Union.

Those are new and important conclusions for the women of Europe and we are ensuring that they are built into the preparations for the final summit of our presidency, which takes place in Cardiff next week.

Dounreay

3.30 pm

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (*by private notice*): To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement about the Government's decision to discontinue reprocessing nuclear material at Dounreay.

The Minister for Science, Energy and Industry (Mr. John Battle): Dounreay has played a significant role in the development of the nuclear industry in the United Kingdom. The experimental fast-breeder reactor at Dounreay, built in the 1950s, was followed by a prototype fast-breeder reactor. Both aimed to show that fast-breeder reactor technology could be harnessed to generate electricity on a commercial scale.

Last Friday I informed the House, in response to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie), that the Government had accepted the advice of the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority board that Dounreay should accept no new contracts for commercial reprocessing work.

The decision will allow the UKAEA to refocus on the management of its existing liabilities, of which by far the majority have arisen from the UKAEA's own Government-funded nuclear reactor development programmes on the Dounreay site. I stress that those liabilities already exist—and they must be dealt with. No amount of wishful thinking will make them go away.

Subject to the necessary consents being obtained from the independent regulators—the nuclear installations inspectorate and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency—I expect the UKAEA to continue to reprocess the existing spent fuel liabilities, the majority of which came from the reactors that operated at Dounreay. It will also reprocess material from existing, committed, legally binding commercial contracts and the small amount of material from Georgia. I am advised by the UKAEA that it expects to have completed all that reprocessing work by 2006. After that, the work of decommissioning the reprocessor will take place.

I remind the House that the Dounreay site was set up to undertake development work on fast-breeder reactor technology. Although the work on that programme was a technical success, it was decided to stop funding the programme in 1988, when it became clear that there was no prospect of the technology fully living up to its economic potential. The development programme finally stopped in 1994, when the last reactor was switched off. Obviously, it has generated no electricity since then.

The focus of activity at the site has shifted inevitably to decommissioning the reactors. Dounreay's main mission has been to decommission completely the facilities on the site. The concern now is to ensure that we pass on to future generations a safe environment at Dounreay. We are deeply committed to caring for the environment and to taking action to deal safely with the difficult legacy from past operations at Dounreay.

We want the focus now to be on decommissioning the plant and securing the site at Dounreay. Subject to satisfying the strict safety and environmental requirements of the independent regulators, commercial reprocessing was accepted as a way of offsetting some of the costs of decommissioning and waste management at Dounreay, but as the UKAEA itself has recently concluded as a result of surveying the international market, further commercial reprocessing would not be economic. Giving up that sort of work is therefore the next step in achieving the main goal: refocusing the site to ensure safe and cost-effective clean-up.

I know that the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan) shares my concern about the impact of this decision, perhaps, on jobs at Dounreay. I have been assured by Dounreay's operator, the UKAEA, that it does not expect significant short-term job losses as the staff currently working on reprocessing will be redeployed to other nuclear decommissioning and radioactive waste management work and will carry that expertise internationally in future.

In March, I announced the Government's decision to retrieve the waste from the Dounreay shaft, which will provide work at the site for several decades at least. Cleaning up the site will inevitably take more than 100 years. The process of decommissioning will now be the business of Dounreay.

Mr. Maclennan: I thank the Minister for that reply, notwithstanding the fact that it expressly contradicts the answer he gave in a written answer on Friday in that it attributes the decision to discontinue commercial reprocessing to the specific advice of the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority, whereas on Friday the Minister said that it was due to the authority having indicated that there was no longer-term prospect for commercial reprocessing. Perhaps in the interests of open government the Minister will be kind enough to place in the Library the precise terms of the advice that has been given.

Does the Minister recognise that the cack-handed approach to the presentation of this issue has created nothing but confusion, with headlines persisting even until today in the Scottish newspapers about the proposed closure of Dounreay—indeed, the Government's decision to close Dounreay? How can there be anything else but confusion when Ministers' offices at the Scottish Office and the Department of Trade and Industry, the Minister's Department, are issuing contradictory briefings to the press?

What are the Government's intentions about further fostering the science-based industries in the north? When the previous Government announced in 1988 the decision to end the fast-breeder reactor programme, Mr. Cecil Parkinson, who is still with us as chairman of the Conservative party, announced the intention to spend about £9 million on promoting new science-based work in the area. Some of that has already begun to come through, but it requires continuing effort and commitment on the part of the Government to build on the skills and science resources that have been accumulated over two generations at Dounreay to ensure that there is a proper future for the immediate area and the entire north of Scotland.

Mr. Battle: I am sure that my office contacted the right hon. Gentleman's office to ensure that he was well informed that the written question would be answered on Friday. I remind the right hon. Gentleman of the text of the answer. It reads:

"The UKAEA have advised me that there is no economic case for supporting commercial reprocessing at Dounreay over the longer term."—[*Official Report*, 5 June 1998; Vol. 313, c. *385*.]

We endorse the UKAEA's view that no more commercial contracts should be let. That was the point of the statement. That is what we said. I do not see why there is confusion about it.

I appreciate, however, that people talk—even Opposition Members occasionally, it is reported—about the closure of the plant as if it has suddenly shut down. That is not what has happened. The Scottish National party in particular put round the rumour that the whole thing can go away overnight. That is not the case. There are 100 years of work left because of decommissioning.

I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman knows that AEA Technology only recently, with the help of my hon. Friend the Minister for Education and Industry, Scottish Office, decided that a new foresight programme—the battery project—should be sited at Dounreay and use the technical expertise of the people there. That is new investment. If I remember rightly, it is a joint venture with the Japanese. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will welcome that. It is not the case that the plant is being closed down overnight, contrary to some of the rumours that have been put around.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): When I complained to his office in rather bitter terms on Friday, the Minister telephoned me himself; I thank him for his courtesy.

Is not there a problem of morale at Dounreay? Ministers talk about the need for a safe environment until 2006 and for many years after, so is not it important that extremely good people are kept at Dounreay to undertake the management? Granted the disastrous decision was made back in 1988—

Mr. Dale Campbell-Savours (Workington): Hear, hear.

Mr. Dalyell: I am sure that that is the root of the trouble, as my hon. Friend suggests. It was made against the wishes of many of us. On the problem of morale and keeping good people at Dounreay, what positive proposals can be offered to ensure the safety that all of us regard as paramount?

Mr. Battle: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments. I cannot answer for decisions made during the past 10 or 20 years—indeed, over the past 30 or 40 years. We inherited a situation and decided to take the advice that we were given, which was that Dounreay should take on no further commercial reprocessing work, that it should handle the liabilities it has inherited from its reactors, that it should deal with the contracts that are still legally binding and in place and that it should deal with the tiny, tiny amount of Georgian waste. Dounreay has work to get on with.

The whole point of the decision is to have a clear focus for the plant and for the work force so that they know what they will be getting on with rather than wondering whether future contracts will come. That was generating uncertainty; we have cut through that and given a clear sense of direction for the future.

According to one estimate, a work force of about 1,200 will be needed at the plant to deal with the liabilities I have described, which is almost as many as are employed today. Let me add that, because of our decision in March to tackle the legacy of the waste shaft, the shaft retrieval project alone will employ 400 additional people. As people work on decommissioning the reactors, as they are now, their decommissioning skills will be internationally saleable—they will be able to give advice and expertise internationally to tackle the legacy of the problem. I expect staff at Dounreay to have their morale boosted by the decision, not further undermined.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): I am grateful to you, Madam Speaker, for granting the private notice question, which the official Opposition also requested.

The Minister should have had the grace to come to the House to make a statement on Friday. My colleagues and I learned of this important development only from the "Today" programme. We do not see the President of the Board of Trade or the Secretary of State for Scotland in the House for the announcement of this crucial decision.

The Government are presiding over a complete shambles. First, they tell us that Dounreay is a safe facility and invite in material from Georgia. Then they close an important part of the plant for safety reasons. Then they tell us that they will pay to make the plant work again as it did before. Now they tell us that they will spend a lot of taxpayers' money to make it safe, only to run it down. That is not the usual government by U-turn; it is government in a permanent spin—one spin doctor corrects what another spin doctor said wrongly the day before.

This is no way to run such a sensitive industry, so will the Minister tell us, and the people of Scotland, how much it will cost to repair and improve the plant? What investment are the Government planning to write off when the plant is eventually closed down? What are the estimated costs of the complete rundown? What reassurance can he offer the people of the United Kingdom—and, especially, of Scotland—that the Government will handle things better than they have done over the past year? The shambles is of the Government's making, not of the previous Government's.

Is the Minister planning to accelerate the rundown of nuclear reactors? What is his current view of the useful life of Magnox stations? Will he apologise for this complete and comprehensive disaster? Does he not see that it now means maximum cost to the taxpayer and minimum benefit for Britain? It is a fitting testimony to months of dithering and contradictory statements.

Mr. Battle: At least we have done our best to sort out the problem that we inherited. The previous Administration would not even admit that the waste shaft existed which, as we have spelt out, will cost £250 million to £300 million to clean up. Where were the previous Administration when they should have been addressing that problem? They were prepared to let it fester.

We shall put the figures in the public domain when the UKAEA spells out the cost of doing the job. As the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) knows, there has been a lot of alarmist comment recently about safety, but the Health and Safety Executive recently announced that it would undertake a review of management of the site. That review is now under way. I do not seek to pre-empt it; I accept and welcome it and expect the UKAEA to implement the recommendations properly. Nothing is more important than the safe management of these liabilities. Unlike the last lot, we

[Mr. Battle]

shall ensure that the funds are provided for the UKAEA to clean up its existing liabilities to the satisfaction of the independent regulators.

The question tabled by the right hon. Member for Wokingham mentioned "the decision to close" Dounreay. To judge from the comments he made on the media, I think he had the impression that I went up to Dounreay on Friday, looked at the plant, shut the gate and threw the key into the Pentland firth. That was not the case. One cannot do that—the liabilities alone last for 100 years. That is nuclear business.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Does my hon. Friend recall that, in the mid-1980s, especially during the miners' strike in 1984-85, some of us argued about the dangers of nuclear power? We talked about the massive cost of nuclear power and of decommissioning. We could have done with this kind of statement 15 years ago: we might then have stopped the Tories closing all those pits when they were in power. Does my hon. Friend believe, contrary to the views of some of my hon. Friends and certainly contrary to the views of the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), that this decision will strengthen the Labour Government's hand in the next few days in ensuring that the safety and maintenance of the pits that are in operation will continue?

Mr. Battle: As my hon. Friend knows, we are working hard to ensure that the coal industry is not squeezed out of the marketplace unfairly. I tend to agree with my hon. Friend's criticism of the past. We have inherited those liabilities; we shall do our best to deal with them and find the funds to meet them. It might have been interesting if the liabilities had been added to the original bill of commissioning so that the cost of electricity at the time was publicly known. That might have resulted in an equation different from that which we inherit today.

Mr. John Swinney (North Tayside): May I ask the Minister two questions? First, when the Prime Minister agreed to accept the consignment of nuclear waste from Georgia—we were told then that Dounreay was the safest place in the world—were the Government in possession of the recommendation to end commercial reprocessing at Dounreay?

Secondly, are the Government now prepared to invest in a centre of excellence for alternative technology research at Dounreay to create long-term, stable employment prospects for people in the north of Scotland?

Mr. Battle: I have heard the canard that I said that Dounreay was the safest place in the world. I actually said on 27 April that the Georgian waste would be "securely and safely" stored at Dounreay—as it is now. Even anti-nuclear campaigners accept that Dounreay is the safest place for it to be stored. What we are debating is setting up the conditions for reprocessing. Of course it is more important that nuclear waste be taken to Dounreay than left in Georgia. I emphasise that our decision to accept the Georgian material was based on non-proliferation treaty grounds. We are a depositor country because we have the expertise to deal with nuclear waste. Rather than leaving the material in Georgia, we have made an important contribution to world security. The Georgian material is safe and secure in storage at Dounreay, awaiting reprocessing. I would be grateful if some hon. Members—perhaps not the hon. Gentleman—stopped circulating rumours to the contrary and using scare tactics to suggest that the material is not safely stored. It certainly is.

Mr. Dale Campbell-Savours (Workington): Is not the simple truth that there have been two errors of judgment over Dounreay? First, there was the Conservative Government's decision in 1988 to cancel and destroy Britain's forefront-of-technology fast-breeder reactor programme—the most advanced in the world. Secondly, the Scottish National party decided repeatedly to run anti-nuclear scaremongering campaigns to promote hysteria over nuclear power throughout Scotland in order to win votes. Should not the people of the north of Scotland reject the SNP and all that it stands for?

Mr. Battle: I think that, sometimes, the very word nuclear is massively misunderstood—even when applied to medicine. People are now objecting to x-rays due to the use of irradiated material. It does not help when people raise the temperature. About 4,000 people with great expertise work in the nuclear industry in Scotland. Those who criticise the industry should respect that fact. I cannot go over what happened under the previous Administration, except to say that we are bringing matters into the open. That has been the problem in the nuclear industry; decisions have been taken in secret and Ministers have not answered to the House for them. We have changed that. At least we are doing our damnedest to sort out what we inherited.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Does my hon. Friend recall a series of Reith lectures under the arresting title, "The Unimportance of Being Right", in which a retired civil servant, who had a hand in nuclear decisions in the past, described the advanced gas-cooled reactor programme as the most wasteful civil investment decision since the pharaohs decided to build the pyramids? Is not it time that we considered the waste and deception of nuclear power in Britain over the past 40 years, which has left a legacy that will be a headache to our great-grandchildren? Should not we coolly and scientifically review the disaster of deception of the House and the country, as well as the entire reprocessing system and the principle behind it?

Mr. Battle: My hon. Friend is well aware that practically the last decision made by the previous Administration concerned the Nirex proposal. My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister, in his capacity as Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, is considering the future of reprocessing. As everybody knows—and as it was well put—the problem with nuclear waste is that it remains and kills. It has to be dealt with; it cannot be wished away. We must take the best advice and use the most scientifically and technologically advanced methods to deal with the problem so that we pass to the next generation a safer environment than we inherited.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): There is still much dangerous nuclear material in the former Soviet Union.

What effect will the decision to stop commercial contracts at Dounreay have on the United Kingdom's ability to deal with the handling of such dangerous material?

Mr. Battle: The decision concerns commercial contracts. The decision on the material from Georgia was not a commercial reprocessing decision. It was a one-off decision as a result of our obligations under international non-proliferation treaties. I imagine that each decision will be made on a case-by-case basis. The decision on Dounreay means that the UKAEA will not be entering into commercial contracts in future—not least because it finds them non-viable. We did the international community a favour by accepting the Georgian waste. We believe that we should act responsibly and make an international contribution.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): Does the Minister understand the scepticism with which his statement has been greeted? Does he acknowledge that the statements made in this place on 22 and 27 April did not mention the prospect of reprocessing being stopped? Does he accept that the decision he has announced today is very difficult to equate with the decision to accept material from Georgia for reprocessing? Will he instruct the UKAEA to prepare an explanatory memorandum setting out the commercial reasons for the decision so that that memorandum can be deposited in the Library? If he does not do that, the House will regard what has been said today as a sop to the Scottish National party.

Mr. Battle: I just wish that the right hon. and learned Gentleman had listened to what I said. The Georgian uranium was not accepted under a commercial deal—it was a one-off, under international non-proliferation treaties. We accepted it to store it, with a view to reprocessing it. There is a difference there that the right hon. and learned Gentleman has not picked up.

We were advised by the UKAEA that it did not want to go ahead with further commercial reprocessing. In other words, it did not want to go around the world seeking contracts. The UKAEA wanted to send a clear signal to those with commercial contracts that Dounreay was not available because it had more than enough to be going on with, which would see it through to a safer and more secure future.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): In sorting out problems that were largely ignored or made worse by the previous Tory Government, will my hon. Friend bear in mind my plea on behalf of the local fishing communities? Dounreay and Sellafield lie on coastlines close to traditional fishing grounds that are fished by static gear and mobile gear fishermen. Does my hon. Friend agree that we must defend and promote the interests of those fishermen?

Mr. Battle: The answer to my hon. Friend is a forthright yes. We should also respect the full advice of the Scottish Environment Protection Agency and the nuclear installations inspectorate—the bodies that give us the best scientific advice on whether the plants should operate and on what terms. The UKAEA takes advice and guidance and—more than that—applies recommendations. The advice received following the review of the management of the site by the HSE will be implemented.

Millennium Compliance

3.57 pm

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Dr. David Clark): With permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a statement reviewing progress on tackling the millennium computer problem within central Government and the wider public sector.

Since my last report to the House on 3 March, I have conducted a further round of inquiries on Government Departments and their agencies, and I am now also able to give a picture of progress in the wider public sector. I am arranging for the completed questionnaires received from Departments in May—and summaries of them and their reports on wider public sector bodies—to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses and published on the internet.

Overall, Departments' plans have remained stable since the March review, and very little change in scope has been found necessary. We can now identify target dates for business-critical systems. Most of the returns show progress in correcting business-critical information technology systems. A few show dates uncomfortably close to the end of 1999, although they do not involve organisations that provide services direct to the public.

The overall target dates, and the completion dates for non-critical systems, have moved by a larger margin. There are still cases in which testing seems to have started without a sufficiently defined strategy, and some plans still contain too little information about embedded systems and telecommunication systems. I am following up those issues with the Departments concerned.

The majority of returns have shown little or no change in the overall cost estimates. Departments are now firming up their estimates, and, although some previously small estimates have increased significantly, the overall costs have increased only slightly—they are now £402 million, compared with £393 million in the last round. Departments expect to meet those costs from their existing IT budgets, and only a minority of returns showed that it was necessary to reallocate funds from other budgets. We do not expect operational budgets to be affected.

A majority of the returns showed that Departments and agencies feel that they have adequate skills to undertake the work, although there is a heavy reliance on out-sourcing and consultants. Although about a third of returns stated that shortages of skilled staff could impact on year 2000 programmes, none of the Departments reported a significant loss of skilled staff owing to the millennium problem—where skilled staff turnover is usually high, there seems to be no difficulty in recruiting new staff. Most of the organisations reporting difficulties are small agencies, but the Ministry of Defence and the Northern Ireland Office also reported that difficulties were being encountered in some areas.

The returns highlight the fact that a number of Departments and agencies are still experiencing difficulties in securing responses from IT suppliers about product compliance. I am asking all Departments and agencies to continue to press for that information. The returns show that many of the major Departments have conducted a full risk assessment and developed business continuity plans. That is a critical issue for all Departments, and Ministers and I will be monitoring it closely.

[Dr. David Clark]

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me to report on the position there. Baseline plans for the Northern Ireland Office and the Northern Ireland Departments were published in December 1997. The current quarterly monitoring process shows that Departments are making good progress, and remain on course to meet the deadline of 31 December 1998 for the conversion and testing of systems, although a small number will not be ready until early 1999.

In response to the concerns expressed in the House, the Prime Minister has extended the remit of the ministerial group on the millennium date change, which I chair, to include the wider public sector. It is, of course, the responsibility of the chief executives of the quangos, authorities and trusts to take effective and timely action on the date change problem to ensure that there is no material disruption to the services they provide, and that appropriate contingency plans are in place.

Nevertheless, the House will be concerned that the public sector as a whole continues to operate effectively after the date change; the ministerial group will take a close interest in progress on that. Ministers have for some time been in touch with the key organisations that they sponsor to emphasise the importance of tackling the date change problem and to help with advice and support. I have asked them to report on those organisations, and I have placed a summary of their responses in the Library and on the internet. I am also encouraging all non-departmental public bodies, organisations and other bodies in the wider public sector to publish their plans for millennium compliance.

The quality of the responses varies. They show that all the organisations covered are aware of the problem and are taking action, but there is clearly a long way to go before we have a complete picture. Some of the organisations are small, and the century date change has few, if any, implications for them. However, others—such as the national health service and local authorities—are critical to ensuring a satisfactory continuation of key public services over the millennium; they will need to reassure the public that they will be able to provide those services.

The National Audit Office report published last month stated that the framework for managing the remedial process in the NHS was in place, but that tight control was needed to ensure success. I welcome the NHS executive's statement that the millennium date change problem is its top non-clinical priority; I expect other wider public sector bodies similarly to treat it as a priority. There is not a great deal of time left to put systems in place if progress has so far been slow.

Ministers and I will be paying particular attention to monitoring progress in those key areas and reporting to the House regularly. The best way to reassure us all is for the bodies themselves to keep the public informed of their plans.

The importance of the year 2000 issue is also widely recognised in the European Union. At the meeting of EU Ministers of Public Administration at Lancaster house on 20 May, Ministers agreed to review progress at the next meeting in Vienna and to exchange information on the action that Governments were taking to help ensure continuity of operations in the public and private sectors. They invited me to take the lead, and I have today started the process by sending the UK's contribution to this exercise to my European colleagues.

Finally, a new team has been formed within the Cabinet Office reporting to me and the President of the Board of Trade. That "year 2000 team" has strengthened arrangements to drive forward action on the date change, both within Government and through working with Action 2000 in the private sector. The reports we have so far show that the message is certainly getting across, and they provide some reassurances that action is being taken. Equally, they show that we cannot afford to let up the pressure, and that we still need to monitor progress closely. That I will certainly do, and I will continue to report to the House on a quarterly basis.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): I thank the Chancellor of the Duchy for making that statement. It is most welcome for a Cabinet Minister to come to the House to explain the truthful position about a worrying problem. However, the content of the statement was extremely worrying. It shows the Government at last becoming concerned about the consequences of their own delays and dithering. They are beginning to see the danger of copying the style of Ethelred the Unready—[HON. MEMBERS: "What did the Conservatives do?"] We left matters in good order; then this Government wasted more than six months before they realised that they had to get on with the job.

The Chancellor now tells us that some Departments are leaving it very late. He says that some do not know how to tackle embedded systems and telecommunications—*[Interruption.]* Hon. Members should listen, because this is very serious for the services that they and their constituents will want.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Get back to the planet Zog.

Mr. Redwood: That was an extremely rude remark from a semi-sedentary position, and the hon. Gentleman ought to know better.

Some people do not know which of the products that they own will work. Meanwhile, costs are going up. Most chilling of all, the Chancellor cannot tell us what the position is for the health service and local authorities, or what the position will be in our hospitals and schools come the millennium.

So will the right hon. Gentleman today confirm that, instead of lecturing the private sector further about the dust in its millennium eye, the Government's efforts will now be concentrated on dealing with the log in the public sector's vision? Will he confirm that the total cost for the complete public sector will now be in excess of £3,000 million? Will he tell us how those sums will be found, in particular by the health service and by local authorities, when both are complaining of cuts and inadequate grants? Where will the money come from? What is he going to do about seeing that it is there?

Will the right hon. Gentleman today give us a guarantee that all medical equipment and systems in the national health service will work on 1 January in the year 2000, or will have been replaced in good time before that date? Will he confirm to all pensioners and people relying on housing benefits or on income support and similar

payments that all those will be paid to the right people in the right way at the right address after 1 January in the year 2000? Is he able to confirm personally and on behalf of the Government that all schools and colleges—all educational establishments—will be able to function normally on or after 1 January in the year 2000?

In short, will the right hon. Gentleman give the House a millennium guarantee from the Government that the public sector will be up and running on 1 January 2000? This feeble and cautious prevarication of a statement will not do. The House, and the country, deserve something clearer and better—nothing less than a guarantee that all will work.

Dr. Clark: The right hon. Gentleman is right in one sense. The previous Administration left the task in good order: the cupboard was bare, but it was very tidy. They left us with practically no plans to work on, although I concede that the hon. Member for Esher and Walton (Mr. Taylor), who was the Science Minister, worked hard to interest his colleagues in the issue.

The right hon. Gentleman also said that we had waffled and dithered for a long time. We have just received a report from the National Audit Office, "Managing the Millennium Threat II". The first report came in May 1997, and as soon as I received it, I began to take action. We assessed the situation, and I wrote to Departments. We achieved some movement across Government towards having the issue taken seriously.

We have never lectured the private sector. When it comes to millennium compliance, the private and public sectors will have to work together, and we have tried to work to share experiences. I pay tribute to those in the private sector who have helped us to devise our plans.

The right hon. Gentleman asked two specific questions, the first of which was about the total cost. No one has any idea what that will be for the public sector. However, on 30 March, the Prime Minister announced a major initiative on the millennium bug, and he said that he felt that the current estimate of up to £3 billion was probably as good a guess as any.

The right hon. Gentleman also asked about the national health service and the Department of Social Security. Let me refer him to the second NAO report, which, regarding the NHS, states on page 6:

> "The framework for managing the remedial programme is now in place but its size and its complexity are such that very tight control will now be required at all levels to ensure success."

We accept that, and shall work to ensure success. On the DSS, the report simply says:

> "The Department's approach to project management complies with best practice recommended by CCTA."

No one pretends the solution is easy. There is a major problem, which must be tackled, and I am trying to work with the House, as all of us have a responsibility to ensure that this country and its citizens do not suffer when 2000 comes around.

Mr. Brian White (Milton Keynes, North–East): Does my right hon. Friend accept that, in certain parts of the country, skills shortages and poaching by other firms are causing a problem in the public sector? Does he accept that we are getting close to the date on which that will cause millennium problems, which could come in the autumn of this year? His comment that some programmes may slip into 1999 was worrying; can he assure us that testing will not be squeezed as a result of that slippage?

Does my right hon. Friend agree that, because of the actions of the Government, most significant problems have been addressed, and it is not likely that we will hit a major problem on 1 January 2000? What is more likely is that there will be a large number of small problems, none of which individually will be problematic, but all of which taken together may cause serious difficulties. Will my right hon. Friend outline the steps that he proposes to take on that? Finally, what steps does he propose to take to help third-world countries for which there will be a major problem?

Dr. Clark: My hon. Friend has considerable expertise on these matters, and he has poignantly identified the key areas. We are certainly aware that, although there may be no skills shortage today, the problem will become more difficult as we move towards the key date. It was partly for that reason that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced £100 million in the Budget for improving IT excellence, 30 per cent. of which will go towards trying to tackle the millennium bug.

We are prepared to offer up to £1,300 per trainee for people from small companies and others—companies which may not be critical but which are none the less vital for society's interconnections—to go for training. We have also established MISC 4, a Cabinet Committee completely committed to considering contingency planning and the interrelationship between various aspects of both private and public industry and service providers.

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): I welcome the Minister's statement, and especially the announcement that his working group's remit will be widened to cover the whole public sector. That is an important, if slightly belated, step in the right direction. Will he confirm that much of the statement—this certainly applies to the figures that it contains—refers simply to central Government Departments rather than to the wider public sector and the public services on which the ordinary citizen depends? We are delighted that ministerial laptops will be working when the new millennium comes, but will the computer systems in Kingston hospital, and indeed in hospitals throughout the country, still be operational?

In response to the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), the Minister said that the Prime Minister's figure of £3 billion was the Government's best guess. That does not reassure anyone that the Government have a firm grasp of the problem. Can we have a more detailed breakdown of that best-guess figure? Given that national health service trusts were asked to submit their fully costed plans for tackling the millennium bug by the end of March, can the Minister now tell us the total cost of the bug to the NHS?

Given that the Chancellor said that there would be no extra funds to tackle the problem, what impact will there be on waiting lists? Does the Minister accept that widening the remit to cover the wider public sector will be a Canute-like gesture unless it is accompanied by new resources and a new sense of urgency?

Dr. Clark: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point. I invite him to help me in the task of trying to ensure that

[Dr. Clark]

his local health authority and trust, and indeed his local authority, can sensibly analyse the position and draw up and publish plans. I happen to believe that right hon. and hon. Members have a responsibility to persuade bodies in their constituencies that are not directly answerable to the House to follow what I regard as a sensible and open approach.

The hon. Gentleman chastised me for having no figures for the national health service. The figures are vague and difficult to collect. The National Audit Office undertook an audit, and—I am speaking from memory—estimated the cost to be more than £200 million to £250 million. I think that it is on the low side, but it was the NAO's best estimate when it published its report about three weeks ago.

Maria Eagle (Liverpool, Garston): I welcome my right hon. Friend's activity on this problem over the past year, and especially his willingness to make quarterly reports. The National Audit Office report makes it clear that Departments and agencies have plans of varying quality, some of which—one hopes that these are from the smaller agencies—amount to no more than one-page letters about what they have done so far. What activity is his Department undertaking to chase up those agencies and Departments with poor-quality plans, and ensure that they will be able to deal with the problem in plenty of time?

Dr. Clark: My hon. Friend quite rightly draws to our attention the great disparity of preparedness, especially within NHS trusts. The National Audit Office report says:

"one fifth of the NHS Trusts and Health Authorities thought they would need right up to the end of 1999 to ensure that all their IT systems were year 2000 compliant and 10 per cent of NHS Trusts were not confident that they would achieve this."

Frankly, that is not good enough, and I have written to the Secretary of State for Health, who is, of course, in touch with the chief executive of the national health service, to point out that that is not good enough.

We have to ensure that the message on best practice, which the national health service executive is keen to expound, is got across to those trusts which do not appear at this stage to have taken on board the seriousness of that message. Therefore, we are putting as much pressure as we can on the NHS to try to ensure that those trusts that we and others have identified do better.

Mr. David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden): May I start by welcoming the Minister's statement that his remit is being widened? It seems necessary from the report that he quotes. The Comptroller and Auditor General, if I can summarise the thrust of that report, says that, broadly speaking, centralised Departments such as the Department of Social Security are doing well. Decentralised departments such as the NHS give much more cause for concern.

The Minister quoted a figure from the report on the cost that the NHS has cited. The report also says that that cost looks very low compared with that of other sectors. He cites the likelihood of hitting the target. I think that the report says that nearly one in six health authorities are unsure whether all their clinical equipment will be up to speed by 2000.

My concern is that, given that the aim is to meet the requirements out of the existing budgets of the NHS and of other decentralised departments, and given, as the Minister says, that the costs of meeting this problem will escalate geometrically as 2000 comes closer, we do not have the makings of a financial time-bomb. I should like to hear him tell the House how he will intervene to prevent both costs and risk to the public escalating as we approach 2000.

Dr. Clark: The right hon. Gentleman approaches this in what I accept is a commendable manner. He accepts that there is a problem, and I hope that he will try to help us to deal with it; his questions certainly suggest he will.

In addition to having the National Audit Office report, soon we should have a report from the Audit Commission, which will allow us to make a better assessment of the picture in the NHS and in the other delegated authorities. Plainly, we have a better picture of the central Government Departments, because we have been working with them for almost 12 months now, whereas we have just brought the other public sector authorities within our scope.

Because of the various structures that we were not responsible for setting in place, such as delegated authorities, we do not have the hands-on authority that we may have had in days past, so it is a question of persuading trusts and authorities that they must meet the deadlines. Indeed, I will be asking the relevant Secretaries of State to get the message across to the respective bodies that they must start to take these issues seriously.

On costs, the Audit Commission suggested that the costs of the NHS would be between £200 million and £850 million, although the estimate from the NHS trusts is at the lower end. I agree with the NAO that that is very much on the low side.

Mr. Derek Wyatt (Sittingbourne and Sheppey): Under Mackinlay's law, may I congratulate my right hon. Friend on all his work on this?

May I ask for clarification? First, on the current situation with regard to Cabinet Ministers, will the actual state of each Department be put in the public domain? Secondly, I understand from all the research I have seen that it would be very unwise for any country to go into a single currency and cope with the millennium bug in one year. I wonder whether he might pose that question when he goes to Vienna, and bring back an answer.

Thirdly, is there any value in having a practice day for the millennium bug? It is dangerous to go to one date and hope that the systems are going to work. Is there a way that we could try systems in 10 per cent. of Government agencies and 10 per cent. of other agencies on a particular day in October or November this year, which is possible? It would be much better to do that than to try them all on 31 December 1999.

My final worry is that the top 60 Microsoft products, including Windows 95, are not millennium-compliant.

Dr. Clark: My hon. Friend is extremely knowledgeable about these matters. I can confirm that the detailed plans and the complete responses from Cabinet Ministers will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses and on the internet. They add up now to more than 2,000 pages.

As for the Vienna issue, we have examined millennium compliance and the euro. Ever since the Maastricht treaty was signed in 1992, the countries that intend to sign up to the euro have been aware of the dual problem involved.

I do not know enough about a specific testing period; I will certainly look into it. To give my hon. Friend some idea of progress so far, we believe that about 30 per cent. of systems have been completed and about 25 per cent. have been tested. The Cabinet Sub-Committee has recommended that, once internal testing has been done, we should do random testing with outside experts to double-check the facilities.

I was not aware of my hon. Friend's point about Windows 95 and the other Microsoft pieces of equipment—but I fully understand it.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher and Walton): The Chancellor was generous about my efforts, and we certainly share his desire to ensure that the public are protected from a failure of systems at the millennium. Some simple things can go wrong and cause havoc. For instance, I was born in 1945; will his systems show me as being 55 in 2000, or minus 45, or not born at all? The difference is important, not just to me but to the records that the Minister is keeping.

Is the Chancellor following best private sector practice—for example, when it comes to risk assessment? Such risk assessment has led private sector companies to prioritise already. That is, of course, a good deal more sensitive in the public sector, because it implies that some functions may not continue through the millennium. Is the Minister copying the auditors in the private sector? From this year, some large companies' accounts will be qualified—a practice which could be applied to the NHS trusts.

What concerns me about costs is that a failure to provide a ballpark figure would imply that no proper audit of the problem has been carried out by some of the decentralised public services. That is not a great criticism of the Chancellor, but it is very worrying if we do not yet have a grip of the size of the problem.

Inevitably, at some point, Government Departments will refuse to deal with private sector companies that cannot guarantee that they are compliant. In the private sector, cut-off dates are beginning this year, not in 1999. Will the public sector start refusing to deal with private sector companies in this position—on 31 December 1998 or thereabouts?

Dr. Clark: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his pertinent points. I sincerely meant the tribute that I paid to his work.

I hope that I have already made it clear that we are trying to work with the private sector. We accept that it is often way ahead of the public sector, and we have a great deal to learn—we are still learning—from its experiences. Some of those advising us are prominent private sector figures.

The first lesson that we have learnt is that prioritising is critical—we have made that quite clear to all central Government Departments. The second lesson is the issue of testing and having external testing, just as, in a financial context, one has external auditors to check one's own internal auditors.

Regarding the hon. Gentleman's point about the NHS, on 15 May, we sent round a circular to the NHS making it clear to the trusts and to the NHS authorities that they are responsible for getting this right. We made it clear that the ultimate responsibility for millennium compliance within a trust rests with the chief executive of that trust—that is spelled out in words of one syllable.

We understand the hon. Gentleman's third point about the wider public sector, and I accept that he was not making a cheap political point. There are problems: having devolved power to try to enable increased efficiency, one is left without the hands-on authority. I think that we have got the message of awareness and necessity across to central Government; we have not managed to do so with the same success in the wider public sector, but we intend to do so.

The hon. Gentleman's final point related to testing equipment that we are buying in, and I have installed a testing and checking regime. Although, since September last year, we have said that every piece of equipment that central Government buy in ought to be millennium-compliant, I am insisting that there is random, routine testing of the equipment to ensure that compliance standards are met. I am working in the hope that, as the market for equipment in central Government is so large, no supplier would be so foolish as to supply us with equipment that was not millennium-compliant, because we are carrying out checks.

Mr. Christopher Leslie (Shipley): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, although it is welcome that the Government are bringing forward plans to catch up with the neglect left behind by the previous Government, it is an outrage that so many information technology suppliers are still selling goods and products that are not millennium-compliant? Have the Government any plans to take legal action to recover some of the costs incurred by the public sector as a result of duff and defective products being sold by such companies?

Dr. Clark: As I said, I have now installed a new regime whereby there is random testing of equipment supplied. The answer to my hon. Friend is that, if we find equipment that is not up to scratch, we simply send it back, and think very hard before offering a contract to that supplier again.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): The Chancellor said that his latest estimate of the cost to Government Departments of dealing with the millennium date change was £402 million, and that he was confident that that could be met out of information technology budgets, rather than, as he put it, out of operating costs. He then went on to a guesstimate, saying that he thought that the problem would cost up to £3 billion in the wider public arena.

The right hon. Gentleman mentioned in particular the NHS, in which the problem would cost somewhere between £250 million and £800 million, but is he satisfied that it will be possible to meet that sum, without—in respect of the NHS, I use the term "operating costs" literally—the quality of services provided being affected? If he cannot answer that now, can he give any indication as to when the other Chancellor—the Chancellor of the Exchequer—will be able to say whether Government money will be forthcoming to deal with the problem, or whether the cost will have to come out of overall budgets?

Dr. Clark: The hon. Gentleman raises a serious point. The truth is that nobody really knows—nobody knows

[Dr. Clark]

how much it will cost either the private sector or the public sector. Those figures are only guesstimates, but each Department has made its own guesstimate, is aware of the costs and has budgeted accordingly. Let me make the general point that the replacement of IT equipment is in a very short cycle; in the past three years, the amount of routine replacement with millennium-compliant equipment has meant that the cost might not be quite as great as we thought it would be. The guess of £3 billion is the best guess that anyone has made.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough): Does my right hon. Friend share my concern about the duplication of effort, especially within the health service, with different trusts all trying to solve the same problem? I am frustrated to see Conservative Members nodding their heads in response to this, because I believe that their changes to the national health service created the divisions that have led to lots of people having to do the same job. Will my right hon. Friend ensure that separate health trusts do not have to duplicate one another's work by instructing the Medical Devices Agency to provide a list of millennium-compliant equipment so that trusts can have a single source of reliable information about what is compliant?

Dr. Clark: My hon. Friend asks pertinent questions. I assure her that that issue has been considered, but NHS trusts have many aspects. For example, the information management group of the NHS executive gives advice and guidance on information technology issues; the Medical Supplies Agency performs a similar task on supply issues; the estates agency provides specialist advice and consultancy on estate matters, including equipment; and the Medical Devices Agency, to which my hon. Friend referred, is responsible for ensuring that all the necessary steps are taken and that individual trusts are aware of those steps. We are considering ways of ensuring that the advice given by different groups within the NHS is co-ordinated. I shall draw my hon. Friend's views to the attention of the NHS executive.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): About two months ago, during Scottish questions, I was given an unconditional assurance by the Scottish Office that the emergency services in Scotland would be millennium-compliant. Can the Chancellor of the Duchy give that assurance for emergency services in England, or was his Scottish colleague being somewhat heroic?

Dr. Clark: The Scottish Office has a slight advantage, in that its old mainframe computer was replaced in March, which means that the problems in Scotland are considerably eased compared with those in England. However, the Cabinet Committee is trying to ensure that the provision of health and emergency cover is dealt with.

That is not simply a public sector issue, because the provision of emergency services requires, for example, that telephone exchanges are working. That is what I meant earlier when I referred to an interrelationship between the private and public sectors. We all depend on one another, and we are working to try to ensure that contingency plans are in place at a national level so that there will be no serious problems in 2000.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Still on the subject of Scotland, does the Minister think that on Hogmanay 1999, any of us will be in a fit state to do anything, let alone cope with the millennium bug? Is there not some merit in the case put forward by my hon. Friend the Member for Sittingbourne and Sherry—[HON. MEMBERS: "Sherry?"]—Sheppey (Mr. Wyatt)? That is what will happen on Hogmanay 1999. My hon. Friend suggested that there should at least be a dummy run on a Saturday and Sunday.

Will the Minister also consider the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, North-East (Mr. White), which was also asked by those of us present during the proceedings on the Companies (Millennium Computer Compliance) Bill in the name of the hon. Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson), when the hon. Member for Esher and Walton (Mr. Taylor) was a Minister? My hon. Friend asked how developing countries should be helped with their problems, because, apart from anything else, chaos in their ordering and trading systems will hit us.

Dr. Clark: On my hon. Friend's latter point—it was remiss of me not to deal with this earlier, for which I apologise to him—it is important that we recommend best practice and provide help to other countries. The interrelationship that exists, as I pointed out, between the public and private sectors in this country applies equally across international boundaries. We are considering what assistance we can provide to third-world countries. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has taken every opportunity at every international conference since March to raise the issue of the millennium bug.

On my hon. Friend's other point, I was tempted to say that at least one person in Scotland should be in a fit state on Hogmanay 1999, but, in light of my hon. Friend's reference to a constituency in "Sherry", I am not sure whether that will be the case. I have said that we shall consider whether it is feasible to conduct contingency testing. I do not rule it out, but I shall seek expert advice on that point.

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North): Will my right hon. Friend comment on the popular belief—which has been strengthened somewhat this afternoon—that, by new year's day 2000, we may have witnessed the complete disintegration of the shadow spokesman, the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), and possibly his entire party?

Dr. Clark: That is a little unkind. The right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) is extremely consistent: he rubbishes this Government in exactly the same way as he rubbished the previous Government.

Mr. Stephen Timms (East Ham): My right hon. Friend is well aware of the anxieties being expressed that there are not enough skilled people to do the work that must be done between now and the millennium. I welcome his reassurances this afternoon about the position in central Government Departments, but what is his assessment of the position on skills shortages in the wider public sector?

Is there any evidence of a shortage of the skilled staff who are required in sufficient numbers to do the work that is outstanding?

Dr. Clark: I can go only on what Departments and public sector bodies tell me. With the exception of the Northern Ireland Office, the Ministry of Defence and several smaller agencies, they tell me that they do not envisage any particular shortage. However, I am advised by people in the private sector that, as we move towards testing time—particularly next year—there could be a shortage. We want to ensure that that does not happen, so we are trying to train 20,000 "bug busters" under the initiative outlined in the Budget.

Eritrea

4.41 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Tony Lloyd): With permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a statement on the border conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea.

The dispute over border delimitation and demarcation arose when Ethiopian and Eritrean armed forces clashed on the Badame plateau on 12 May. Ethiopia accused Eritrea of invading its territory and Eritrea defended its actions by claiming that it was responding to an Ethiopian violation on 6 May. There have since been further clashes in border regions over disputed territory.

On 15 May, I issued a statement on behalf of the European Union expressing our concern about the clashes, urging restraint and calling for the resolution of the dispute by peaceful means. At that time, a facilitation team led by Susan Rice, the United States Assistant Secretary of State, and including Vice-President Kagame of Rwanda, commenced a round of shuttle diplomacy in an effort to find a peaceful solution to the dispute. We have fully supported those efforts and continue to do so in both our presidency statements and personal contacts with both leaders by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary.

The team's initial recommendations included an Eritrean withdrawal from Badame and the restoration of the status quo of 6 May, the demilitarisation of the whole border area, the delimitation/demarcation of the boundary, and deployment of observers. We understand that, while both sides showed a willingness to accept the broad principles of the recommendations, they could not agree on several points of detail—particularly on the Eritrean side. We monitored closely developments throughout the negotiation period and, by 2 June, it became apparent that the facilitators had been unable to bridge the gap of disagreement between the two sides.

Therefore, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary took the decision to intervene in order to reinforce the European Union's position that the dispute should be settled by peaceful means and to underline our support for the work of the facilitators. On 3 June, my right hon. Friend spoke personally to Prime Minister Meles of Ethiopia and sent a written message to President Issaias of Eritrea. He told both leaders that the United Kingdom and the European Union were saddened by this dispute between two friendly nations. He stressed that the outbreak of war would damage the interests of both sides and, in particular, would endanger regional stability and development. My right hon. Friend assured both leaders that the EU supported the efforts of all parties that genuinely wished to see the dispute settled peacefully.

Sadly, as hon. Members will know from media coverage, the two sides escalated the level of military engagement. On 5 June, the Ethiopians flew two bombing sorties over Asmara airport in Eritrea and the Eritreans twice launched air attacks on Mekelle in the Tigray province of Ethiopia. The Ethiopians responded with a further bombing raid on Asmara airport on the morning of 6 June. I regret to report to the House that the raids caused civilian casualties and deaths on both sides of the border. We deplore this needless loss of life and have reiterated our appeal to both sides to seek a negotiated settlement.

[Mr. Tony Lloyd]

In view of the rapidly deteriorating situation, which, because of the geography, threatened to trap foreign nationals in a situation of war in Eritrea—the same geographical problem does not apply to Ethiopia—officials urgently considered the need to evacuate British nationals in Eritrea. At that point, it was clearly very dangerous to risk flying in and out of Asmara airport without guarantees of safety from both sides. Our ambassador in Addis Ababa initiated a joint United Kingdom-United States-German-Italian effort to secure such agreements. Accordingly, an RAF Hercules set off from RAF Lyneham in the early hours of Saturday morning to evacuate British nationals who wished to leave and who had been unable to be accommodated on a US civilian evacuation flight to Frankfurt the previous day. The US flight had accepted 48 British nationals, mostly voluntary service personnel. We are most grateful to the United States Government for their help.

The Germans, Italians, Americans and the United Kingdom sent in military evacuation flights on Saturday evening. Our aircraft was able to evacuate a large number of Commonwealth and EU citizens and one American, as well as British citizens, to Jedda in Saudi Arabia. One of the two American flights that day took 21 Britons to Amman in Jordan. The majority of British nationals have now arrived back in the United Kingdom. Our consulates in Frankfurt, Jedda and Amman have assisted with onward journeys. I take this opportunity to pay special tribute to those closely involved in the evacuation exercise, including the crew of the RAF Hercules and our honorary consul in Asmara, Stephen Burges. He was appointed only recently and works in an unpaid capacity—he literally experienced a baptism of fire.

Although accurate and up-to-date information is now hard to obtain, we understand that the temporary cessation of hostilities negotiated to assure the safe passage of the evacuation flights has, by and large, held. I repeat our urgent call to both parties to maintain the cessation of hostilities and to agree a formal ceasefire. If they do that, I believe that the way will be open for the facilitators to resume their work. The gap between the two sides is small and can surely be bridged. They do not dispute the border line itself: it is a matter of demarcation and delimitation. It is in the interests of both countries, which for 17 years fought together the terrible tyranny of the Derg regime, to find a peaceful settlement to the dispute. The stability and development of both countries is otherwise at risk.

We are now considering with the US and our EU partners how best we may be able to assist in the process of securing a lasting and peaceful settlement of the dispute. We believe that that can be achieved by giving our unequivocal support to the efforts of the facilitators. If we can provide material help that also supports those efforts, we shall do so. I assure the House that we shall continue to do all that we can to bring about a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

Mr. Michael Trend (Windsor): I thank the Minister for his statement and join him in commending the work of the Royal Air Force and members of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in evacuating British citizens from Eritrea. Like the Minister, I thank the honorary consul, Mr. Stephen Burges, who took up his post only on Monday. He has played an important role in evacuating civilians from that country. It demonstrates once again the value and commitment of honorary consuls, and the Opposition are grateful for their work in assisting British citizens throughout the world.

The Minister has confirmed that all British citizens who wish to leave the country have now done so. Will he tell the House what arrangements have been made to ensure that others who may wish to leave hereafter have the opportunity to do so? On a more general but very important point, can the Minister give the House an unequivocal assurance that the United Kingdom will be able to participate in similar future evacuations should the need arise after the findings of the strategic defence review are made known and implemented?

The Minister will be aware that Britain has a particular relationship with the region, following the liberation of Eritrea in 1941 and our administration of the country for more than a decade. In view of the growing hostility between the two countries, is it right for the ambassador to Eritrea to be resident in Ethiopia? Has the Minister plans to review our diplomatic presence?

I have questions on two further specific points. First, the Minister refers to the Government being prepared to provide "material help" for the efforts of those seeking to facilitate a peaceful settlement. The Minister could have in mind, for example, arranging an international conference or providing direct military assistance. Will he be more specific about what he means by "material help"? Secondly, can the Minister shed light on what arms and other munitions may be getting through to Eritrea and Ethiopia at present?

Finally, the Minister will be aware that the dispute is not the only one in Africa that could destabilise the continent. What steps is the United Kingdom taking to ensure that other territorial disputes do not escalate into military confrontations such as the one in Eritrea and Ethiopia? For example, what does the Minister plan to do about the stand-off between two Commonwealth countries, Botswana and Namibia? What is being done to support the idea of creating an African-based and controlled peacekeeping force, which could be deployed in areas of tension—such as the border of Eritrea—while diplomatic solutions are sought?

Mr. Lloyd: In welcoming the hon. Gentleman to his new post, I thank him for his gracious remarks about those who took part in the evacuation operation, especially the honorary consul, whom I mentioned. He rightly draws attention to the valuable role that is played by not only honorary consuls, but the diplomatic community globally. At times like this, we all realise that they play an especially important role.

The hon. Gentleman asked me about the British citizens remaining in Eritrea. We believe that they number about 20. In the run-up to the eventual evacuation, we gave consistent advice that British citizens should consider the position in Eritrea, and obviously, one of the reasons for the evacuation was premised by the fact that civilian flights ceased to operate, I believe, on Thursday 4 June. In that context, the decision to send in an RAF plane for evacuation purposes was, of itself, a significant signal that we could not henceforth give guarantees about the safety of British nationals in that situation. We shall consider every practical step that is possible to offer assistance to British citizens in the light of what I have said, but I repeat

that the citizens who chose to remain did so—I believe—knowingly, on the basis that further evacuation may not be an option.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the possibility of such evacuations continuing in future, after the strategic defence review. He, like the whole House, must await the outcome of the publication of that review, as is right and proper.

The hon. Gentleman asked me especially about our diplomatic relationship, specifically in terms of the ambassador in Addis Ababa also being accredited to Eritrea. That situation was based on the fact that, since 1991, the two countries—this is the sad irony of the present conflict—had relations as close as it was possible to imagine between two neighbours, because they had the same background and had been through the same conflict. In those terms, the situation that confronts us is very new. I believe that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I say that, although I do not want to fail to answer his question, it is premature for us to examine how best we continue with our relations, especially with Eritrea.

The hon. Gentleman asked me what support the European Union would consider giving. So far, the primary role has been played by the United States and by the Rwandans; we applaud the role that they have played. Undoubtedly, they played a significant role in trying to prevent the conflict; they are still working hard to prevent it from continuing. We do not want to cut across anything that they do.

At the moment, therefore, the facilities that I spoke of in my statement would mainly be confined—although we would not rule out anything else that might be helpful—to technical expertise, such as the provision of technical experts to take part in the process of delimiting the border between the two countries. That is a practical role, which we may be able to play, and which we would want to play.

Finally, the hon. Gentleman asked about conflict prevention throughout Africa. He may be aware that the British Government, with the United States and France, have been actively engaged at the United Nations, and in co-ordination with the Organisation of African Unity, in proposals to establish an African peacekeeping presence. That would consist of building a capacity between African nations, so that they can play the role that they should be playing, whereby a regional presence moves into such peacekeeping activity and can play a constructive role. We are actively engaged in that agenda; that agenda will pay dividends in future.

Mr. David Hanson (Delyn): I thank my hon. Friend for his statement. First, will he give us an idea whether any assessment has been made of the longer-term solutions to the problems that have been highlighted in the past week or so? Secondly, will he give us an idea of the assessment that he has made of the impact on the important development issues in both countries? As he knows, both countries are among the poorest in the world, and have suffered from drought and famine as well as the long-term effects of war.

Mr. Lloyd: The immediate needs of both countries are an end to hostilities, an acceptance that the zone in dispute should be demilitarised, and a return to the status quo before 6 May, when the present round of conflict had its origins. Beyond that immediate agenda, there needs to be agreement on a process for arbitration between the two parties. Both the United States and Rwandan facilitating team and the European Union will actively work toward that.

The second part of my hon. Friend's question is serious. Since the independence of Eritrea and since the overthrow of the Mengistu regime in Ethiopia, the two countries have worked closely together, in a partnership which, for the first time for a considerable while, has allowed the possibility of development. The real tragedy of this conflict is that all that is now cast in doubt. All that makes it much more difficult for would-be partners to help. It also makes it much more difficult, on the ground, for the practical progress that both countries should be making to occur. That, I regret, is the real foolishness and the real sadness of the present situation.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): I take this opportunity to congratulate the Minister and the Government on helping to negotiate the ceasefire that led to the effective evacuation of British citizens from Eritrea. Does he recall that, in 1985, there was a terrible famine in the Horn of Africa, which was due to a civil war, in which Ethiopia and Eritrea and their present Governments were on the same side? Since that famine in the Horn of Africa, arms and aid have flowed together to both Ethiopia and Eritrea.

Will the Minister tell the House what proper scrutiny there has been of arms going to Eritrea and Ethiopia since his Government took power? Is it not time to end the spiral of conflict that starts with arms to fuel wars, which cause the poverty, which affects the whole of the developing world?

Mr. Lloyd: I thank the hon. Lady for her remarks about the role of the British ambassador in Addis Ababa in negotiating the ceasefire. It was an important role—one which, as it happens, not only brokered a ceasefire until 3 o'clock GMT on Sunday morning, which was the negotiated time frame, but, as far as we are aware, has led to a cessation of hostilities since. We hope that that cessation continues. A not insignificant role was played by the ambassador and his colleagues in Addis Ababa.

On the wider question of the supply of arms to both Ethiopia and Eritrea, I am rather cautious about giving the House information off the top of my head, for reasons that may be obvious. I am not aware that arms have gone from this country to Ethiopia or Eritrea in that time, although I shall seek to check those facts, to ensure, as ever, that this Government, unlike the previous Government, give accurate information to the House.

The real issue that the hon. Lady raises is the supply of arms to Africa and to other areas of potential conflict. The Government are working hard on that problem. For example, the Department for International Development recently provided the Government of Mali with significant sums, among other purposes for the possible buyback of arms that have gone into that area. The British Government sponsored a conference in the past few weeks in southern Africa, the aim of which was to examine the possibility of controlling the supply of illicit arms in that region. Those are issues on which the Government are engaged because we know that, in the end, conflict is based on the existence of armaments.

[Mr. Lloyd]

In the case of Ethiopia and Eritrea, the conflict is between two sovereign nations, which is rare nowadays. Few would deny the right of sovereign nations to engage in defence.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): Is there any possibility of a senior aide of Kofi Annan acting as a mediator between the two nations? Has this dreadful affair been raised at the Security Council? On the question of the hon. Member for Windsor (Mr. Trend) about the possibility of regionally based UN peacekeeping forces, how on earth can we expect the United Nations to develop such a fine idea, given that as an organisation it is so badly strapped for money, largely as a result of the stupid obduracy of Congressmen and women on Capitol hill?

Mr. Lloyd: I can tell the House that the matter certainly has been discussed at the Security Council. It should come before the Security Council again, with a view to the United Nations adopting a Security Council resolution. It is important that the UN's authority should be placed behind condemnation of the violence and the efforts of those who are trying to mediate.

Although the United Nations must be engaged at a general level, the view of the international community is that the present efforts of the United States, which speaks for itself, and of Rwanda, which is a country friendly to both parties and a neighbour, are particularly useful. We would not advocate any measure that cut across those efforts. It is important that too many people do not become involved as that would frustrate the mediation efforts.

On my hon. Friend's final question, we believe that the United Nations should be put on a proper financial footing, which means that all those who owe large sums should pay up.

Sir Peter Emery (East Devon): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Windsor (Mr. Trend) on his first appearance at the Dispatch Box in his new role, which I hope he will enjoy.

I have three questions. First, how many Europeans, other than the British, are still left in Eritrea? Do we know that? Is not the airfield at Asmara both a civilian and a military airfield? One side is military and the other side is civilian, so an attack on the airfield is an attack on a civilian airfield as well as on a military base. If we can get some sort of solution, we should be prepared to ensure that the airfield can be restored for civilian use as quickly as possible.

Secondly, as a secondary effect of the conflict, are there attacks on Europeans? I believe that that is not the case, but it would be useful to have an assurance that, although Europeans may be caught up between the two sides, there are no direct attacks on Europeans.

Thirdly, does the Minister agree that in the efforts to bring about a solution, the leadership ought to be taken by the Organisation of African Unity, whose headquarters are in Addis Ababa? Such an organisation is most likely to be able to represent both sides in bringing about a solution.

Mr. Lloyd: The right hon. Gentleman is right that the airport in Asmara is both military and civilian. As far as we are aware, there have been no further attacks on the airport since before the British evacuation took place. We hope that that state of affairs continues.

I cannot give the right hon. Gentleman any further information about the number of European nationals. We know that there are some 20 British nationals there, but we do not know how many other Europeans may be there. I can tell the House that on the RAF Hercules flight, there were 104 people, of whom the overwhelming majority were non-UK nationals. They were nationals of Commonwealth countries or of other European countries. We trust that we played a significant role in evacuating other European citizens, and I am sure that the House appreciates the work of the RAF and other authorities in that process.

I am not aware of any attack on European nationals. We have had no such reports, but obviously the quality of information is poor and it is not possible to give a guarantee that that is the case.

On the role of the Organisation of African Unity, the House will want to know that the OAU is in session at present. The Secretary-General, Salim Salim, has been in direct contact with the Prime Minister of Ethiopia and the President of Eritrea to put the force of the OAU behind the mediation role currently being played by the Americans and the Rwandans. That is the right way forward. It is important that in this almost inexplicable situation, there is no gap between organisations in the international community, and that all of us speak with the same voice and the same authority to deplore the violence and to demand that both sides get round the negotiating table.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): To return to the question of the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) on arms, when I was on holiday in Iran in October, I got into a chance conversation with a Russian national in Hamadan who was clearly selling arms to Iran. When I commented that he was obviously doing good business, he said, "Yes, I am certainly doing good business, but it is not half as good as the business that we do in east Africa."

Is it not the case that Russian arms, dirt cheap and pretty sophisticated, are swilling around vast parts of the developing world? I do not know what my hon. Friends can do about it, but is that not part of the problem and should we not face the fact that cheap Russian arms and ammunition are creating a great deal of difficulty?

Mr. Lloyd: It is not just Russian arms that find their way into potential conflict zones. Sadly, the world is awash with small arms. The majority of deaths and injuries worldwide are caused by small arms systems, not by the great armament systems that we tend to read about.

As I told the House earlier, the British Government are engaged on practical ways of dealing with the problem. I do not pretend that there is an easy, immediate solution. We are examining the possibility of empowering regional groupings. Southern Africa is an example of a region that has known enormous conflict in recent times and where, even now, huge amounts of arms are swilling around. If we can learn the lessons from that region, they apply in other parts of the world. At the international level,

with other partners who share our concern, we are examining other ways of dealing with that extremely difficult problem.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): Am I correct in understanding that the Minister is saying that the Ethiopians initiated this latest round of violence? Do the Government believe that there is any justification for this behaviour? Is it possible for the international community, especially the United Kingdom and the European Union, to draw a distinction between the behaviour of the two nations that are involved in the violence?

Mr. Lloyd: I did not say that the Ethiopians are the authors of this particular round of violence. In these situations, it is probably foolhardy to try to allocate responsibility. At this stage, we should be saying to both sides that the cycle of violence begetting violence is not the way forward. We need a clear break from hostility, demilitarisation of the conflict zone and a return to the status quo that existed before 6 May, and then to get round the negotiating table to begin the difficult process of drawing up commonly agreed boundaries. Such a process, however difficult, is much less painful than the cycle of violence that simply kills.

Maria Eagle (Liverpool, Garston): Given that there are other on-going conflicts in the area—one thinks of Sudan and Somalia—what implications does my hon. Friend believe the new conflict has for the region? Is this conflict likely to change the balance of power and the balance of other conflicts in the region and affect the stability of the whole of east Africa?

Mr. Lloyd: My hon. Friend raises an important point. We know that in neighbouring Sudan there has been a civil war for a generation—indeed, effectively since independence. We know also that in Somalia the state of governance is almost no governance. A conflict between what in recent times have been the more stable countries in the region is a tragedy for the two countries involved and is potentially destabilising within the region. That is partly why there need to be intense efforts to bring both sides to the negotiating table.

This extra or latest conflict could, of course, spill over to neighbouring countries, and the process of destabilisation could occur on a much wider scale. Sadly, that destabilisation would feed back into the conflict. There is much for us to agree on in our demand that mediation must be the right answer.

Points of Order

5.12 pm

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I seek your clarification. It has been drawn to my attention by friends of mine in the tobacco industry that there is a meeting tomorrow morning in the Jubilee Room. It is a so-called press briefing entitled, "A call for a more effective UK public policy on smoking cessation and the use of nicotine replacement therapy", sponsored by the hon. Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson). I understand that the promoters are being assisted by a commercial company whose public relations firm was responsible for sending out the invitations to this so-called press briefing.

Is it right, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the facilities of the House should be used for a meeting purporting to address a matter of public policy when it is, in fact, masquerading as such on behalf of commercial companies that wish to supplant tobacco and replace it with an alternative?

Mr. Hugh Bayley (City of York): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) is an eminent cancer scientist. Surely it is right and proper that he should hold a meeting in the House with bodies working in that sector and invite hon. Members who, like me, have an interest in his work in the fight against cancer.

Dr. Ian Gibson (Norwich, North): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am pleased to have this opportunity to speak to the House. I can assure the House that I would not have any truck with tobacco companies. Indeed, I have fought them for many years. I am told reliably by the two professors who have produced the report that will be presented tomorrow that they are independent of any tobacco companies. Their report will play a major part in the production of the White Paper on tobacco smoking and the protection of young people—indeed, all people—from hazards to the health of the people of our nation.

Mr. Howarth: I do not wish to detain the House much longer, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The point is that commercial companies are offering nicotine replacement therapy and it is their public relations company that is behind the organisation of the meeting. I have no objection to the hon. Member for Norwich, North taking part in it. My objection is to the fact that a meeting purporting to address a matter of public policy is in fact being promoted by commercial companies, undeclared.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): I have no doubt that the appropriate authority will have noted the point that the hon. Gentleman has made and will, if necessary, look into the matter for him.

TEACHING AND HIGHER EDUCATION BILL [*LORDS*] PROGRAMME

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 82 (Business Committee),

That the Report [4th June] from the Business Committee be now considered.—[*Mr. Jon Owen Jones.*]

Question agreed to.

Report considered accordingly.

Resolved,

That this House doth agree with the Committee in its Resolution.—[*Mr. Jon Owen Jones.*]

Following is the report of the Business Committee [4 June]:

That—

(a) Proceedings on consideration of the Bill shall be taken in the following order, namely, Amendments to Clauses 12 to 21, Amendments to Schedule 2, New Clauses 5, 6 and 8, Amendments to subsection (1) of Clause 22 relating to treatment of students resident in different parts of the United Kingdom, remaining Amendments to Clause 22 and Amendments to Clauses 23 to 28 and remaining New Clauses and New Schedules relating to Part II, Amendments to Clauses 1 to 11, Amendments to Schedule 1, Remaining New Clauses, remaining New Schedules, remaining Amendments, and

(b) the two days allotted under the Order (19th May) to proceedings on consideration and Third Reading shall be allotted in the manner shown in the following Table and each part of the proceedings shall, if not previously brought to a conclusion, be brought to a conclusion (in accordance with the Order) on the expiry of the allotted period (calculated from the commencement of proceedings on the Bill on that day) specified in the third column of the Table.

TABLE

Allotted day	*Proceedings*	*Allotted period*
First day	Amendments to Clauses 12 to 21 and Schedule 2	1 hour
	New Clauses 5, 6 and 8	1½ hours
	Amendments to subsection (1) of Clause 22 relating to treatment of students resident in different parts of the United Kingdom	3½ hours
	Remaining Amendments to Clause 22, Amendments to Clauses 23 to 28 and remaining new Clauses and new Schedules relating to Part II	6 hours
Second day	Amendments to Clauses 1 to 11 and Schedule 1, remaining New Clauses, remaining New Schedules and remaining Amendments	2 hours
	Third Reading	3 hours

Orders of the Day

Teaching and Higher Education Bill *[Lords]*

[1ST ALLOTTED DAY]

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

Clause 12

DEDUCTION OF FEES FROM SALARIES, ETC.

5.15 pm

The Minister for School Standards (Mr. Stephen Byers): I beg to move amendment No. 84, in page 8, leave out lines 14 to 18.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): With this, it will be convenient to discuss Government amendments Nos. 12, 13, 85, 96, 97, 14 to 33 and 99.

Mr. Byers: I extend a warm welcome to the occupants of the Opposition Front Bench, the hon. Members for Havant (Mr. Willetts) and for Maidenhead (Mrs. May); I hope that they will occupy their shadow positions for many years to come.

The amendments relate to the procedures that are necessary to bar teachers from entering the teaching profession. Tomorrow, we shall have the opportunity—in line with the recommendations of the Business Committee—to discuss in some detail the powers and responsibilities of the General Teaching Council. The amendments before us today enable us to consider what responsibilities the GTC should have, and reflect the Government's disagreement with the recommendations coming from the other place and our view that child protection matters should remain to be considered by the Secretary of State. We feel it appropriate for the GTC to have powers over the conduct of teachers and on the question of teachers' competence or otherwise—

Mr. Hugh Bayley (City of York): Before my hon. Friend gets into his stride, I wish to intervene on a general issue involving the General Teaching Council. I know that my hon. Friend has been actively considering education jobs moving to York now that the Funding Agency for Schools is moving away. May I say publicly what I have said privately to my hon. Friend, which is that I believe that the GTC would be an appropriate body to be sited in York, partly because of its size and partly because in my view it needs to be away from the mainstream of the Department for Education and Employment to illustrate its independence and—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. If the hon. Gentleman wants to speak at such length, he should wait and make his speech later.

Mr. Byers: My hon. Friend has been a doughty campaigner for the Funding Agency for Schools and for retaining employment in York. I regret that our decision did not go in favour of basing the new framework department in York. Instead, we decided that it should be placed in Darlington. I hear what my hon. Friend says about the potential for the GTC to be sited in York. No

doubt there is a strong case that can be made on behalf of York—and no doubt my hon. Friend will make it. Decisions about the location of the GTC will be made over the next few months. I assure my hon. Friend that we will take into account the strong representations which he has already made and which he will no doubt make over the months ahead.

The amendments deal with the role that the Secretary of State should continue to have in the barring of teachers from the profession. A number of commitments were given in Committee, and the amendments reflect several points that were made from the Government Benches and by the Opposition, who raised a number of concerns about the detail of the implementation of procedures for the barring of teachers. The amendments reflect the positive contributions made by all members of the Committee.

For the benefit of hon. Members, I shall briefly outline the existing provisions for the barring of teachers from the profession. At present, the Secretary of State has the power to bar any individual from employment by a local education authority in a school. It is not restricted to teachers, but applies to classroom assistants, caretakers and youth workers—anyone with involvement in a school and contact with children attending it.

In discharging those responsibilities, the Secretary of State must put the interests of children first, especially in child protection matters. That is why there is provision that anyone convicted of a sexual offence involving a child under 16 will automatically be barred from the teaching profession. All hon. Members would agree that that is wholly appropriate, but in cases that fall short of a criminal conviction, there is discretion about whether an individual should be barred as a teacher or from carrying out any capacity or responsibilities in a school.

That discretion is currently exercised by the Secretary of State. The House of Lords, however, proposed that the power to bar for child protection reasons should be taken from the Secretary of State and handed over to the General Teaching Council. The Government have grave concerns and reservations about handing over such an important responsibility to the untried and untested General Teaching Council, which is why I shall invite hon. Members to reject the proposals from another place and agree to the amendments, under which child protection matters would remain the responsibility of the Secretary of State.

In dealing with those matters, the Secretary of State considers representations made on behalf of individuals, who can submit written representations, testimonials, character references and, where necessary, medical and other reports. The aim of the Secretary of State, and of Ministers who have responsibility for deciding such cases, is to achieve an overall picture of the conduct of the individual. In arriving at a decision, we do not require proof beyond reasonable doubt, which is the normal test in a criminal case. We believe that, even though evidence may fall short of that, there will be situations in which an individual should be barred from a school and from working in it if the interests of children are to be put first. Ministerial decisions are made on that basis, and there is no right to appeal. An individual may apply for judicial review, however, if he believes that the Secretary of State has exercised his responsibility in a way which should be challenged.

In exercising those responsibilities, we have always put the interests of children first. Many hon. Members and parents will be concerned at the scale of the problem and the number of times annually that the Secretary of State has to consider whether an individual should be barred from taking part in classroom activities. In the 12 months to 31 March 1997, the Department dealt with no fewer than 458 misconduct cases: in 125, individuals were barred from a school and from taking part in activities, and 12 individuals had employment restrictions imposed on them. That clearly shows that we are not considering only isolated cases. Unfortunately, hundreds of cases a year—the majority concerning misconduct in relation to child protection matters—have to be dealt with by the Secretary of State.

We believe that it is right and proper that that responsibility should remain with the Secretary of State. The Department maintains a list of people who are barred or restricted from teaching and from being involved in school-based activities, which we refer to as "List 99". Hon. Members will be surprised to learn that more than 2,100 people are on it at present. The majority have been barred from teaching or from classroom activities for child protection reasons, so the scale of the problem is considerable. The Government will not ignore it. Copies of "List 99" are issued to local education authorities, to further education college corporations and to other organisations representing employers in the education service. We are all responsible for ensuring that individuals on "List 99" are not involved in school-based activities.

The Government have a responsibility to ensure that no one slips through the net. There are concerns, which were expressed in Committee, that a number of lists compiled for child protection purposes operate in various Departments. The Department for Education and Employment has "List 99", and separate lists operate in the Department of Health and the Home Office. I am pleased that the Minister of State, Home Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael), announced last Thursday that we are to establish an interdepartmental group of officials to consider the additional safeguards that are necessary to prevent unsuitable people from working with children.

The aim is to have a co-ordinated approach to ensure that we can establish a central register, which will be backed up by a new criminal offence, to prevent those on any register applying for work with children. I hope that the initiative will be welcomed by hon. Members.

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): Private schools, institutions and nurseries, where it is far more difficult to get control, were mentioned in Committee, but have not been addressed in the Bill. Can the Minister assure hon. Members that he will consider those organisations carefully, to ensure that we can offer the same protection to children in that sector as we do to children in the state sector?

Mr. Byers: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point. Individuals on "List 99" are also barred from teaching in independent schools. I am happy to give notice that if we discover an independent school employing an individual on "List 99", we shall take steps, not only in relation to the individual, but in relation to the school.

[Mr. Byers]

We have powers to serve a notice of complaint and to strike a school off the register of independent schools, and we have certainly exercised them since I have had responsibility for the matter. We have moved against individual independent schools that have not regarded child protection matters as being as important as they are and struck them off the register, which means that they can no longer act as independent schools. We shall exercise that power in any situation where we think that the interests of children are not being put first. That applies to the independent sector as well as to the maintained sector, for which we have responsibility as well.

5.30 pm

Although it is important that the General Teaching Council should be a single unified voice for the profession, it is the Government's view that it should not have responsibility for child protection matters. The House of Lords took a different view, but we believe that the public have a right to expect a coherent and rigorous system for barring people who are unsuitable to enter schools. It would have been wrong, misguided and dangerous to adopt the proposals from another place, which would have fragmented the child protection system by passing those responsibilities to the General Teaching Council.

The General Teaching Council should have a more clearly defined role as regards regulation of the profession, however. Schedule 2 provides for the council to determine those cases that involve unacceptable professional conduct or serious professional incompetence, but reserves child protection matters for determination by the Secretary of State. More than half the cases that come before the Department concern child protection matters; they will remain the Department's responsibility. Many of the other cases have little or no child protection dimension and those will become the responsibility of the General Teaching Council. In a small number of cases where it may be difficult to define the classification, it will be for the Secretary of State to determine whether the issue involves matters of child protection: if it does, it will continue to be reserved to the Secretary of State.

We shall place on employers a requirement to report to the General Teaching Council when they have dismissed someone on the ground of misconduct or incompetence, or when a person has resigned when he or she might have been so dismissed. Amendment No. 13 ensures that a teacher cannot tender his or her resignation in order not to be reported on the ground of incompetence or misconduct. That important safeguard closes a loophole that would otherwise exist.

A teacher must always be entitled to put his or her side of a case at a hearing to determine whether he or she should be barred from the profession. The Bill at present requires that teachers will have legal representation before any hearing of the General Teaching Council. The hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) raised that issue in Committee. He was concerned that the provision was overly restrictive in terms of a friend's accompanying a teacher. The Government agree with that view. It would be inappropriate to restrict the provision solely to legal representation. Amendment No. 17 makes it clear that a teacher can be accompanied by anybody of his or her choice, rather than someone from a legal background alone. That will be bad news to many Members of this House who are in the legal profession, but it is right and appropriate in these circumstances to widen the classification of those who can accompany an individual teacher.

The General Teaching Council should be able to strike teachers off the register for serious professional incompetence as well as unacceptable professional conduct. That corresponds with the powers of most professional bodies, particularly the General Medical Council. Indeed, we have based many of the proposals before the House this evening on the GMC model.

We intend that the General Teaching Council will be entitled to act only when a teacher has been dismissed on the ground of incompetence or has resigned to avoid such dismissal. The council will then consider the case and decide whether the incompetence demonstrated is so serious that it should be taken forward with a view to striking the teacher concerned off the register or placing conditions on his or her practice as a teacher. However, the new powers that we are giving the General Teaching Council will in no way cut across the new capability procedures now being adopted by local authorities and school governing bodies throughout the country. It will be for individual governing bodies to judge a teacher's competence or otherwise, and it will be the responsibility and right of a governing body to dismiss the teacher.

Nothing in the powers that we intend to give the General Teaching Council will cut across that obligation and responsibility on a school governing body. We intend to ensure that, where that incompetence is so grave, the General Teaching Council should have the power to strike the teacher off the register so that he or she can teach in no other school.

Schedule 2 sets out the range of sanctions that will be open to the General Teaching Council. Again, they reflect the powers made available to other professional bodies. The sanctions will be graded to respond to misconduct or incompetence of differing levels of severity. Schedule 2 would allow the General Teaching Council to issue a reprimand to attach conditions to a teacher's registration, to suspend registration for up to two years, or to strike a teacher off the register—the ultimate sanction. Those powers will provide the General Teaching Council with a full and substantial role in regulating the teaching profession. I believe that that approach will be welcomed by teachers and the wider public.

People who are disciplined by the General Teaching Council should have a right of appeal, and the Government have been considering what arrangements should be put in place. We have now tabled amendment No. 28, which provides that individual teachers will be able to lodge an appeal with the High Court within 28 days of receiving notice of a disciplinary order. That reflects the arrangements that apply north of the border, where teachers may appeal to the Court of Session against a decision made by the General Teaching Council. I am advised that, since the GTC for Scotland was established in 1966, there have been only two appeals, so we envisage that the number of appeals will be small.

We seek to close a further loophole by means of amendments that have been tabled this evening. Teachers may commit offences abroad. Where those would have

been considered offences in the UK, we want to ensure that they can also be considered. As the law stands, it does not allow us to do so. Amendments Nos. 15, 23, 30 and 31 will achieve that objective and close what could be a significant loophole. When the General Teaching Council investigates and hears disciplinary cases, it will need to have the power to assess all the necessary and relevant documentation, to require witnesses to attend, to give evidence and to administer oaths. That is in keeping with the powers of other professional bodies, and we intend to give such powers to the General Teaching Council. Amendments Nos. 18 and 19 do precisely that.

In addition, the General Teaching Council will have the power to impose conditional registration orders on teachers found guilty of unacceptable professional conduct or serious professional incompetence. Amendments Nos. 26 and 27 make it clear that such an order might involve the teacher having to incur expenditure to comply with those requirements. For example, a teacher may need to undergo further training or be required to attend in-service training. In those circumstances, it is wholly appropriate for the individual to bear the costs.

This is an important area. By means of the amendments that we are tabling this evening, and by reversing the defeat that the Government suffered in the House of Lords, this House will put the interests of children first. Where child protection matters are concerned, we must be eternally vigilant. By providing the Secretary of State with a continuing role in child protection matters, we shall be able to guarantee our children the security that they deserve. The amendments will do that, and I commend them to the House. I hope that, although the House may divide on other issues this evening, this raft of the Government's proposals will command support from members of all parties.

Mrs. Theresa May (Maidenhead): I thank the Minister for his kind words of welcome, but must say that, as a result of his well-known facility for figures, he has his numbers wrong again concerning the number of years that we Conservatives will be on the Opposition Benches.

I am very pleased to have the opportunity to contribute to this debate from the Front Bench. I suppose that many hope that, when making their first such speech, they will be able to set the political world on fire by making a speech to which reference is made in hushed tones for generations to come.

Mr. David Jamieson (Plymouth, Devonport): Have a go, then.

Mrs. May: Were it my intention to make such a speech, Government amendment No. 84 would not have been my chosen starting point.

As the Minister made clear, the amendments raise several very important issues. I turn to the responsibility for child protection, and ensuring that those who are in charge of our children and young people in schools are entirely suitable. The Minister has set out why he believes it is important that the child protection regime should be maintained and that such powers should not go to the General Teaching Council. I fully appreciate that, given that the GTC is untried and untested, it would be risky to give it such powers and take them away from the Secretary of State.

The Minister spoke about putting the interests of children first, which, of course, is important. Given that responsibility for dismissing teachers on various grounds will be split between the GTC and the Secretary of State, we must ensure that arrangements work properly and fully and that there is no danger of any information or decisions falling between two stools. I note the interdepartmental group, although it is not clear whether it will consider ways of making certain that decisions on teachers will not fall between two stools, thus enabling teachers to continue teaching even though they are not suitable. I hope that the Minister will consider that issue to ensure that procedures are appropriate.

Mr. Byers: Rather than spending time dealing with that specific point in my winding-up speech, I shall deal with it now. Decisions on the matter will be reserved to the Secretary of State. The Secretary of State will determine whether the GTC has responsibility for a matter, although if it is one of child protection, the Secretary of State will determine it. With the Secretary of State as the central authority, making the decision on allocation, the difficulties to which the hon. Lady refers should be overcome.

Mrs. May: I am grateful to the Minister for that intervention, which goes part way to resolving my concerns. I still wish to leave the issue on the table because there will always be suspicion when one body deals with instances concerning professional misconduct and health of teachers, and another deals with child protection issues. If the GTC is found to work well and is respected in the teaching profession, I hope that the Minister will not close his mind to the possibility of child protection issues being under its remit. Would it be necessary to introduce further legislation to enable that or, if everybody agreed that it were appropriate, would it be possible simply to pass the responsibility over under existing powers?

In response to the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis), the Minister referred to the Secretary of State's responsibility in child protection matters for determining the suitability of teachers in independent schools. Will such responsibility also apply to people who look after children and young people in the out-of-school homework clubs that the Government are introducing? It is possible that all such people may not be members of the teaching profession. It is therefore necessary to ensure that the same rules, regulations and protection apply in such circumstances.

5.45 pm

Government amendment No. 13 would provide that information could be given to the Secretary of State or the GTC for England or for Wales in respect of dismissals for misconduct or incompetence, or on medical grounds, or where people resign in circumstances where

"their employers would have dismissed them, or considered dismissing them, on any such grounds".

I am concerned about circumstances in which an allegation is made against a teacher, a governing body considers whether it is appropriate to continue to employ that teacher, and the teacher takes early retirement or resigns due to concern about the case, even though the case would have been dismissed as entirely unreasonable

[Mrs. May]

and the teacher would have been exonerated. In such circumstances, a person might want to return to work. As I understand the amendment, information about the initial consideration would be on record but, because the case had not been heard properly, its result would not. Will the Minister respond to questions concerning justice and fairness in that regard?

I should like to raise a technical point about amendments Nos. 84 and 99; it concerns who can put their hands into teachers' pockets for GTC registration fees. I am sure that the Minister will say that he made it clear in Committee that the sums of money concerned are very small. I think that the sums quoted were £10 or £20. That may be so today, but a possible increase is not precluded.

I am concerned about the Government's definition of employer, especially in relation to a debate in Committee on the School Standards and Framework Bill, with which the Minister will be familiar, about the relationship between local education authorities and education action zone forums. In an EAZ, teachers may, effectively, be employed by two bodies. Given the definition that the Minister is intending to insert into this Bill, it certainly seems to me that it is intended that the EAZ forum will also have the opportunity to be the body taking money out of teachers' pockets. I look to the Minister for confirmation. How will duplication be prevented when a teacher is employed by both bodies?

As the Minister has said, several of the amendments are technical. The Government are proposing important changes in disciplinary procedures concerning the GTC. We shall tomorrow have a wider debate on what it is appropriate for the GTC to do. I accept that, as the Minister said, the House will be wary of a body, which is not tried and tested, dealing with the very important issue of child protection. If the aim is that the GTC should develop into a body that maintains professional standards in teaching, it may be necessary to consider giving it child protection powers. I hope that the Government will at least keep their minds open on that possibility and not simply dismiss it out of hand.

Miss Anne Begg (Aberdeen, South): I shall be brief, because there will be a wider debate on the powers of the General Teaching Council tomorrow. I may be unique in this House, in that I have served on a General Teaching Council. How can that be? I was an elected member of the General Teaching Council for Scotland—a post I had to give up, reluctantly, on my election to this place. In Scotland, the General Teaching Council—founded in 1966—works extremely well, although I must admit that a number of teachers in Scotland were against it at the time.

I welcome the strengthening of powers to enable the General Teaching Council for England and for Wales to be able to strike a teacher off. I served on the investigation committee of the General Teaching Council for Scotland, which looked at any allegations to see if there was a case to answer. The committee had all the information in front of it, but took no evidence from the individual. The committee merely looked at whether there was a case to answer before passing it on to the disciplinary committee, the quasi-legal committee which took the case forward. As my hon. Friend the Minister said, only twice has the appeals mechanism to the Court of Session in Scotland been used in such cases.

It is right that the General Teaching Council should be able to strike teachers off. It sounds draconian, and it is something which one should not do lightly—that is the case in Scotland. Moves have been taken after a great deal of deliberation, but that has meant that there is confidence about the teaching profession in Scotland. The teachers themselves would not want any body other than the GTC to be taking those decisions.

I wish to refer to the issue of an appellant being accompanied by someone other than a lawyer. In Scotland, someone from the teacher's trade union will often accompany the teacher, and there is no reason why a friend cannot come along. That makes things much easier for any teacher who is going through what is, for them, a stressful situation.

I welcome the amendments, and tomorrow we will debate why it is so important to have the General Teaching Council for the good and well-being of the teaching profession in England and Wales.

Mr. Byers: With the leave of the House, I shall reply to this useful debate. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South (Miss Begg) for sharing with hon. Members her personal experience of how a General Teaching Council works in practice. It is interesting to note that Scotland has had its General Teaching Council since 1966. If all goes well, we hope to establish one covering England and, probably, a separate one for Wales, by 2000. That is another example of where Scotland leads, England and Wales eventually follow.

The hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) raised a number of detailed points about the way in which we intend to develop the General Teaching Council, and I shall try to deal with them all. She referred to the important issue of ensuring that there is an individual with clear responsibility for dealing with child protection matters, and ensuring that, under shared responsibility, no individual can somehow slip through the net.

The hon. Member for Maidenhead touched on a very important point—one which we have considered in some detail. We must ensure that the practical difficulties to which she referred do not apply to the Bill. That is why we have taken the view that the Secretary of State should determine whether the General Teaching Council or the Secretary of State should deal with the matters. The Secretary of State will not deal with a matter of conduct or competence, which will go to the General Teaching Council. The Secretary of State is likely to deal with purely child protection matters, and will take decisions in such cases.

The interdepartmental group—which my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Home Office announced last Thursday—is working across Departments, and not just within the Department for Education and Employment. The group recognises that, at the moment, a number of different Departments have responsibility for child protection matters and operate their own registers to bar people from working with children.

Our concern is that a register in, for example, the Department of Health is not accessible by the Department for Education and Employment. Schools or FE colleges may be unaware of an individual registered for barring purposes by the Department of Health. We want to establish a central register so that no one slips through the net in terms of child protection. The interdepartmental

group has been set up specifically to establish such a central register. That will go a long way toward ensuring that we do not have the loopholes which apply at present.

The hon. Member for Maidenhead asked whether the General Teaching Council might, in due course, take responsibility for child protection matters. As the Bill is at present worded, new primary legislation would be needed if the view was that the General Teaching Council should have responsibility for child protection matters. The matter would need to come back to the House. Some would say that that is disappointing, and that we should give more responsibility to the General Teaching Council.

In child protection matters, we should be cautious. I am prepared to see how the General Teaching Council develops over time. If the view is that it would be appropriate to give the responsibilities to the General Teaching Council, the matter should come back to this House for a decision.

To assist in the process, we intend to involve the General Teaching Council in child protection cases from its establishment. We would like the General Teaching Council to make recommendations to the Secretary of State on child protection issues so that it can be involved, consider matters and make recommendations. There is no guarantee that the Secretary of State will agree with the recommendations, but it is a way of involving the GTC.

Over time—when the GTC becomes tried and tested—we may well be able to hand over responsibility for child protection matters to the General Teaching Council. If so, it is only right and proper—in the Government's view—that the matter should come back to this House to be dealt with by fresh primary legislation.

In terms of out-of-school homework clubs and a range of activities out of traditional school hours—such as expanding summer schools or work before the normal school day starts—existing legislation and the Bill will cover those developments. The message is clear. There is no escape from proper scrutiny. The strict regime that we are proposing will apply to any activity that is school-based and involves children of school age—at no matter what time of day or night it takes place. That is right and proper.

The sort of individuals about whom we are concerned will use any opportunity which may be available to them. If they can see a chink in the armour, they will exploit any loophole. Protection will be there for any school-based activity at any time of the day, and at weekends.

The hon. Member for Maidenhead referred to amendment No. 13 and expressed concern at the way in which it is worded, as it simply talks about an individual who resigns being considered for dismissal. There was no alternative to that wording. If someone wanted to escape disciplinary proceedings by resigning, the matter would obviously never be determined. Striking the right balance was difficult, but it will be for the General Teaching Council to consider whether, in the circumstances, a person would have been dismissed. We felt it appropriate that, rather than allow someone to exploit the device of resigning before the matter is determined, the matter should go to the General Teaching Council or to the Secretary of State. We believe that the inclusion in the Bill of the words "considered dismissing" represents the way forward.

The hon. Member for Maidenhead is right that the Bill contains a wide definition of the employer. We want to cover all eventualities, as we are not sure how the school system will develop in the months and years ahead. Some of us have clear views on how it should develop—fingers crossed—but I am delighted that the definition in the Bill covers all eventualities.

The amendments are important. I make no apology for giving them 45 minutes of debate, as they raise important matters that will affect hundreds of children every year—we should put those children's interests first. I hope that the House will agree to the amendments so that we can move on to the next group.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 15

PROHIBITIONS OR RESTRICTIONS ON EMPLOYMENT OF TEACHERS IMPOSED BY SECRETARY OF STATE

Amendments made: No. 12, in page 9, line 20, after 'incompetence', insert 'or on medical grounds,'.

No. 13, in page 9, line 21, leave out

'it is likely that they would have been so dismissed'

and insert

'their employers would have dismissed them, or considered dismissing them, on any such grounds'.

No. 85, in page 9, leave out lines 23 and 24.—*[Mr. Byers.]*

Clause 19

REQUIREMENT TO SERVE INDUCTION PERIOD

6 pm

Mr. Byers: I beg to move amendment No. 86, in page 11, line 17, at end insert—

'(ca) precluding a relevant school, in such circumstances as may be prescribed, from being one at which an induction period may be served;'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following: Government amendments Nos. 87 to 93.

Amendment No. 119, in page 12, leave out lines 5 to 10.

Government amendments Nos. 94 and 95.

Mr. Byers: The amendments deal with the new induction arrangements for newly qualified teachers before they enter the teaching profession. Many hon. Members will be aware of the old system in which a teacher had to serve a probationary period. That approach fell into disrepute because the necessary investment was not made available; the previous Government removed the requirement for teachers to serve a probationary period because it was taken for granted that teachers would sail through it.

The Government take the view that an effective induction period should be put in place. The amendments would achieve three distinct objectives. First, they would enable the Government to ensure that no teachers serve an induction period in a school that is under special measures because it has been deemed to be failing. Secondly, they clarify the appeal arrangements that we intend to

[Mr. Byers]

introduce when teachers have not successfully completed their induction period. Thirdly, they fine-tune existing provisions in the Bill to ensure that the induction arrangements are consistent with best education and employment practice.

On the first of those aims, amendment No. 86 would enable the Government to introduce regulations to ensure that an induction period is not served in a school that is subject to special measures. We take the view that, during the induction period, the individual teacher needs support and assistance, which should primarily come from the school. The prime responsibility of a school that has been found to be failing and is under special measures—there are nearly 500 such schools—must be to turn itself around and restore itself to good health so that it can offer the standards that we all want. In those circumstances, we believe that the school will not be able to give the necessary support and assistance to a student undergoing the induction year and that such schools should be precluded from offering an induction period.

Amendment No. 87 would allow a local education authority to decide whether a teacher has achieved the necessary standards during the induction period. The LEA—if it is the appropriate body in the circumstances—may decide that the period has been successfully completed, or that the induction should be extended by a specified amount of time, or that the teacher has failed to complete the induction to its satisfaction.

Amendments Nos. 88 and 92 enable regulations to be put in place so that the appropriate body can exercise functions in relation to the induction arrangements; in particular, they enable the appropriate bodies to make charges for carrying out those functions. We believe that LEAs are uniquely placed to carry out that important role. That is why we do not support amendment No. 119, which would remove that responsibility from a local education authority. The School Standards and Framework Bill gives a new duty to LEAs to promote high standards; we believe that involvement in the induction process is an important way in which LEAs can support our crusade to raise standards.

Amendments Nos. 90 and 93 are designed to clarify the existing appeal provisions. Amendment No. 91 enables regulations to require the employer of a teacher at a maintained or non-maintained school either to secure the termination of the teacher's employment or to give that teacher other duties in the school during any appeal. Amendments Nos. 94 and 95 are technical; I do not want to delay the House by going through their requirements in detail.

The amendments are significant and I commend them to the House. They improve the induction arrangements, clarify provision and ensure that additional responsibilities are not placed on failing schools. If amendment No. 119 is pressed, I ask the House to oppose it.

Mrs. May: Given the time constraint, I shall speak to amendment No. 119 only briefly. In response to the debate on the previous group of amendments, the Minister referred to his expectations about the future of schools. We know that his hopes for the structure of schools are different from those of the Secretary of State—that is reflected in the Bill, particularly in its references to local education authorities.

Amendment No. 119 would remove clause 19(4), which prescribes that the appropriate body should mean the local education authority. We do not believe that the flexibility that is allowed is sufficient; we think that the Government should consider the matter—and perhaps even the role of the General Teaching Council—more widely. We shall debate the council tomorrow, but I believe that if it is to be the body that determines the professional status of teachers and whether the teachers it registers satisfy its high professional standards, it has a role to play in this matter. Appropriate bodies should not primarily be local education authorities, especially as, in the future that the Minister seems to prescribe, they will cease to exist.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendments made: No. 87, in page 11, line 24, leave out from 'decide' to end of line 27 and insert 'whether a person—

(i) has achieved those standards and has accordingly satisfactorily completed his induction period, or

(ii) should have his induction period extended by such period as may be determined by the appropriate body, or

(iii) has failed satisfactorily to complete his induction period;'.

No. 88, in page 11, leave out lines 28 to 31.

No. 89, in page 11, line 33, leave out

'on the matter referred to in paragraph (f)(i)'

and insert

'as to whether a person has achieved the standards mentioned in paragraph (e)'.

No. 90, in page 11, leave out lines 34 and 35.

No. 91, in page 11, line 40, leave out from 'to' to end of line 42 and insert

'secure—

(i) the termination of that person's employment as a teacher, or

(ii) that he only undertakes such teaching duties as may be determined in accordance with the regulations,

in such circumstances following a decision that he has failed satisfactorily to complete his induction period as may be prescribed;'.

No. 92, in page 11, line 42, at end insert—

'(ka) authorising or requiring the appropriate body to exercise such other functions as may be prescribed (which may include functions with respect to the provision of assistance to schools or of training for teachers);

(kb) authorising the appropriate body in such circumstances as may be prescribed to make such reasonable charges in connection with the exercise of its functions under the regulations as it may determine;'.

No. 93, in page 12, line 4, at end insert—

'(3A) Regulations under this section shall include provision conferring on a person aggrieved by a decision under subsection (2)(f) a right to appeal against the decision to one of the following, namely—

(a) the Secretary of State, or

(b) the Council or the General Teaching Council for Wales;

and any decision made on such an appeal shall be final.

(3B) Regulations made in pursuance of subsection (3A) may make provision for, or for the determination in accordance with the regulations of, such matters relating to such appeals as the Secretary of State considers necessary or expedient.'.

No. 94, in page 12, line 19, at end insert—

'(6A) Where, in accordance with a requirement imposed by virtue of subsection (2)(k)(ii), a teacher employed at a school maintained by a local education authority—

(a) continues to be employed at the school, but

(b) is not undertaking his normal teaching duties there,

any costs incurred by the local education authority in respect of the teacher's emoluments shall not be met from the school's budget share for any financial year except in so far as the authority have good reason for deducting those costs, or any part of those costs, from that share.

Nothing in this subsection applies to a maintained school at any time when the school does not have a delegated budget.'.

No. 95, in page 12, line 20, at end insert—

'(aa) any reference to a school's budget share or to its not having a delegated budget has the same meaning as in Part II of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, and'.

No. 96, in page 12, leave out lines 21 to 23.

No. 97, in page 12, line 25, leave out

'subsection (12) of that section'

and insert

'section 218(12) of the Education Reform Act 1988'.—*[Mr. Byers.]*

Clause 20

INSPECTION OF INSTITUTIONS TRAINING TEACHERS FOR SCHOOLS

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): I beg to move amendment No. 3, in page 13, line 8, after 'appropriate', insert

'following consultation with the relevant institutions on the contents of any such reports, oral and written'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 39, in page 13, line 10, at end insert—

'(c) carry out an inspection at a relevant institution no more than once in a period of four years, unless at the request of a relevant institution.'.

No. 5, in page 13, line 23, leave out from 'which' to 'under' in line 24 and insert

'is relevant to the inspection'.

Government amendment No. 98.

Mr. Foster: I shall be brief, as time is limited. I must make clear that Liberal Democrat Members have no objection to the principle of inspection of initial teacher training provision by the Office for Standards in Education. Our three amendments enable us to raise some of our concerns about the practice of such inspections. Perhaps I should quickly declare an interest, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in that my wife is an initial teacher trainer, as I used to be, and in the past couple of years has spent many hundreds of hours preparing for and being involved in Ofsted inspections at her university.

It is vital that inspections should not only provide information that helps to raise standards in teacher training, but that they should not place undue and unnecessary burdens on the institutions, to the detriment of their work with students. To that end, the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals and Ofsted have already established, with various other bodies, a joint working party to develop a draft protocol for inspections. That protocol, with the various guidelines on procedures for inspections, is likely to be published in the summer and will cover many matters, including the minimum period of notice for inspections, advance publication of the inspection methodology and a complaints procedure.

The House should be aware that the protocol will not be binding on Her Majesty's chief inspector, so we argue that it is important that some of the matters that are likely to be in the protocol are reflected in the Bill. That is why we have tabled the amendments, the first of which would ensure consultation with the relevant institutions before the final report was published. The report is crucial to the initial teacher training institutions since their quality grading—and hence their student allocations—are based on it. If the amendment is accepted it will ensure that there is, for example, an opportunity to correct factual errors and to ensure consistency between the oral feedback and the eventual report.

Amendment No. 39 would limit the frequency of inspections to once every four years—even that would be more frequent than school inspections. The present frequency of inspections gives great cause for concern, not only for the initial teacher training institutions but for their partner schools, which also receive inspection visits to watch students on placement. In my wife's institution, for example, more than one third of the current year has been taken up by Ofsted inspections. Such a high frequency causes enormous difficulties and creates significant costs. Important though inspections are, they should not become a huge administrative and financial burden, causing institutions to feel that they are on a permanent treadmill, hence the suggestion of a once-in-four-years cycle.

Amendment No. 5 would ensure that the records and documents inspected and copied by Ofsted are only those relevant to the inspection in question. Universities are right to be concerned that Ofsted should not have a completely free hand to rummage around wherever it pleases without the university even having the right to query HMI's consideration of what is relevant.

Inspection is important if it helps to ensure that the standards of initial teacher training are raised; the amendments would help to do just that.

Mr. Byers: In the brief time available I shall try to deal with the matters raised by the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) and speak to Government amendment No. 98, which would ensure that the independent inspectorate, Ofsted, had a right not merely to inspect teacher training, which is defined in clause 20, but to extend it to cover a teacher serving an induction period. It is not clear at present that Ofsted would have that power.

I am fully aware of the concerns of the hon. Member for Bath about these matters. He is a one-man campaign to hold Ofsted accountable and Her Majesty's chief inspector individually responsible for the various actions of that body. However, I am not convinced that his amendments would achieve his objective. The Government's view is that the joint working group that has been established between Ofsted and the CVCP to

[Mr. Byers]

draw up a protocol to take forward these matters is the best way forward. Amendment No. 3 would add an extra, unnecessary layer of bureaucracy to the process for inspecting teacher training institutions.

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus): The Government are introducing an eight-week period of notice before an inspection of English teacher training institutions. Do they intend to introduce a similar period of notice in Scotland? If not, can the Minister explain why not and state what period of notice will be given in Scotland?

Mr. Byers: I am sure that, as a Scottish Member, the hon. Gentleman would not want an English Minister to decide those matters—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman is a member of the Scottish National party and that is why I made that point. As a Scottish Member he will, no doubt, want to raise that matter with the Scottish Office, which has responsibility for it.

The amendments are not appropriate and I ask the House to resist them.

Mr. Don Foster: In the brief time available could the Minister at least give the House an absolute assurance that, once developed, the protocol will be expected to be observed by HMCI and the inspectors?

6.15 pm

Mr. Byers *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

It being one hour after the commencement of proceedings on consideration of the Bill, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER, *pursuant to the Order [19 May] and the Resolution [this day], put forthwith the Question already proposed from the Chair.*

Amendment negatived.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *then proceeded to put forthwith the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that hour.*

Amendment made: No. 98, in page 14, line 25, after '(b);' insert—

'(ba) "in-service training" includes any training provided to a teacher serving an induction period (within the meaning of section 19 of the Teaching and Higher Education Act 1998);'.—*[Mr. Byers.]*

Schedule 2

DISCIPLINARY POWERS OF COUNCIL

Amendments made: No. 14, in page 39, line 38, after 'for', insert 'and in connection with'.

No. 15, in page 39, line 43, leave out 'in the United Kingdom'.

No. 16, in page 39, line 47, leave out 'for'.

No. 17, in page 40, line 7, leave out 'legally represented' and insert

'represented, by any person whom he desires to represent him,'.

No. 18, in page 40, line 10, at end insert—

'(ca) empowering the Council to require persons to attend and give evidence or to produce documents or other material evidence;

(cb) about the admissibility of evidence;

(cc) enabling the Council to administer oaths;'.

No. 19, in page 40, line 13, at end insert—

'(2A) No person shall be required by virtue of the regulations to give any evidence or produce any document or other material evidence which he could not be compelled to give or produce in civil proceedings in any court in England and Wales.'.

No. 20, in page 40, line 20, leave out '18' and insert '19'.

No. 21, in page 40, line 20, at end insert—

'(4) In framing any regulations under section 218(6) of that Act the Secretary of State may similarly take account of the functions conferred on the Council by virtue of sub-paragraph (1) (so far as not excluded or restricted by virtue of sub-paragraph (3)); and any such regulations may include provision with respect to the allocation of cases between the Secretary of State and the Council and the reference of cases by one of them to the other.'.

No. 22, in page 40, line 22, after 'provision', insert

'for and in connection with'.

No. 23, in page 40, line 27, leave out 'in the United Kingdom'.

No. 24, in page 40, line 31, at end insert

', and of his right to appeal against the order under paragraph 5A,

(aa) as to the time when any such order takes effect, whether in a case where any such person exercises that right of appeal or otherwise;'.

No. 25, in page 40, line 43, leave out 'relating' and insert 'relevant'.

No. 26, in page 40, line 44, at end insert—

'(1A) Without prejudice to the generality of sub-paragraph (1)—

(a) the conditions which may be specified in a conditional registration order include conditions for requiring the person in question to take any specified steps that will, in the opinion of the Council, be conducive to his becoming a competent teacher; and

(b) conditions may be so specified (whether for the purpose mentioned in paragraph (a) or otherwise) that will involve expenditure on the part of that person.'.

No. 27, in page 40, line 45, leave out 'so specified' and insert

'specified in a conditional registration order'.

No. 28, in page 41, line 20, at end insert—

'Appeals against disciplinary orders.

5A.—(1) Regulations shall make provision for conferring on a person aggrieved by a disciplinary order made in relation to him under this Schedule a right to appeal against the order to the High Court within 28 days from the date on which notice of the order is served on him.

(2) On such an appeal the Court may make any order which appears appropriate.

(3) No appeal shall lie from any decision of the Court on such an appeal.'.

No. 29, in page 41, line 24, after 'provision' insert—

'(a) for the Council, where a disciplinary order takes effect in relation to a person, to serve notice of the order on that person's employer;

(b) requiring the employer of any such person to take in relation to that person such steps in consequence of the order (which may include his dismissal) as may be prescribed;

(c)'.

No. 30, in page 41, line 41, after 'means', insert—

'(a) in the case of a conviction in the United Kingdom,'.

No. 31, in page 41, line 43, at end insert

', and

(b) in the case of a conviction elsewhere, an offence which, if committed in England and Wales, would constitute such an offence as is mentioned in paragraph (a);'.

No. 32, in page 41, line 44, leave out 'serious professional misconduct' and insert 'unacceptable professional conduct'.

No. 33, in page 41, line 45, at end insert—

'(2) Where regulations under paragraph 9(1)(b) of Schedule 1 require the Council to establish a committee for the purpose of discharging any of the functions conferred on them by virtue of this Schedule, references in this Schedule to the Council shall be construed, in relation to those functions, as references to that committee.'.—*[Mr. Byers.]*

New clause 5

SUPPLY OF INFORMATION IN CONNECTION WITH STUDENT LOANS: SCOTLAND

'After section 73C of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 there shall be inserted the following section—

"Supply of information in connection with student loans

73D.—(1) This section applies to any information which is held—

(a) by the Commissioners of Inland Revenue, or

(b) by a person providing services to those Commissioners and in connection with the provision of those services.

(2) Information to which this section applies may be supplied to—

(a) the Secretary of State or the Department of Education for Northern Ireland,

(b) any person or body acting on behalf of the Secretary of State or that department under the delegation of functions provisions, or

(c) any person or body by whom any function of the Secretary of State or that department is for the time being exercisable to any extent by virtue of the transfer of functions provisions,

for the purpose of enabling or assisting the recipient to exercise any function in connection with the operation of the student loans scheme.

(3) Information supplied under subsection (2) above shall not be supplied by the recipient to any other person or body unless it is supplied—

(a) to a person or body to whom it could have been supplied under that subsection, or

(b) for the purposes of any civil or criminal proceedings arising out of the student loans scheme.

(4) Subsections (2) and (3) above extend only to the supply of information by or under the authority of the Commissioners of Inland Revenue.

(5) This section does not limit the circumstances in which information may be supplied apart from this section.

(6) In this section—

"the delegation of functions provisions" means section 73AA(3) of this Act or section (*Transfer or delegation of functions relating to student support*) (4) of the Teaching and Higher Education Act 1998;

"the transfer of functions provisions" means section 73AA(1) of this Act or section (*Transfer or delegation of functions relating to student support*) (1) of the Teaching and Higher Education Act 1998; and

"the student loans scheme" means the provisions of—

(i) regulations under section 73(f) of this Act with respect to loans; or

(ii) regulations under section 22 of the Teaching and Higher Education Act 1998 so far as having effect in relation to loans under that section,

and in this subsection any reference to a provision of this Act includes a reference to any corresponding Northern Ireland legislation."'.—*[Dr. Howells.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Dr. Kim Howells): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following: Government new clause 6—*Transfer or delegation of functions relating to student support.*

Government new clause 8—*Supply of information in connection with student loans.*

Government amendments Nos. 69, 71, 76, 65, 66, 70, 67 and 72.

Amendment No. 111, in clause 22, page 17, line 38, at end insert—

'(11A) A statutory instrument containing the first regulations under any provision of this section shall be laid in draft before, and shall be subject to approval by resolution of, each House of Parliament.

(11B) A statutory instrument containing the second or subsequent regulations under any provision of this section which is made without a draft having been laid before, and approved by resolution of, each House of Parliament shall be subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament.'.

Amendment No. 100, in clause 27, page 21, line 30, leave out from beginning to end of line 42 on page 26.

Government amendments Nos. 40 to 54.

Amendment No. 114, in clause 35, page 33, leave out lines 30 to 34.

Government amendments Nos. 75 and 68.

Dr. Howells: I shall speak to all the Government new clauses and amendments, and I hope that the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) will appreciate that. I also welcome the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) to her new position and, of course, the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) to his greatly elevated position, as well as the hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green).

In Committee, I made it clear that the Government would table a number of amendments on Report designed to ensure that the new student support arrangements, in particular the new arrangements for repaying income-contingent loans, worked smoothly. Those amendments are contained within this group. Although there are many individual amendments, they deal with only a small number of substantive issues, so I hope that I shall not detain the House too long in discussing them.

Essentially, the new clauses and amendments do five key things. They provide for the Inland Revenue to make available information to the Student Loans Company for the purpose of loan repayment. They will enable the Secretary of State to transfer or delegate his functions under the student support regulations to the bodies that

[Dr. Howells]

will administer the scheme, and will enable him to put in place appeals mechanisms in relation to any matters covered in the regulations. They also provide for the Secretary of State to determine, through regulations, the priority that loan repayments should take in relation to other deductions by employers. Finally, they will give the Secretary of State the power to impose penalties on those who fail to comply with the requirements of the new loan repayment regime. The group also contains a number of technical and consequential drafting amendments.

Mr. Willis: One of the major issues in Committee was whether regulations would be available for students when they took our their loans at the beginning of the new university session this year. We were "promised" that amendments would be tabled to guarantee that regulations would be in place, but I have received a copy of a letter sent to the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts), which clearly states that the regulations will not be in place. Is the Minister saying that students will be able to take out loans this year, but will have to sign a legally binding document for which the regulations will not be in place?

Dr. Howells: The hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) knows that I have written to the hon. Member for Havant, and I have had a copy of the letter sent to him. I felt it important that he knew that we did not think that the regulations would be drawn up in total. I did not want regulations that were partial or that tried to patch together the whole matrix of regulations that will govern the procedure. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept that we will produce a watertight description of what signing for a loan means, what will be delivered and what will be meant by repayment. That will be of infinitely more value to students and their families than the sort of regulations that, as I said in Committee, are rarely read anyway. I give the undertaking that there will be a document for all students and their families to read, which will indicate exactly what they are entering into by signing the contract for income-contingent loans.

New clause 5, for Scotland, and new clause 8, for England and Wales, provide for the Inland Revenue to disclose information to the Secretaries of State for Education and Employment and for Scotland, to the Department of Education for Northern Ireland and, by extension, to bodies to which functions are transferred or delegated under the Bill. In practice, that will allow the Revenue to disclose information to the Student Loans Company, to which the Secretary of State's functions in relation to loan repayment will be delegated. For example, the Revenue will be able to provide details of repayments made via employers to enable the Student Loans Company to update borrowers' accounts.

The amendments are necessary to allow the Inland Revenue's legal duty of confidentiality to the taxpayer to be set aside in the specific case of information required for the collection of loan repayments. Without it, it would be impossible to collect repayments through the tax system. I hasten to add that the normal requirements of the Data Protection Acts will continue to apply in respect of any information that is disclosed under these provisions. There is no question of general details of a borrower's tax affairs being disclosed, but merely information that is relevant to loan repayment. We will make it clear to students before they take out their loans that the information that they provide on their application forms may be passed to the Revenue for the purposes of collecting repayments. There is no need for specific provision in legislation for that purpose.

New clause 6 and, for Scotland, amendment No. 41 clarify the Secretary of State's powers to transfer and delegate the powers given to him in respect of student support, replacing and improving on provisions already in the Bill.

Right hon. and hon. Members will note that the Bill makes provision for the Secretary of State alone to make grants or loans to students. That is different from current student support legislation, which gives the Secretary of State powers to make arrangements for making and collecting loans, and which, in England and Wales, places duties on local education authorities in respect of mandatory and discretionary awards. A variety of bodies will be involved in administration of the new loans scheme, including LEAs, higher education institutions, the Student Loans Company and the Inland Revenue. New clause 6 and amendment No. 41 accordingly provide for those bodies to exercise powers instead of, or on behalf of, the Secretary of State. Amendment No. 41 differs from new clause 6 in that it does not specifically mention LEAs, which are not involved in administration of student support in Scotland.

The new provisions allow functions to be transferred to LEAs and higher education institutions which, as independent bodies, already have distinct responsibilities for administering aspects of the existing awards and loans schemes. Functions will not be transferred to other bodies but will be delegated. The Secretary of State will retain overall responsibility, and will be subject to judicial review. We believe that that is more appropriate in the case of bodies such as the Student Loans Company, which is wholly owned by the two Secretaries of State, or the Inland Revenue, which will collect loan repayments on the Secretary of State's behalf.

The new provisions also enable the Secretary of State to establish an appeals procedure in respect of functions that are transferred or delegated. We are considering the details of the appeals mechanism, but I am happy to give an undertaking that a right of appeal will be put in place in relation to collection of student loans.

Part of amendment No. 69 and, for Scotland, amendment No. 50 relates to appeals. The amendments will enable the Secretaries of State to put in place appeals mechanisms where functions have not been transferred or delegated, but have been imposed by regulation, as in the case in which they are undertaken by employers. I hope that hon. Members will agree that the provisions offer borrowers full protection against potential maladministration of the scheme.

New clause 6 and amendment No. 41 also provide for the Secretary of State to make payments to bodies to which functions are transferred or delegated, or which are appointed to hear appeals. The payments can be toward the cost of making grants or loans, or as payment for administering the scheme.

Amendments Nos. 69 and 70, and, for Scotland, amendment No. 48, allow for a relationship to be established between the Bill's student support provisions and other legislation that governs deductions from income. They will allow other legislation to be amended

accordingly. The amendments are necessary to take into account the fact that students and graduates may be subject to other deductions from their income. A court may, for example, impose an attachment of earnings order for unpaid council taxes or fines. There is also a limit to the amount that employers may deduct from an employee's income—the protected earnings rate, which is designed to ensure that the employee is left with enough to live on. Where total deductions payable exceed the limit, it is obviously necessary to determine which deductions should take priority. Amendments Nos. 70 and 48 enable provision to be made in regulations for determining the priority of student loan repayments and other amounts due from the borrower.

Hon. Members will note that the Bill will enable provisions to be made in regulations for student loan repayments to be deducted at source through the tax system, as the Dearing committee recommended. That will have an impact on other legislation governing deductions from income where that legislation defines how the deductions are to be calculated. Amendments Nos. 69 and 48 would permit other legislation to be amended through regulations to take account of the impact of loan repayments. The amendments would also allow income from student loans or grants to be taken into account or disregarded when calculating a person's total income for the purpose of some other deductions.

Amendment No. 65 and, for Scotland, amendment No. 45, ensure that provisions can be made for the imposition of penalties on borrowers or persons required to make deductions from borrowers' pay in the event of default. The amendments provide for the imposition of interest and penalties on borrowers who fail to make repayments that are due, or to provide information when required to do so. They also provide the means to impose penalties on those charged with making deductions from the borrower's salary when the borrower wilfully or negligently fails to carry out that obligation. I am sure that hon. Members will agree that we should have the power to recover public money that would be lost as a result of wilful default.

The provisions will have no effect, of course, on those who meet their obligations. The precise penalties that apply will be set out in regulations. We envisage that they will not exceed those that apply to non-payment of income tax or national insurance contributions. For employers, that might mean the imposition of a penalty if they fail to make deductions from the borrower's salary or transmit payments to the Inland Revenue, although that would apply only when the failure was due to fraud or negligence. For borrowers, interest would be charged on any outstanding repayments, and in the event of persistent default, further surcharges might be applied, on which interest would also be charged. I stress that the charging of interest is not intended to be punitive, but is necessary to cover losses of public funds. Similarly, penalties are intended to be no higher than is necessary to discourage wilful or negligent default such as I have described.

Amendment No. 51 is technical, and relates only to the Scottish provisions. It will enable the regulations governing the student loan scheme in Scotland to deal appropriately with borrowers who are declared bankrupt or sequestrated. Individuals who have been declared bankrupt have always been eligible to receive student loans, to enable them to undertake courses of higher education which might we hope improve their prospects.

Arrangements are in place to ensure that any loan payment for maintenance received during the period of such courses cannot be claimed by creditors. Amendment No. 51 will ensure that that situation can continue in Scotland. Parallel provisions are not needed for the English clauses, which are already sufficiently widely drawn.

6.30 pm

Amendment No. 68 extends the scope of certain provisions of the student support clauses for Northern Ireland. That is necessary to ensure that the scheme can operate effectively on a United Kingdom basis. For example, if an English student takes out a loan and goes on to work in Northern Ireland, we shall need to be able to impose duties on his or her employer in relation to loan repayment. Separate provisions with the same effect in relation to Scotland are contained in amendment No. 61.

Amendments Nos. 40, 42 to 44, 46, 47, 49, 52 to 54, 66, 67, 71 to 73, 75 and 76 are either purely technical or consequential to the changes that I have described, and I commend them to the House.

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford): I thank the Minister for his nearly gracious welcome to the Dispatch Box, and I assure him that, as a fellow Welshman, I not only know his constituency, but can pronounce it, which may put me at an advantage over some hon. Members. It was kind of him to give us a full description of the various new clauses and amendments. I will be briefer, because I know that this is very much the hors d'oeuvres to the main course to be served this evening. I am sure that he will be as pleased as I am to see how many of his colleagues appear to wish to speak in that later debate. In this and in future appearances at the Dispatch Box, I will be as constructive and helpful as the Government deserve in every case.

In that spirit, I must question the Government's competence in having to make so many changes to the Bill. From the outset, the motto for their policy has been, "React in haste and legislate in panic". In this relatively small part of the Bill, they have tabled three new clauses and 14 amendments, which does not suggest a finely crafted piece of legislation.

The essential purpose of amendments Nos. 111 and 114 is to allow the House a significant say in the future organisation of the loan system. I hope that the Minister will acknowledge that the loans will be an extremely important part of life for many millions of families over the years, and that to have all the powers relating to their organisation delegated to the Secretary of State, with only minimal parliamentary scrutiny, is wrong both for those who will receive the loans and for the respect in which one would hope that the Government hold the House.

Too much of the Bill, and especially this part, is skeletal – that word was used a lot in Committee – and too much power has been left in the Secretary of State's hands. The purpose of the regulations appears to be to allow maximum flexibility for the Secretary of State and minimum flexibility for those in charge of higher education and student loans. That is exactly the wrong way round and the Government should rapidly reverse the policy. The debate in Committee reverberated with that worry.

[Mr. Damian Green]

I assure those who toiled in the vineyard of the Standing Committee that, although they may have thought that they were talking only to each other, they have had at least one extremely avid reader of every word that they said, so their labours were not in vain. I am delighted to say that I am up to speed with all the great thoughts expressed by members of the Committee from all parties in what appear, from the *Hansard* report, to have been some quite long sittings in which, although wisdom was dispensed, it was not necessarily received.

The hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) referred to the letter that the Minister sent to my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts), which may symbolise why it is so important to make amendments Nos. 111 and 114. The Minister said that he would try to make the regulations available for scrutiny in time, and he has simply failed to do so.

The letter says:

"instead of draft (or partial) regulations we should produce a detailed guide to the repayment terms for students which will be published in the summer."

It will be impossible for that detailed guide to be accurate and full, simply because the regulations will not be available. The letter continues:

"the regulations will need to be laid . . . probably in early 1999—in order to allow employers sufficient time to make whatever arrangements they need to implement collection."

If the regulations are not laid until early 1999—they have been significantly delayed once already—students and their families will not know this autumn what regulations will be in place to organise their loans, and could be left in uncertainty for some months. That extra uncertainty may discourage students from taking out loans or, even worse, from taking up places and contributes, in its own small way, to the damaging effects of other parts of the Bill.

Our essential purpose is that priority should be given to Parliament and not to the Secretary of State. Why are Departments to be excluded by amendment No. 71 from the obligations on employers? I may be unduly cynical, but when I see that impositions are to be placed on non-public bodies, but that Departments are to be excused those obligations, my eyebrows go up and I suspect that the convenience of Whitehall is coming before that of the citizens of this country. I hope that the Minister can reassure me on that point.

What will be covered by the word "emoluments" in amendment No. 76 that would not be covered by "remuneration"? It is important at this stage to clear up as much as possible of the uncertainty that students and their families will face.

The Minister has said a couple of things that I also found slightly disturbing. First, he talked about a protected earnings rate being retained. Visions of the Child Support Agency appeared before me. One hopes that, with all the uncertainty that we have had in setting up the regulations, the House will not, in two or three years' time, be reverberating to debates about constituents complaining bitterly that student loan organisations do not understand what sort of protected earnings rate they need. The proposal seems similar to the provision for the agency. I hope for the sake of all concerned that we are not setting up the same sort of organisational mess as arose with the agency.

Secondly, I am disturbed that details of the penalties, particularly those that will be imposed on employers, are to be left to some later date. Again, the various Government amendments and new clauses seem to suggest throughout that it will be the employer who will be in the frame, rather than the Government or even the individual who may be defaulting on the loan.

This is a wide-ranging set of powers. It is wrong for all the powers to be exercised by the Secretary of State without sufficient scrutiny by Parliament. I hope that the Government will accept our amendments because they do not in any way alter the main purpose of this part of the Bill. They will give the House the proper scrutiny that it will need over the years to ensure that these arrangements are made satisfactorily and fairly, in the interests of all those who will be concerned with student loans.

Mr. Welsh: I say to the hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green), the official Opposition spokesperson, that the hors d'oeuvres are just as unpalatable as the main course. The Government amendments simply clear up the debris covering the Government's mistaken policy. Attention has been deliberately focused on the introduction of unfair tuition fees, but the real deterrent to university students and to their families is student loans. Future generations of young people and their families will find themselves saddled with considerable debts on loans, as well as on tuition fees, and all that will have been placed on them by Ministers who benefited from the grant system. They should be ashamed of themselves for the way in which they are acting.

Worse still, as the Government sell off the debt loans book to private hands, income from repayments will disappear into those private hands as profit. None of it will return to replenish or to improve the higher education system. It is bad enough that tuition fees will be paid and then disappear out of the university system, but that will be compounded by the Government's short-term policy of student loan privatisation.

The Scottish National party has consistently opposed both the privatisation of student loans and the student loans system. The amendments simply tinker with the detail of collection, while the glaring unfairness of the Government's failure to fund the university system properly will mean that the situation will worsen for universities as they deal with their student populations.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): Will the SNP make it clear that it will sort out this horrible mess in the Scottish Parliament?

Mr. Welsh: That is a very good point, which I shall come to later. A fundamental change in policy is required to sort this mess out.

Ms Margaret Hodge (Barking): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Welsh: No. Time is short.

I therefore support amendment No. 100, which would remove the Scottish provisions. This matter should be dealt with by the new Scottish Parliament, not imposed by this Parliament. The Minister has recognised that the Scottish system is distinct. In less than a year, that Scots Parliament will be in charge of Scottish education. There is no reason why it should not also deal with this matter

It is bad enough that legitimate Scottish questions are ducked by an English Minister when a Scottish Office Minister, the Minister for Education and Industry, is sitting next to him, as happened in a previous debate. It is worse when this Parliament does not allow the Scottish Parliament to undertake what are legitimate devolved matters. This matter should be dealt with by that new Parliament. It should not suffer diktat by this organisation.

Dr. Howells: There are many questions to answer in two minutes.

I understand that the hon. Member for Angus (Mr. Welsh) envisages an SNP-controlled regime in future. He has said:

"We will make good, as far as we can within the limit of resources given" *[Official Report, Scottish Grand Committee*, 20 May 1998; c. 22.]

I have heard that one before somewhere.

The hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) asked me to explain the difference between emoluments and remuneration. I was tempted to say cars, but I think it is a broader definition, which encompasses benefit in kind, in Whitehall-speak; I hope that he will accept that as an answer. I tried to deal with the points that he raised about regulations as honestly as I could in my answer to the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis), who has properly pressed us on this matter on several occasions, and in my letter to the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts).

6.45 pm

It being one hour and thirty minutes after the commencement of proceedings on consideration of the Bill, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER, *pursuant to the Order [19 May] and the Resolution [this day], put forthwith the Question already proposed from the Chair.*

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *then proceeded to put forthwith the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that hour.*

New clause 6

TRANSFER OR DELEGATION OF FUNCTIONS RELATING TO STUDENT SUPPORT

"(1) If the Secretary of State so determines, any function exercisable by him by virtue of regulations under section 22 shall, to such extent as is specified in his determination, be exercisable instead by such body as is so specified which is either

(a) a local education authority for the purposes of the Education Act 1996, or

(b) the governing body of an institution at which eligible students (within the meaning of such regulations) are attending courses.

(2) A body by whom any function is for the time being exercisable by virtue of subsection (1) shall comply with any directions given by the Secretary of State as to the exercise of that function.

(3) Where any function is so exercisable by a local education authority, the function shall be taken to be a function of that authority for the purposes of

(a) section 101 of the Local Government Act 1972 (arrangements for discharge of functions by local authorities), and

(b) section 70 of the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994 (contracting out of functions of local authorities).

(4) The Secretary of State may make arrangements for any person or body specified in the arrangements to exercise on his behalf, to such extent as is so specified, any function exercisable by him by virtue of regulations under section 22 (including any such function in relation to appeals).

(5) Any arrangements made under subsection (4) shall not prevent the Secretary of State from exercising the function in question himself.

(6) The Secretary of State may make provision for enabling appeals—

(a) to be made with respect to such matters arising out of the exercise by any person or body of any function by virtue of subsection (1) or (4) as he may determine; and

(b) to be so made to a person or body appointed by him for the purpose.

(7) The Secretary of State may pay to any body or person by whom any function is exercisable by virtue of subsection (1) or (4)—

(a) such amounts as he considers appropriate for the purpose of meeting expenditure incurred or to be incurred by that body or person—

(i) in making grants or loans under section 22, or

(ii) by way of administrative expenses,

in or in connection with the exercise of that function;

(b) in a case where the function is exercisable by virtue of subsection (4), such remuneration as he may determine.

(8) Any payment under subsection (7)(a) may be made subject to such terms and conditions as the Secretary of State may determine; and any such conditions may in particular—

(a) require the provision of returns or other information before any such payment is made;

(b) relate to the use of the amount paid or require the repayment in specified circumstances of all or part of the amount paid.

(9) The Secretary of State may pay to any person or body appointed by him under subsection (6) such remuneration or administrative expenses (or both) as he may determine.

(10) In relation to any function which, by virtue of subsection (1) or (4), is exercisable to a specified extent, references in any other provision of this section to the exercise of that function are accordingly to its exercise to that extent." *[Mr. Jamieson.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

New clause 8

SUPPLY OF INFORMATION IN CONNECTION WITH STUDENT LOANS

"(1) This section applies to any information which is held—

(a) by the Commissioners of Inland Revenue; or

(b) by a person providing services to those Commissioners and in connection with the provision of those services.

(2) Information to which this section applies may be supplied to—

(a) the Secretary of State or the Department of Education for Northern Ireland;

(b) any person or body acting on behalf of the Secretary of State or that Department under the delegation of functions provisions; or

(c) any authority or governing body by whom any function of the Secretary of State or that Department is for the time being exercisable to any extent by virtue of the transfer of functions provisions;

for the purpose of enabling or assisting the recipient to exercise any function in connection with the operation of the student loans scheme.

(3) Information supplied under subsection (2) shall not be supplied by the recipient to any other person or body unless it is supplied—

(a) to a person or body to whom it could be supplied under that subsection, or

(b) for the purposes of any civil or criminal proceedings arising out of the student loans scheme.

(4) Subsections (2) and (3) extend only to the supply of information by or under the authority of the Commissioners of Inland Revenue.

(5) This section does not limit the circumstances in which information may be supplied apart from this section.

(6) In this section—

(a) "the delegation of functions provisions" means section *(Transfer or delegation of functions relating to student support)* (4) of this Act or section 73AA(3) of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980;

(b) "the transfer of functions provisions" means section *(Transfer or delegation of functions relating to student support)* (1) of this Act or section 73AA(1) of that Act; and

(c) "the student loans scheme" means the provisions of

(i) regulations under section 22 of this Act so far as having effect in relation to loans under that section; or

(ii) regulations under section 73(f) of that Act made with respect to loans;

and in this subsection any reference to a provision of this Act includes a reference to any corresponding Northern Ireland legislation."—*[Mr. Jamieson.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

Clause 22

NEW ARRANGEMENTS FOR GIVING FINANCIAL SUPPORT TO STUDENTS

Mr. David Willetts (Havant): I beg to move amendment No. 102, in page 15, line 12, at end insert—

"(1A) No regulations may be made under this section if their effect would be to disadvantage students by reason of their residence in one part of the United Kingdom as opposed to their residence in any other part."

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following:

Amendment No. 2, in page 15, line 45, at end insert—

"(2A) Regulations under this section shall provide that, for an eligible student who attends a higher education institution in Scotland and whose parental home or normal place of residence for purposes other than attendance at that institution is in England or Wales, the payment of grant in respect of fees shall be made on the same basis as for a student whose parental home or normal place of residence is in Scotland."

Amendment No. 8, in page 17, line 12, at end insert—

"(5A) Regulations under this section shall make provision for the payment of grant in respect of tuition fees for the fourth or any subsequent year of study at any higher education institution in the United Kingdom to a student whose parental home or normal place of residence for purposes other than attendance at the institution is in any part of the United Kingdom."

Amendment No. 9, in clause 28, page 26, line 42, at end insert—

"(3H) In exercising his powers under this section, the Secretary of State shall ensure that fees in respect of tuition for the fourth or subsequent year of any course of higher education at a publicly-funded institution in Scotland shall only be payable by the student concerned where a grant in the same amount has been made available for that purpose to that student.

(3I) In subsection (3H) "the student concerned" means any student at a publicly-funded institution of higher education in Scotland whose normal place of residence for purposes other than attendance at such institution is in any part of the European Union."

New clause 1—*Commencement of sections 27 and 28*—

"—Sections 27 and 28 shall come into force when ratified by a resolution of the Scottish Parliament."

New clause 3—*Treatment of students regarding tuition fees*—

"Under any regulations of this enactment relating to tuition fees, students normally resident in the United Kingdom who are doing the same course at the same college or university shall be treated on the same basis, irrespective of their country of residence within the United Kingdom."

Amendment No. 1, in clause 39, page 34, line 31, leave out '28' and insert '26'.

Mr. Willetts: I thank Ministers for their kind welcome to my new Front-Bench colleagues, my hon. Friends the Members for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) and for Ashford (Mr. Green). I thank Ministers for their best wishes after our reshuffle. I hope now that they can get on with their reshuffle, after the Chancellor of the Exchequer removes his objections, and that they are suitably rewarded when it comes.

The central statement in amendment No. 102 is simple. Things have come to a pretty pass when that simple statement—that students from England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland should not be disadvantaged, when it comes to access to a university within the United Kingdom, because of where they happen to have been born or to be living—has become the subject of controversy in the House.

We have reached an absurd position. The Government are going to try to whip people through the Division Lobby in defence of the proposition that there should be disadvantages for students dependent on which part of the United Kingdom they happen to be residing in. I am encouraged that that essential point is conveyed not just in our amendment, but in the other amendments, which have been tabled by the Liberal Democrats, the Scottish National party, and, indeed, by some Labour Members as well.

All we are talking about is one nation. The Prime Minister has tried rather cheekily to use the language of one nation. If one nation means anything, it means that access to higher education in this United Kingdom should not depend on one's place of birth.

The Minister for Education and Industry, Scottish Office (Mr. Brian Wilson): Does the hon. Gentleman believe that a student living somewhere else in the UK who chooses to do a four-year degree course in Scotland is conferring on him or herself an advantage or a disadvantage?

Mr. Willetts: It is an advantage both for the student in question and for the Scottish university. Scottish universities want their flow of students from outside Scotland.

We would not give our amendment priority over amendments and new clauses tabled by other parties with the same objective. If, within the procedures set down for these debates, we could have a vote on new clause 3, we would be much happier, but as new clause 3 comes much later, the danger is, given the time restriction, that we would end up unable to vote on this measure at all.

Mr. Jamieson *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Willetts: I assure the Whip that that is the procedural position, and it is why we will press our amendment to a vote, in the hope that other Members who believe in the principles of one nation and non-discrimination will support us in the Lobby.

Someone from England, Wales or Northern Ireland—especially Northern Ireland, which lacks enough universities, and which sends many students to Scotland—will, absurdly, have to pay £4,000 in tuition fees to follow a four-year course in a Scottish university, whereas a Scottish student will have to pay only £3,000.

Ministers have managed to upset many English students who had hoped to go to Scotland for a four-year course. They have also managed to irritate and insult many people in Scottish universities who value this inflow of students. They have added insult to injury by claiming that the four-year Scottish course is merely the equivalent of the second year of English A-levels plus a normal three-year English degree course. That is not how many people in higher education in Scotland regard such courses, nor is it how English, Welsh and Northern Irish students who go to Scotland having completed their A levels regard Scottish courses.

Sir Teddy Taylor: Some students from St. Andrews with whom I have just held discussions make the astonishing claim that students from France, Italy or Germany will be exempt from the additional £1,000 fee. Surely that cannot be true. Are the Government saying that a migrant worker from Italy living in London will be exempt, while someone from Southend will have to pay? Can my hon. Friend think of anything more ridiculous or insulting?

Mr. Willetts: My hon. Friend is quite right—that is the next absurdity. The Government have angered English, Welsh and Northern Irish students, and insulted the people running Scottish universities.

Dr. Howells: Seething.

Mr. Willetts: I have held meetings with students who have come down here from the Scottish universities, and they are indeed seething. That is why they have come to the House to protest.

Dr. Howells: In that case, will the hon. Gentleman tell me why applications to Scottish universities from Welsh students are up this year?

Mr. Willetts: The Minister will know that there has been a significant increase in applications for three-year courses. With this ill-thought-out measure, he is distorting the pattern of higher education in Scotland by forcing students to begin with the second year of a course instead of starting at its natural commencement.

Dr. Howells: The hon. Gentleman seems to forget that there is a reason: in Scotland, pupils do one year of A-levels; in Wales, England and Northern Ireland, they do two years. They are thus equipped to go into the second year of a Scottish degree course.

Mr. Willetts: I must warn the Minister against proceeding too far down that line of argument. Nothing irritates Scottish universities more than being told that the first year of an integrated four-year course is simply a repeat of the second year of an English A-level course. That is not how they regard it, nor is it how the vast majority of students from outside Scotland who go to Scottish universities regard it.

Caroline Flint (Don Valley): If that is so, why are Scottish universities allowing students from England into the second year of degree courses?

Mr. Willetts: The reason is that they face a serious problem. Because of the Government's actions, applications are increasingly for places to begin with the second year—instead of what students would prefer, which would be a full four-year course.

Mr. Wilson: Will the Minister do the House a service by telling us which Administration provided for students with A-levels from England and the rest of the UK to enter Scottish universities in the second year—Tory or Labour?

Mr. Willetts: That is not the point. It is clearly the preference of a majority of students from England with English A-levels to go to Scotland for a four-year integrated degree course. That is a coherent and sensible option, now liable to a £1,000 penalty.

The only people laughing—this is the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor)—are the students from the rest of the European Union, who will enjoy the same regime as Scottish students. As was said in Committee, someone from Umbria will pay £3,000, but someone from Northumbria will pay £4,000. Not only will English students be disadvantaged compared with their Scottish counterparts; they will be disadvantaged compared with students from France, Germany, Italy and the rest of the EU.

This point was put to the Minister for Education and Industry, Scottish Office, the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson)—incidentally, I should remind him that he is the Minister, not me. In answer to it, he said, "Because France is in the EU." If France is to have special treatment, what about England? Are not England, Wales and Northern Ireland in the EU as well? If the Minister carries on using this argument, he will find himself before the European Court of Justice having to explain why he is operating two different regimes.

Mr. Wilson: Does the shadow Minister genuinely not understand the fact that the different education systems that prevail in the UK are a matter for the Administration

[Mr. Wilson]

of the UK, whereas students from EU countries studying in the United Kingdom have parity with the arrangements in any specific part of the UK? I should have thought that a man with two brains could grasp that.

Mr. Willetts: It is indeed a matter for the Government of the UK; all we ask is that that Government take a view about the whole of the UK. One reason for this mess is that the Scottish Office Minister may not have taken the DFEE Under-Secretary fully into his confidence when he was planning this little manoeuvre, which he suddenly launched on an amazed world—some time after the Government decided their policy on Dearing. So the Scottish Minister has made life very embarrassing for his colleagues in the DFEE, who have found themselves having to explain why they are unwilling to give English and other UK students the treatment being offered to Scottish students in Scotland. All we plead for is a United Kingdom approach.

It is no accident that the Government have got themselves into a mess on the Scottish question—the so-called Scottish anomaly. They have been getting themselves into a mess on aspect after aspect of the proposals on higher education, and have got into a series of muddles and improvisations.

Sir Teddy Taylor: I do not want to be a pest, but I want to put a straight question to the Government and stop the Minister laughing, because something filthy and foul is being done. Why the blazes should we have a special rule applying to French and Germans, but not to Bulgarians, Czechs, Slovaks, Australians or New Zealanders? That is not a question at which the Minister should laugh; he is doing something filthy and foul to Scottish universities, and he should be ashamed of himself.

7 pm

Mr. Willetts: Of course, we will not have heard the end of it tonight. Those who live by the European Court of Justice will die by the European Court of Justice: the Minister may come to regret the Government's attempt to impose a regime that discriminates against one part of the United Kingdom.

My point is that this is only one in a catalogue of disasters which began the day—23 July 1997—that the Government published the Dearing report and, on the same day, tore it up. It was when the Government failed to implement Dearing that they got themselves into the muddles on higher education policy that have bedevilled them ever since.

The Dearing committee was set up on a bipartisan basis—although we set it up when in government, we consulted the then Labour Opposition before doing so—and its report is the only serious game in town when it comes to the future of higher education in this country; it is a serious piece of work that sets out a way forward for higher education.

The Dearing committee had to be set up because we recognised that the time had come to take a serious look at the future financing of higher education. British universities had delivered heroic improvements in efficiency, so as to deliver a significant increase in participation in higher education by British young people, while at the same time bringing down the cost of educating each individual student. The Dearing committee was set up to identify a way forward, and the way forward it identified was very clear.

First, the committee decided that the maintenance grant should stay. I think that the members of the committee probably began their deliberations expecting to conclude that the maintenance grant should go, but, after they had taken evidence and deliberated, it became clear to them that the case for the maintenance grant was overwhelming. They did not want to abolish the maintenance grant and end up with students from a modest-income background finding themselves, say, £10,000 in debt—far more than students from more affluent backgrounds.

It is impossible to defend the abolition of the maintenance grant and increased debt for students from low-income families, while simultaneously talking about a belief in wider access. Abolishing the maintenance grant and imposing greater debt on students from low-income backgrounds is incompatible with any serious commitment to widening access. The Dearing committee decided in favour of keeping the maintenance grant, and it was right to do so.

The committee also looked at tuition fees, and concluded in favour of a £1,000 tuition fee for each student. As we are consistent in our support for Dearing, we recognise that, if Dearing recommends tuition fees, the case for tuition fees is one that we must accept. However, the basis on which Dearing recommended tuition fees was that they would be a source of extra income for universities.

The committee did not envisage tuition fees being a student tax. For every £1,000 a university raises, the threat is of an offsetting reduction in the Government grant to universities. That is why we hope to make clear later in the debate our belief that tuition fees should be a source of extra revenue for universities rather than a means of displacing Exchequer grant.

Before the election, the then Leader of the Opposition, now the Prime Minister, told the *Evening Standard*:

"Labour has no plans to introduce tuition fees".

The Government are in a rather awkward position. The stage has been reached where believing that one should stand by the pledges made before an election makes one a rebel in today's Labour party—that is a path down which many Labour Members have had to tread in the past few months. If any Labour Member thinks that the Prime Minister was right to say that to the *Evening Standard* in March 1997, the Whips will descend threateningly, urging him or her to take constituency leave.

Of course, the Prime Minister appears to believe that he is implementing Dearing, and I should be fascinated to learn exactly what briefing he has been given by Education Ministers. At Prime Minister's Question Time, the right hon. Gentleman claimed:

"I made it clear throughout"

the election campaign

"that we should abide by the recommendations of the Dearing Committee".—[*Official Report*, 29 October 1997, Vol. 299, c. 892.]

If only he would. If he had done so, his Government would not have got into the mess in which they now find themselves, whereby they abolish maintenance grants

when the arguments in favour of the retention of maintenance grants are overwhelming; they impose tuition fees without the prospect of their bringing extra resources to universities as was promised; and they break their pre-election pledges.

Today, the Secretary of State for Education and Employment has announced a package of measures that is supposed to assuage the concerns of many on both sides of the House about the provisions of the Bill. I studied the Secretary of State's package with some interest, because he has some skill—I pay tribute to it—in plucking a little package out of the air every time he is in some political difficulty.

I realised that the package announced today is the same as the one announced on 23 September, when the right hon. Gentleman was going to speak to the Labour party conference about this measure; and it was the same as the one announced on 4 November when he was coming to the House to face a Supply day debate. What is interesting is not that he announces a package every time, but that he announces the same package every time. We have spotted that.

Mr. Willis: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that there is a significant difference between those packages, which is that full-time undergraduates aged over 50 but less than 55 will now be entitled to loans?

Mr. Willetts: Would the hon. Gentleman like to tell the House his exact date of birth? I suspect that that measure is a desperate attempt to curry the support of the Liberal Democrats later this evening—I hope that the hon. Gentleman will not fall for it.

The package is nothing that the House has not seen before, and the financing for it is to be achieved purely by delaying payments to universities. The only way the Secretary of State can fund that extra resource, which he has plucked out of thin air, is by delaying the payment of the annual grant to universities, so that, instead of coming in a single one-off payment, it is to be made in three separate payments, with the third coming in the subsequent financial year.

That will yield savings in the first financial year which the right hon. Gentleman can then put back into higher education in the form of the package that has been before the House so many times before. That is sleight of hand of rather impressive skill, but it is not a serious attempt to address the problems facing higher education because of the provisions of the Bill.

There is nothing in the so-called package that addresses the concerns felt by Members on both sides of the House, or our desire to ensure that maintenance grants continue. We do not believe that saddling students from low-income backgrounds with large debts is a sensible or convincing way of broadening access to higher education.

Ms Hodge: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. For 10 minutes or quarter of an hour, we have not addressed the issue of fees for students in Scottish universities. Is the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) in order?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Lady has taken the words out of my mouth—perhaps she will do a good job in the Chair one day. The point of order is correct, and the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) should return to addressing the amendment.

Mr. Willetts: I know that many hon. Members wish to speak in the debate, so I shall not pursue my points. I simply wanted to put it on the record that we had seen through the Secretary of State's sleight of hand in respect of the package. However, you are quite right, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The basic point is a simple one: if hon. Members on either side of the House believe in equitable treatment of students from England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland as part of one nation, they should support our amendment, which we shall press to a Division tonight.

Ms Hodge: I should say that I did not make my point of order so as to hasten my contribution to the debate, but I am delighted that you called me, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Let me start by saying that the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) has got it wrong, and, if he had not taken so many interventions in his speech, I would have risen to point that out. The proposal for the payment of fees in Scotland has absolutely nothing to do with access to universities. That is a completely different point. Access to places in Scottish universities will depend, as it does now, on the qualifications and standards reached by those applying. The treatment of students within the universities will be different, not the access to the universities. I should have thought that someone with the hon. Gentleman's stated intelligence would have known that.

Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge): I am concerned about degree courses that are offered only by Scottish universities—for example, Celtic studies—which people of Scottish parentage, living in England, might want to follow. Surely they would be put at a disadvantage because, coming from England, they could not study in Scotland on the same terms as someone who came from Scotland.

Ms Hodge: That point is central to the debate, and I shall deal with it in my speech.

We all know that there are different systems of education in Scotland and England. Indeed, one of the justifications for devolution in Scotland, which the Opposition do not support, is that the different systems can be administered by local people who have an affinity with the area. Students from Scotland enter university a year earlier than those from England, Wales and Northern Ireland, because they finish their compulsory schooling a year earlier.

That is an anomaly that we must deal with, but it is one of many. To pull that anomaly out of the hat is to do a disservice to our attempt to ensure that there is equitable access to our universities and that the opportunity to study in higher education is open to the many, not the few.

Other anomalies are more important. Why should mature students in all universities be expected to pay fees, as many of them do? Why should part-time students be expected to pay fees, as they will have to until these changes are introduced? Mature and part-time students tend to come from lower socio-economic groupings. If we want, over the longer term, to introduce a system of student finance that opens opportunity to the many,

[Ms Hodge]

not the few, we must create a system that will allow us to open up maintenance loans and student grants to those groups before we open them up to Scottish students.

More importantly, why should students in further education—who are the subject of a recent Select Committee report—particularly those over 19, be expected to pay fees?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. As the hon. Lady was kind enough to remind me about hon. Members straying from the subject of the amendment, I should advise her that, if her case relates to comparisons between Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom, I can rule her remarks in order.

Ms Hodge: Thank you for drawing me back to order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was attempting to demonstrate that there is a series of anomalies and unfairnesses, and that, even if one were to deal with one anomaly, others would remain which are worthy of more immediate concern.

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine): The hon. Lady seems to have a strange logic: she argues that, because there are other anomalies, the anomaly that is the subject of the debate should not be addressed. The fact that the world is full of anomalies does not mean that we should not deal with one when we have the chance.

Ms Hodge: We have to choose our priorities, and this anomaly would not be my top priority, given the costs involved in dealing with it.

Dr. Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Is not the point that, although we are concerned about existing anomalies, tonight we shall create a further anomaly?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady is referring to amendments that we shall come to later.

Dr. Jones: Mr. Deputy Speaker, a new anomaly would be created in the treatment of students in different parts of the United Kingdom.

7.15 pm

Ms Hodge: The direct answer to that point is that, if we were to accept the Opposition's proposal, we would create further anomalies.

I shall give my hon. Friend an example. Students would get a free education in St. Andrews or Edinburgh, but if they were taking a four-year course at the university of East London or the universities in my hon. Friend's constituency, they would not have that advantage. By trying to iron out one anomaly, we would create further anomalies.

Mr. Willis: The hon. Lady has described the essence of the anomaly—on the one hand, students who are domiciled in Scotland and go to a Scottish university will have their fourth year paid because they have one year less of compulsory full-time education, but if they go over the border to an English university, they will have to pay for their fourth year. Surely that anomaly is unacceptable even in her terms.

Ms Hodge: The hon. Gentleman is simply alluding to the fact that the Opposition amendment would create further anomalies.

I shall move on to other issues. Will the introduction of our measures for Scotland put off English students from applying to Scottish universities? That is what we should all be interested in. Are we, by our proposals, putting back the clock on access to higher education, or in any way constraining choice? The answer must be no.

As my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary said in his intervention on the Opposition spokesperson, the hon. Member for Havant, this year there has been an increase in the number of Welsh students who have applied to go to Scottish universities. More English, Welsh and Northern Irish students have applied to go to Scottish universities this year than Scottish students. If the proposals were as damaging as has been suggested by some hon. Members, that would not have happened.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): Would the hon. Lady like to develop that argument further, and suggest that we should further increase fees so that even more students will apply?

Ms Hodge: I know that the Conservatives regard this issue facetiously, but increasing access to higher education is important. I was attempting to counter the allegation that the proposals in any way inhibit access. The facts speak for themselves, and the applications prove that the proposals have not inhibited access.

There may well be an increase in the number of students who choose to go into the second year of their study in Scottish universities. At present, the figure is 10 per cent., but it may go up. That is not a bad thing, and we should not regret it.

It was the Conservative Government who recognised the differences between the Scottish and English education systems, and enabled English students to start their education at second-year level. Last year, 10 per cent. of those who went to Scottish universities went to do a three-year degree, not an honours degree. They will be subject to the same rules for the three years of an ordinary degree as if they had gone to an English university.

Mr. Green: Does the hon. Lady recognise the difference between choice and coercion? The previous Government gave students the choice of going to university for three or four years, but this Government are coercing them by reducing the amount of money available. Does she not recognise that this is essentially a case of fairness? Different students will be paying different amounts in the same circumstances.

Ms Hodge: I tried to point out earlier—perhaps the hon. Gentleman did not understand me—that there are many anomalies and unfairnesses throughout the post-education system. If we were to accept the Opposition amendment tonight, we would create still further anomalies.

The hon. Member for Havant referred to European Union students. European legislation provides that students from European countries will have their fees subsidised in their fourth year. Let us be absolutely clear how many students we are talking about. In 1995–96, only 350 students in the Scottish university system came from European Union countries outside Britain. That anomaly is not so important that it compels the sort of anger and frustration that has been expressed by some Opposition Members.

Mr. Don Foster *rose—*

Sir Teddy Taylor *rose—*

Ms Hodge: I will give way.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. To whom is the hon. Lady giving way?

Ms Hodge: I am giving way to the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster).

Mr. Foster: I am grateful to the hon. Lady. Will she remind the House whether England is part of the European Union?

Ms Hodge: As a Liberal Democrat, the hon. Gentleman—more than anyone else—should support the concept of subsidiarity, which is integral to the debate.

Sir Teddy Taylor: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Things are getting out of hand. The hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor, should not walk across the Chamber while asking the hon. Member for Barking (Ms Hodge) to give way. He is out of order. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to intervene, he should stand in his place and ask the hon. Lady to give way.

Sir Teddy Taylor: I am sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I got carried away—I do not usually. As a socialist, how the blazes can the hon. Member for Barking (Ms Hodge) accept the expenditure of public money to subsidise students from France and Germany when the same subsidy is not provided for students from Bulgaria and places like that? Is the hon. Lady saying that, because there are only about 300 such students, it does not matter? As a supporter of people's rights, should she not be concerned that the Government are offering facilities to people from certain areas and not to those from the poorest countries in the world? As a socialist, should not the hon. Lady be ashamed of herself?

Ms Hodge: As a member of the new Labour party, and a warm supporter of the European project, I embrace the huge benefits that membership of the European Union has brought to the people of this country.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Hodge: I must move on, as many hon. Members wish to participate in the debate. However, I shall give way once more.

Mr. Beith: The hon. Lady may have inadvertently misled the House when she said that there were 300 students from EU countries. The figure for 1995–96 is in fact 3,082.

Ms Hodge: I obtained my figures from the Library—I am not sure whether we are exchanging figures that were obtained in different ways—and they show that 350 students from EU countries outside Britain were studying at Scottish universities in 1995–96.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan) *rose—*

Ms Hodge: I must continue, as I have taken a range of interventions, and the hon. Gentleman has just entered the Chamber.

I turn to other issues that I believe are relevant to the debate. When most people from England, Wales and Northern Ireland think of Scottish universities, places such as Edinburgh and St. Andrews come to mind. However, many Scottish universities cater primarily for Scottish students. For example, Robert Gordon university derives only 3.5 per cent. of its student intake from outside Scotland, and Paisley university derives only 4 per cent. Most Scottish universities—except perhaps the more elite establishments in Scotland—cater primarily for Scottish students.

The Opposition may have identified an anomaly, but is it a priority for targeting resources? I argue strongly that it is not. I share the priorities of the Secretary of State for Education and Employment for distributing additional resources. Any additional money—there will be even more when resource accounting gets under way and we treat loans under public expenditure rules—should be used to improve access for lone parents, mature students and people with disabilities.

Let us use the money to iron out other anomalies that I believe are more important. For example, part-time students are treated differently, and students in further education are treated in a totally unfair and discriminatory manner. Let us put that money to better use, so that we may create opportunities for the many, not the few.

Mr. Donald Gorrie (Edinburgh, West): Before attempting to controvert the intellectual chicanery practised by various Government Members, I shall speak to Liberal Democrat amendment No. 8.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. No hon. Member is ever involved in chicanery.

Mr. Gorrie: I beg your pardon, Mr. Deputy Speaker; I thought that the phrase might be allowed.

I shall speak to Liberal Democrat amendments Nos. 8 and 9. Amendment No. 8 means that fees for the fourth year and subsequent years of study in all United Kingdom universities would be covered by grants. There would be a level playing field across the whole United Kingdom, as fees would be paid for only three years. Concentration on the Scottish anomaly has concealed the fact that many university courses in England continue for four or more years and that students enrolled in those courses will suffer under the present arrangements.

The Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals estimates that it will cost £12 million a year to remove the fees or cover them by grants. That seems a modest amount to pay, to address that anomaly and assist the students enrolled in those courses, many of which are vital to the future of our economy. This is one anomaly, but there are many others. We are concentrating on the single anomaly in this amendment and we deal with other

[Mr. Gorrie]

anomalies in later amendments. I commend to the House our proposal, which would solve the problem in Scotland. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Hon. Members must allow the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (Mr. Gorrie) a hearing. Every hon. Member is entitled to a hearing. Far too many conversations are being conducted in the Chamber.

Mr. Gorrie: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Amendment No. 9 would address the Scottish anomaly by covering fourth-year fees in Scottish universities with grants. Different parties have tried to address that question from four different directions. In addition to our amendments, we endeavoured to address it by moving a motion for recommittal, which did not leave the starting blocks. We proposed that the clauses regarding Scotland be recommitted to a Scottish Standing Committee. Our amendment seeks to deal with the anomaly, and other parties' amendments deal with it satisfactorily in other ways. We shall be happy to support the Conservative amendment or any other amendments that are selected.

This is the most extraordinary mess that the Government have made. The sight of different Departments passing the buck from one to another and saying, "It wisnae me," "I'll not pay," and "It isn't my fault," is not enlivening.

The Government—or their latest spokesperson—argue that they are retaining equal access. In theory, there will be equal access to the most expensive seats at Covent Garden when it reopens, in that anyone will be able to go in, part with several hundred pounds and get the seat, but that is not equal access, as whether one can afford the ticket price enters into the equation.

The arguments made in Labour interventions and speeches so far are of the "angels dancing on the point of a pin" variety, but they have a new angle on the issue, which the mediaeval people did not. The area of residence of the angel dancing on the point of a pin was the crucial new issue. The arguments—

Mr. Ian Davidson (Glasgow, Pollok): New Labour, new angle.

Mr. Gorrie: New Labour, new lunacy. The arguments are incredibly unconvincing.

7.30 pm

Mr. Vernon Coaker (Gedling): If this is as huge an issue as the hon. Gentleman implies, and if the amount of hot air generated means that the Government are in trouble, why is that not borne out by the statistics of applications by real people in England, Northern Ireland and Wales to universities in Scotland? Why is it not borne out by a plummet in applications? That is what we would expect if what he said bore a shred of a relationship to reality.

Mr. Gorrie: We are setting out a—[HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."] I will answer the question. We are setting out a point of principle. If Labour Members cannot recognise a principle, that is their problem, not ours. We are looking to the future. We want to establish a principle that will last. It is not a question of whether one year of students decides in a specific way, when the facts are not fully known. I ask Labour Members to imagine a scenario in which we were not doing this but, in a year or two, the Scottish Parliament passed a Bill to the effect that it would cost English students more than it would Scottish students to study in Scotland. My God, what an outcry there would be—"Wicked Scots nationalist discrimination!" Instead, the Labour party, whose duty it is to run the Union satisfactorily and fairly, is introducing this anomaly. It is blowing a hole in the concept of the Union and fairness throughout the country.

Mr. Wilson: I wonder whether the obvious solution would be to have the same system of school qualifications, the same entry qualifications and the same higher education system in England as in Scotland. Then there would be no anomalies. Is that what the hon. Gentleman is recommending?

Mr. Gorrie: No; I am not proposing that. I am proposing that there should be a level playing field and non-discrimination for entry to Scottish universities. For the sake of £2 million—what it has been estimated would be necessary to redress the anomaly—the Government are seriously damaging Scottish universities. They have enraged the students and the university community, which are very unhappy about the whole thing.

Mr. Byers: Oh dear.

Mr. Gorrie: "Oh dear" is not a very intelligent remark for Ministers to make if a large number of university principals are very unhappy with their policy.

Ministers are deliberately denigrating the Scottish four-year degree. On a previous occasion, the Minister for Education and Industry, Scottish Office referred to a "leisurely four-year degree". Ministers ignore the fact that, throughout Europe, broader and longer degrees are the norm. Scotland is more in tune than is England with most of continental Europe. The Government are much mistaken in undermining the Scottish four-year degree. The idea that people can go straight in at the start of the second year—

Caroline Flint: Does not the hon. Gentleman accept that, on a point of principle, the task should be to increase opportunities for students at school and in further education in Scotland to have access to university? Is not that the point of principle—increasing the number of students from Scotland who can apply to do the four-year degree course?

Mr. Gorrie: With due respect to the hon. Lady, that is not the issue. Scotland already has a better rate of people going on to university than England does. We shall support any measure to improve the participation of people in any part of Britain in higher and further education, and to improve their opportunities, but how one improves their opportunities by charging fees, I do not know.

Mr. Willetts: The hon. Gentleman may be aware of the survey conducted by Scottish university students, approaching every head teacher in Scotland, of whom

68.5 per cent. felt that the percentage of their pupils entering higher education would fall as a result of the introduction of tuition fees and 70.4 per cent. felt that abolition of the maintenance grant would further reduce the percentage of their students entering higher education. If that is indeed the concern of the hon. Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint), it does not look as if these measures make much sense.

Mr. Gorrie: The Conservatives can speak for themselves on their policy on fees.

At present, about 10 per cent. of students coming from England, Northern Ireland and Wales go straight into the second year of a Scottish course. It is not an option in many courses and, according to my information, many people who start in the second year go back to the first year because they do not think that it would be sensible to continue, and they cannot cope. Only the top-quality entrants from England can go straight into the second year, and it is arguable whether it is beneficial for them, because they miss out on the breadth of the traditional Scottish degree.

The Government have got it entirely wrong, first, on the issue of equality throughout the Union, and secondly, in their extraordinarily consistent attack on the Scottish traditional four-year degree, which is very damaging for the future. I hope that the House will support whatever amendment it has to vote on to oppose these foolish policies.

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): I support new clause 3, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan), my colleagues and myself.

The hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) made what he described as a one-nation political speech—a one-Union political speech, if you like—but I warn him that taking a Unionist line will not work with me. I certainly will not support amendment No. 102, which is a Tory amendment tabled in his name. I have been 11 years in the House, and so far I have managed never to support the Tories in any decision; I will not support them now.

I say to Ministers, however, that neither will I vote against amendment No. 102. In an ideal world, I would have hoped that new clause 3 would be selected and voted on, and if it were voted on, I would vote for it, because it is about a serious, important issue, which Ministers should take seriously—the issue of fairness and not discriminating against people because they happen to live in a different part of this island from other people. That is the basic principle.

People who attend the same university and do the same four-year degree course should be treated exactly the same. There is no way round that basic, simple argument. My hon. Friend the Member for Barking (Ms Hodge) says that access for English, Welsh and Northern Ireland students to Scottish universities remains the same as it did before; it does not. A student from England, Wales or Northern Ireland must find an extra £1,000 in tuition fees if they want to take a course at a Scottish university. I realise that £1,000 here or there does not matter to a millionaire, but to many people £1,000 is a lot of money. It may make all the difference when they are deciding whether to stay in England, Northern Ireland or Wales or go to university in Scotland.

Many of my hon. Friends have argued that it is possible to jump into the second year if one has an A-level qualification instead of a higher, as they have in Scotland. My hon. Friend the Member for Barking conceded that, at the moment, only 10 per cent. of students from the rest of the United Kingdom go straight into the second year of courses in Scottish universities. In fact, at a briefing given to Members of Parliament from Dundee by the local universities—Dundee university and Abertay university—it was made clear that most students coming from England, Wales and Northern Ireland do not go straight into the second year, and would not be allowed to do so because of the type of course on offer. Accountancy was mentioned. Students from England will not be allowed to go into the second year of that course at Dundee university. Of course, we can score debating points across the Chamber, but the problem is real for real students in the real world. We must take it on board when the policy that we are advocating has discriminatory implications and damages the interests of students from elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

There is also a Scottish perspective to the argument. I was born and raised in Glasgow, but I have spent most of my life living in Dundee. I know that there are more universities in Scotland than just Edinburgh and St. Andrews. Dundee university and Abertay university in Dundee—some of my hon. Friends may never have heard of it—have high proportions of students from elsewhere in the UK. At Dundee university, 30 per cent. of the intake consists of non-Scottish students, with 14 per cent. coming from Northern Ireland. If we consider particular disciplines at the university—for example, medicine—60 per cent. of the students on those courses are non-Scottish students.

The universities believe that the measure is bound to have an impact on the applications that they will receive and the number of students coming into the universities. The preliminary figures produced by the universities last November showed that in the case of Dundee, the number of applications was down by 17.5 per cent. At Abertay—

Ms Hodge: That is ridiculous.

Mr. McAllion: The principals of those universities have given those figures to the Members of Parliament who represent them. My hon. Friend may think that the argument is ridiculous, but those are the facts and that is the truth.

Ms Hodge: I said that that was ridiculous because November was not the last date for applications to universities. Can my hon. Friend say whether applications to Dundee university are down this year? Are applications from students in England, Wales and Northern Ireland down?

Mr. McAllion: If my hon. Friend had taken the trouble to read a Scottish newspaper last week, she would have seen a huge article reporting a speech made by Professor Bernard King, the principal of Abertay university, who was speaking about the likely effect of the extra £1,000 tuition fee on applications to his university. His words were that that would have a devastating effect. He believed that the number of students in universities across Scotland would be down by as much as 25 per cent. as a direct result of the policy. He went on to argue that, if the

[Mr. McAllion]

problem was not addressed, the reduction in the number of students attending Scottish universities would in the long term lead to a reduction in the number of universities across Scotland.

That is a man who knows what he is talking about. He is not an elected politician who does a wee bit here and a wee bit there about higher education. He has spent his life in higher education and he knows the likely impact of the changes on higher education in Scotland. He is alarmed, and if he is alarmed, I am alarmed and I suggest that my hon. Friends should also be alarmed. They should pay no attention to the smoothing of the figures. If we put barriers in the way of people going to university, we cannot say that that will have no effect.

I can trade soundbites with the best of us. I also want access to university to be for the many, not for the few. I suggest to my hon. Friends, however, that anything that puts a barrier in the way of students coming to Scottish universities will not encourage access for the many.

Mr. Wilson: Any university that was suffering a reduction in applications from elsewhere in the United Kingdom could take more students from less well-off backgrounds because, of course, no matter where in the United Kingdom they come from, they will not have to pay tuition fees.

Mr. McAllion: There is a danger in that. My hon. Friend highlights another anomaly. In Dundee, not only do we have two universities, but we have a college of further education, Dundee college, which has 10,000 or 11,000 students. If we lose students from elsewhere in the United Kingdom, the criteria for admission to Abertay and Dundee universities will be dropped. Consequently, many of the students who would have gone to Dundee college will go to one of those universities, and Dundee college will then be in trouble. Already it has insufficient funds to keep all the teachers teaching all the time.

There is a knock-on effect all the way down the chain. I plead with my hon. Friends. No doubt the decision was originally based on public spending considerations, but it has grave implications. It would not cost a great deal of money to restore the principle that is at the heart of new clause 3. That would go down very well with people in Scotland if we could find the money to do something about it. We have the money, because there are surpluses around, as everyone is saying. We do not need to adopt such a policy and we should not try to defend it.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I shall call the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor). I have noted his interventions regarding European Union students. He has made his point about EU students, and the amendment deals with UK students. I would not want him to make another European speech.

Sir Teddy Taylor: I am always grateful to you for your guidance, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and of course I shall stick absolutely to the rules.

The hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) made an excellent speech. He was trying to tell us that we should stop playing at politics and throwing around silly figures and estimates, and realise that there is a major problem.

We all know from experience that we cannot tell the impact of anything until it happens. Instead of discussing estimates given by university professors whom we can largely judge as sensible, or soundbites from Ministers that can be disregarded, let us wait and see what happens. We should ask ourselves, first, whether the policy can work; secondly, whether it is just; and thirdly, what impact it will have on Scottish universities.

7.45 pm

I have three children. One went to St. Andrews university, where 40 per cent. of the students came from Scotland, 40 per cent. from the rest of the UK and 20 per cent. from abroad. My daughter is at present at Durham university. Before hon. Members start making political points, I hope that they will think about my daughter. Because I am a wealthy Member of Parliament, I send her a cheque every month. I hope that she will emerge with a good degree and with no debts. However, if I were an unemployed bricklayer, she would probably leave university—if the Bill were enacted—with a debt of £10,000. Let us forget the idea that we are making provision to help the poor. We should look at the facts, not the soundbites.

I should like to ask the Minister some questions. First, if the proposal is just, what is the definition of a Scottish student? I came from Scotland, went to a Scottish university, went down to England looking for a job and found one. If someone is temporarily residing in Scotland before starting university, having his previous home in Birmingham, is he a Scot or is he English? If somebody has been to Scottish schools and got a Scottish education and Scottish higher leaving certificates—

Ms Hodge *indicated dissent.*

Sir Teddy Taylor: The hon. Lady should not shake her head, as this is a real situation. If that person then moves to Birmingham, is he an English resident? The first thing that the Minister should say in his reply is how he will define a Scottish applicant, as opposed to an applicant from England. We know that people move around a great deal. If someone has a Scottish school education and then moves to England, how can the definitions be reasonable or practical?

Secondly, I shall not raise the European issue but, bearing it in mind that the school education in Italy and France is fundamentally different, as the Minister well knows, why should those students get the same £1,000 off their fees, compared with other students coming from Canada, where school education tends to be shorter, or from Australia, where it is in between, or from Bulgaria, where I do not know the situation?

Can the Minister explain why there should be a block exemption for students from the European Union? Can he tell us what will happen in the case of South American countries? French Guyana is an overseas territory of France, but British Guyana is not covered by the measure.

Thirdly, what will be the impact on applications? I know that my son, who went to St. Andrews, was rather worried about going there because it meant an extra year of studying. He did not particularly want to do that, but the advantages of going to St. Andrews were considerable for him, so he decided to do it. Would it not be ridiculous if he had had the disadvantage of the extra year educationally as well as an extra £1,000 fee?

The fourth factor that the Government must bear in mind is that there are variations in the length of courses in Scottish and English universities. At St. Andrews, in some instances, students can apply for three-year courses. That is not possible at other Scottish universities. At Aberdeen university—I know that this applies to two courses at Dundee university—it is not possible to reduce the length of courses.

Finally, I hope that the Government will bear it in mind that they are introducing a new anomaly in the funding of education. That is wrong, especially when the Labour party did not say that it would do such a thing before it came to power.

I had the pleasure this afternoon of speaking to several students from St. Andrews. I spoke to others who came from Dundee and elsewhere. They happened to recognise me, although I have been away from Scotland for a long time. They were concerned. indeed, they were alarmed. They thought that it was fundamentally wrong to introduce a measure which for the first time would bring in discrimination.

I hope that the Minister will tell students—this is not a laughing matter—how he defines whether an applicant comes from Scotland. For example, one of my children could decide to move in with an aunt, perhaps in May, and apply to go to a Scottish university. That child could move away from home for that purpose and say that his or her home had changed for that purpose. Would that child have the Scottish advantage? On the other hand, someone could move down to England temporarily. Does that person become English? The moment we introduce differentiations for Scottish nationals or English nationals, we are bringing something into our law that is fundamentally wrong.

As I have said before, the whole business is filthy, foul and cruel. I accept that other Governments might have done something similar. If they had, however, I fancy that there would have been marching in the streets. The Government's proposal, if enacted, will hit the poorest families hardest of all.

My children and others with parents on higher incomes will emerge without any debt whatever. Although the hon. Member for Barking (Ms Hodge) is shaking her head, I ask her to think about these matters. My daughter will leave university without any debt. If I were on a low income, she would leave with a debt of £10,000, and some day would have to repay it. As for charges and the fees that we were discussing, those on low incomes would not pay them. However, there is still the horrible business of paying back the debt for the money that is borrowed for a university course.

Something big has happened, and it is wrong. The hon. Member for Barking should be well aware that no indication was given to students that this would happen. The Government have done something fundamentally wrong. They should say at least that they will retain the principle that the same rules will apply throughout the United Kingdom, whether someone's residence is classified as being in Scotland or England.

Dr. George Turner (North-West Norfolk): I confess that I learned the differences between Scottish and English education at an early age: the son of Scots parents, and with a working mother, I was sent for the English school holidays to Scotland, where, to get me out of the way and out of trouble, my relatives put me into school. The school holidays were different, of course. Having had cousins who went through the Scottish system doing their highers and four-year degree courses, and having myself followed the traditional English route—A-levels and a three-year degree course—I am well aware of the distinctive pattern of education in Scotland.

Before coming to this place, I worked for almost 30 years in higher education. I am disappointed that the House has not addressed the real issues. Admission to education—along with fees and the suitability of candidates—relates to educational background and experience and not to where people are resident. Over my years in higher education I dealt with exchange courses. Our best universities are international, and the university of East Anglia numbers among them. Within a three-year programme, we had difficulty in ensuring that exchanges could take place—although there were many four-year courses at English universities offering European exchanges, which recognised language difficulties. We must understand that students from elsewhere in Europe who come here as part of their course have similar problems.

In America, with no language differences, there were still grave problems in finding courses—as there would be for students moving between England and Scotland. The reason for that is that the educational system is different—although there are more similarities with the system in the United States, where I worked for a few years, than between the systems in Scotland and England.

As soon as we have differences in schooling and educational systems, anomalies in admission policies may arise. I know that many English universities would dearly have loved the funding to enable them to move to a four-year degree course for those who had completed an A-level course, but I know—

Mr. Randall: The hon. Gentleman is making an interesting point. Does not the argument revolve round the fact that the Government are unwilling to fund four-year courses in the rest of the United Kingdom? As was said in Committee, there are many courses, such as language courses, where four years would be appropriate. The anomaly arises because of the Government's unwillingness to fund four-year courses.

Dr. Turner: With respect, the Government do fund four-year courses where appropriate. The question that must be addressed is whether residence is the appropriate qualification. The first part of my argument is that residence is not appropriate. What is appropriate is educational background and the totality of that education.

I know that there are strains on English universities in finding matching courses that can be made available to American students on exchange. That is because the Americans have a four-year system. If universities that wish to attract international students do not look to the structure of their courses, they will have difficulty in attracting them.

What are our priorities when it comes to the funding that is available for education? That is the real question for the Government to take on board. Despite the mantra of my party, I know that funding will be limited during this Parliament and the next. I know that some of my colleagues at the university of East Anglia will regret me

[Dr. Turner]

saying that we do not have the luxury of funding to enable us to move from the standard English three-year degree course to one of four years. The students and the teachers might like the idea, but it is not our priority.

As an admissions tutor, I am aware of the problems that arise when there are different education systems within the same country. There is just as great a difference between the Scottish system of education and the English system of A-levels as there is for those students who chose to leave school at 16 to take the further education route. If a student takes the FE route in England through the ordinary national certificate and the higher national certificate, he may have more years of education than the student beginning a three-year degree course. That was certainly the case with the engineering course with which I was involved. The argument was that such students should be able to move into their second year at the English university. In some instances, with higher national diploma students, it was argued that they should be able to move into the third year. If the education system is to be efficient, it is necessary to structure courses for students.

I do not know whether it is because of ignorance or because there is little else about which to argue in terms of policy, but I feel that the House is missing the main point. That can certainly be said in relation to the new clauses. We have two distinctive schooling systems and transferring between them is not the same as moving between them. Of course consideration should be given to whether such transfer or movement should be encouraged financially. Much has been made of the £1,000 involved.

Any student who chooses to extend the time that he spends in education by embarking on a four-year course after taking English A-levels could have two good reasons for doing so. One reason is that he has not planned his academic future carefully enough, early enough. It is a common fault, and understandable in the context of young people; such students continue to suffer from that, in England as well as if they wish to transfer elsewhere. Secondly, if someone else is paying, it is very nice to have a year longer to get to the same end point. There is only a modest discouragement because the extra £1,000 is less than 10 per cent. of the actual cost that is being met. The main contribution that young or middle-aged people make is the extra year that they devote to study.

Dr. Lynne Jones: When my hon. Friend talks about the luxury of an additional year in education, should he compare that with income forgone? The Minister suggested that Scottish universities might go forward by attracting more students from low-income backgrounds. Surely he should recognise that those students would have to pay their maintenance grant back, in the form of loans. Under current arrangements, they pay back £6,000 or £7,000, which will double under the new arrangements. Is my hon. Friend concerned about that?

8 pm

Dr. Turner: For the moment, I am concerned to stick to the amendments. I understand that there will be a wider debate on some of the principles later.

The principle that a person taking a year longer pays a £1,000 contribution towards that is not new. Students in England have done that, as have students who have moved. Students from Europe who I have known have usually wanted to come in and take the shortest route: they wanted to argue themselves into the latest year in the course that they could, not necessarily the earliest, because they wanted to diminish the maintenance that they paid—which I understand they will continue to pay.

Mr. Beith: I should like to compare notes with the hon. Gentleman, as someone whom did the same job as him—dealing with students applying to university. Does he not think it strange that an admissions tutor would say to students from Scotland or from other countries in Europe, "You should start in the first year because your education so far is such that that is the right place to start," while being unable to come to that conclusion for an English student without also saying, "It will cost you an extra £1,000"?

Dr. Turner: Never having dealt with these matters in Scotland, I cannot speak for what happens in that system. I dealt with students who came in from further education, and I understood a system whereby a person who had spent a further year in education could usually expect to go into the degree programme at a more advanced stage. As a county councillor, I knew that such students would not have got the grant or had their place paid for for the full three years.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): My hon. Friend is missing a particular point about the typical conduct of students fresh into the first year at universities in Scotland or anywhere else. Such students would not necessarily plan to do a four-year honours course and might have to enjoy success to realise that they were able to do a four-year course. They might come in planning to do three years, and then wish to go on for a fourth, but if they happen to come from any part of the United Kingdom other than Scotland, they will have to pay the extra £1,000. That is unfair.

Dr. Turner: I am afraid that I must disagree. There are different educational systems and we have to try to match them. The judgment has to be an academic one which, in general, depends on the number of years that a student has spent studying.

We cannot afford to let education be seen to be any less efficient than it has become in recent years. There may be effects from cuts in education which will mean that we have to improve quality, but we must maintain the efficiency of the system. Conservative Members are ignoring that, and they will not have my support.

Mr. Welsh: The hon. Member for North-West Norfolk (Dr. Turner) said that one of the problems is that England cannot move from a three-year degree to the more usual four-year degree because the Government will not provide the funding. They are also not funding the resources to end the discrimination against English and other students, which is a giveaway of the real reasons for the debate: education is now resource-driven rather than driven by education needs or reasons.

New clause 1 and amendment No. 1 would delay the Bill's implementation in Scotland until the new Scottish Parliament is set up. The education system in Scotland and attitudes towards education differ from those in the rest of the United Kingdom. That is widely recognised

and has been mentioned several times in the debate. Even the Government have admitted that difference in attitude. The Scottish Office response to the Garrick report states:

"the existence of the Scottish Committee stems from the important and distinctive nature of the Scottish higher education system."

The Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment, the hon. Member for Pontypridd (Dr. Howells), said in Committee:

"The Scottish education system differs from that elsewhere in the United Kingdom—not just at higher education level, but at school level." —[*Official Report, Standing Committee F*, 21 April 1998; c. 150.]

Underlying the differences in the system are different attitudes and principles. For example, a Scottish education offers a breadth of learning: school pupils are able to study a wide range of subject at a high level, and university students take a broad-based four-year degree. In respect of funding, it has been possible for centuries for people in Scotland from the poorest backgrounds to enjoy the best education, if they have the ability.

The Bill will not only affect the Scottish education system, but will seriously undermine the principles on which it is built. It is incredible, therefore, that not a single Scottish constituency Member of Parliament served on the Standing Committee. The Scottish National party certainly sought representation, but was denied it. The Liberal Democrats chose not to give a seat to a Scottish Member, and the Conservatives could not have done so, even if they had wanted to. The Government filled their 14 seats with English and Welsh MPs, showing either that Scottish Labour MPs were not interested or that they could not be trusted to toe the party line. The truth of that will be seen in the Lobby.

The Government initiated legislation giving the Scottish Parliament powers to administer all levels of Scottish education, but the same Government are forcing through changes in Scottish education, even though the new Parliament will be in place in less than a year. It would be an abuse of power for the Government to force the Bill on the Scottish people when it has not been properly debated or scrutinised by their elected representatives, as it would most certainly be in the new Scottish Parliament. To use the Prime Minister's words, it would be an irresponsible act.

Given the huge administrative cost of making two fundamental changes to student funding arrangements in a short period, it would be wise to wait for the Scottish Parliament to pass such a Bill.

Sir Robert Smith: Might not the Minister have welcomed another benefit, the chance to make sure that the computer is finally working at the Student Awards Agency for Scotland? The nightmare that I foresee is that it will not only not manage to administer a system that it has operated for years but will be unable to cope, within the space of a few months, with a new system and the means-testing of parents from Greece, Germany and Denmark.

Mr. Welsh: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. The problems of the Student Awards Agency for Scotland are only a starter—a preview of the horrors of 2000.

Amendment No. 2 would have similar effect to amendment No. 102. It would guarantee equity in payment of tuition fees for all students at higher education institutions in Scotland, regardless of United Kingdom domicile. That was the subject of my Adjournment debate on 15 January. As the Bill stands, English, Welsh and Northern Ireland applicants to Scottish universities will be expected to pay £1,000 more than Scottish or European Union students for the same course, even though they come from exactly the same background.

Mr. Coaker: May I ask the hon. Gentleman the same question that I asked the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (Mr. Gorrie)? If the issue is so huge—he has returned to it—why does not what is happening outside the House reflect what he is saying? Applications have not been affected in the way that his argument suggests.

Mr. Welsh: That is not true. Applications at many universities are down, but we should remember that there is a difference between applying and taking a course. The hon. Gentleman should think beyond the present to one, two, three or 10 years from now. The Bill will not only lumber students and their families with massive debt but will have a ripple-back effect on the Scottish education system. Those major problems are being forced on Scotland. The Scottish Parliament is the best place to debate those issues so that the people of Scotland can decide what educational provision they want and what choices they wish to make, rather than have a fait accompli visited upon them.

To solve the English-Welsh-Northern Ireland anomaly would cost only £1.5 million for students from England, £45,000 for students from Wales, and £500,000 for students from Northern Ireland—a total of £2 million. That is a small sum compared with the overall budget available to the offices governing those countries, yet it would stop the anomaly, get rid of the discrimination and solve the problem. It would not take much, and the Government could easily do it if it were a priority.

The Government's policy is discriminatory. It will deter English, Welsh and Northern Ireland students from coming to Scotland. The Minister will no doubt quote figures to show, as the hon. Member for Gedling (Mr. Coaker) attempted to do, that overall applications have not been affected. However, some Scottish universities, such as Dundee and Abertay, have seen a substantial drop in applications, particularly from Northern Ireland.

The final result of the Government's policy will not be known until the autumn, when the important admissions figures will be released. We shall then all see the effect of what is happening. Any drop in the number of students from other parts of the United Kingdom will force Scottish institutions to downsize their diverse range of courses. There is also the danger that Scottish universities may be forced to consider abandoning the traditional four-year honours degree, replacing it with a three-year course to compete on a level playing field to attract non-Scottish UK students. The effects of that will ripple back through the whole system into secondary schools, and so on. The matter should have been thought through much more thoroughly. That could and should be done within the Scottish Parliament—not in this institution, where Scotland was not even represented in Committee.

The Government's proposal will also have a negative effect on the Scottish economy, causing a reduction in the £210 million spent each year in Scotland by students from

[Mr. Welsh]

other parts of the United Kingdom. The Government have given two reasons for not removing the anomaly, and neither is good enough. First, they argue that Scottish students will have had one less year of school education than English, Welsh or Northern Irish students, and are therefore entitled to one more year of free higher education. That is merely a convenient excuse, which is full of flaws. For example, Scottish students may have repeated years at school, but they will not be forced to pay the fourth-year fees. Several European Union countries offer free school education for 14 years or more, but students from those countries will be exempt from fourth-year fees. However, students from England, Wales or Northern Ireland who left school at 16 and who have done an access course will have to pay fees for all four years. People have been calling that an anomaly; it certainly is, and it is certainly unfair.

That is not the real reason for the Government's attitude. The real reason why they are unwilling to resolve the anomaly is that they are afraid of the implications in other parts of the United Kingdom. Students on longer courses in England will think it unfair that they are expected to pay fourth-year fees whereas students in Scotland are not; a maximum sum of £3,000 will be applied. The Department for Education and Employment could find a solution to that problem to satisfy English, Welsh and Northern Irish students—it could, if it wanted to.

It is typical of this Government that they are willing to allow universities in faraway Scotland to pay the price for their flawed policies rather than face criticism closer to London. The only solution that the Government have proposed to help ease the problem is that Scottish institutions should give English, Welsh and Northern Irish students direct entry into the second year of a four-year course. However, only 7 per cent. of non-Scottish UK students currently receive direct entry into the second year of undergraduate courses at Scottish universities. The Government are happy to encourage people to go directly into the second year, whether they are A-level students, Scottish students with a certificate of sixth-year studies or, in the future—if it comes to pass—holders of advanced highers. The first year of a four-year degree is foundational and often academically necessary. Direct entry into the second year is not possible in all courses, nor is it advisable for educational reasons.

Universities are being forced to redesign courses to suit second-year entrants for financial, not academic, reasons. The Government's flawed policy is causing the erosion of the original intention of the broad-based degree, which is gaining admiration and popularity in other countries. University is not, and should not be, simply a case of rushing people through and giving a certificate at the end. It is a learning process, which takes time.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): Why do so few students choose to enter the second year of a course? Is it because they are discouraged by the universities, or because they choose not to enter the second year?

Mr. Welsh: Funnily enough, more Scottish students than English choose to go directly into the second year. The question is too complex for me to answer in the short time available to me, but it is interesting.

8.15 pm

The English three-year honours system, rather than the Scottish four-year honours degree, is the exception. My argument is based on educational grounds. Scotland has something that is worth protecting, defending and improving. In the long run, the Government's flawed policy will act as a deterrent. It will not deter access, except in the sense that people will not wish to pay the extra money and have the extra debt, and will not choose to come to Scottish universities. If that happens, a smaller range of courses will be available in Scottish universities. The problems will be seen over the coming decades because the policy is flawed.

Our amendments would protect the four-year honours degree and ensure equity for everyone studying at Scottish universities. That is how it should be.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): I wish to speak briefly in support of new clause 3, which seeks to address the anomaly referred to by other hon. Members.

Under the Government proposals, a new West Lothian question has arisen—namely: why should a student from Blackburn in Lancashire doing a four-year honours course at Edinburgh university have to pay £4,000, whereas a student from Blackburn in West Lothian pays only £3,000? The anomaly is complicated even further under European Union legislation: why should a student from Belfast have to pay £1,000 more than a student from Dublin? The whole matter is patently unjust, and unless the Government take action to eradicate the injustice, they may face a court action in the European Court of Justice. I appeal to the Government to see reason. That is the basic case for new clause 3—it is a plea for justice.

I take what the hon. Member for Barking (Ms Hodge) said about the available evidence regarding applications. I emphasise the word "applications" rather than admissions. However, it is early days yet and it would be wrong to jump to conclusions simply based on the application statistics at this stage. Well-articulated fears have been expressed by vice-chancellors and principals of almost all the Scottish universities about the damaging effect of the proposals and the fact that they will discourage students from England, Wales and Northern Ireland from going to Scottish universities. In the long term, that could undermine the Scottish four-year honours degree, which has been part of the tradition of our broad-based Scottish education.

Some hon. Members have said that some students from England and Wales with A-levels can go straight into the second year of a degree course. That may be true for some courses and for some students, but it is certainly not universally applicable.

I have heard at least one Minister say that students from England and Wales who opt to go to a Scottish university are already paying more anyway because they are having to pay maintenance for four years rather than the three years at an English university. That seems rather weak logic. It is almost like saying that students who already pay more should therefore pay even more. The extra £1,000 could be the last straw for potential students which dissuades them from opting for a Scottish university.

Dr. Godman: My hon. Friend said a couple of minutes ago that such an anomaly could be referred to the

European Court of Justice. I am not so sure about that, but might it not create a very lively debate at the very first meeting of the Council of the Isles?

Mr. Canavan: It could, indeed. I am not a lawyer so I do not know the strength of such a case going to the European Court of Justice, although I think that outrage will be expressed by all parties in a debate on education in the Council of the Isles.

I made some effort to find out an estimate of costs involved by tabling some written answers, which were answered on Friday, and for which I am grateful to the Minister for Education and Industry, Scottish Office. He was not, however, very revealing in his first answer. I asked:

"what is the estimated total of tuition fees which will be payable in the final year of four years honours courses at Scottish universities and colleges by United Kingdom students from outside Scotland."

He replied:

"I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (Mr. Gorrie) on Monday 24 November 1997." — [*Official Report*, 5 June 1998, Vol. 313, c. 388.]

I looked with great anticipation for the appropriate extract in *Hansard*. In reply to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West, the Minister said:

"no specific estimate of the likely average fee per student for those students from England, Wales and Northern Ireland studying in Scotland is available." [*Official Report*, 24 November 1997, Vol. 301, c. 422.]

I know that, sometimes, figures are not the strongest points of some Education Ministers, but my hon. Friend the Minister for Education and Industry was educated at a Scottish university, so we expect better.

The Minister did eventually give me some figures, when I asked:

"how many United Kingdom students from outside Scotland are in the final year of four-year honours degree courses at Scottish universities or colleges." [*Official Report*, 5 June 1998, Vol. 313, c. 388.]

Although his reply did not exactly answer my question, he said that, last year, there was a total of 3,543 non-Scottish UK honours graduates from Scottish higher education institutions who had completed four or more years study.

Even if all those 3,543 students were paying the full fee of £1,000, the maximum cost to the Government would be just over £3.5 million. If we assume that one third will be exempt from paying fees, one third will pay a partial fee and only one third will pay the full fee, the total estimated cost would probably be less than £2 million. I should be grateful if the Minister would be good enough to confirm that, or give some rough estimate. That £2 million would or could be shared between the Department for Education and Employment, the Welsh Office and the Northern Ireland Office. Although the cost is not astronomical, the Government would generate much good will towards Scottish universities and colleges if they were to eradicate the unfair anomaly. I therefore plead with the Minister to do so.

Mr. Beith: I should like to stress to the Minister the sense of injustice with which this matter is viewed in Berwick-upon-Tweed, where the nearest two universities are in Scotland and there is a long tradition of people doing four-year courses at Scottish universities, including Aberdeen, and how people will sense the anomalies.

There is a fairly considerable movement of people and pupils across the border in and around Berwick. Quite a number of pupils complete their education in England but have a domicile in Scotland. All the Minister's arguments that, since students have had a year less full-time education in Scotland they are entitled to the full four years of education, do not apply in such cases. Such students will have completed their English education to the end of the A-level year, and will still be entitled to four years of a Scottish degree course because they live on the Scottish side of the border. On the other hand, the majority in England will have to pay the extra £1,000 in order to go to a university in Scotland. That is regarded as a very great injustice.

The injustice is compounded when it becomes clear that, by comparison with a student from Dublin, Bavaria or Sicily, the Berwick student will have to pay £1,000 more. The Minister still has not answered the argument that people in Berwick-upon-Tweed have long believed that they are in the European Union. They are entitled to parity of treatment in the EU as much as those who come to the United Kingdom from any other part of Europe.

The sense of annoyance, and even outrage, is very strong among pupils, teachers and parents in whose families there is a tradition either of going to university in Scotland or of going across the border and therefore having been in and out of both education systems. The anomaly is absurd. It is not a matter of removing some old anomaly. The Government have created a new one and I shall vote for any amendment that is designed to prevent them from doing so.

Mr. Wilson: I should like to pick up on the point made by the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith). We are not talking about an anomaly, as I shall explain. We are talking about two different education systems. Anyone trying to square that circle must arrive at the conclusion that the only way in which to have an internal education system free of such anomalies is to have a unitary system. I doubt very much whether the nationalists or the Liberal Democrats are proposing that. Indeed, as a product of the Scottish education system, I would very strongly oppose that.

I turn to the amendments tabled by the nationalists because that will not take much time. The hon. Member for Angus (Mr. Welsh) proposed that all such matters should be put back for the consideration of the Scottish Parliament. If I wanted to be uncharitable and to put egg on the hon. Gentleman's face, I might accept the proposal. But I am an humane man, so I shall spare the hon. Gentleman's embarrassment.

The result of the proposal would be to deny Scottish universities the additional funding that these changes will bring, deny Scottish students access to the much more sympathetic loans regime that the legislation will introduce, and deny Scottish mature students the improved arrangements that have been announced today. Of course, by extension, the proposal would deny Scottish part-time students from less well-off backgrounds the abolition of tuition fees that we have announced in Scotland. If the hon. Gentleman wants to face his electorate to tell them that he has wiped out all of that in Scotland but not in the rest of the United Kingdom, I should perhaps facilitate it.

One wonders why the hon. Member for Angus wants to postpone all the matters for the consideration of the Scottish Parliament. The implication is that here is a

[Mr. Wilson]

Braveheart figure who cannot wait for the Scottish Parliament in order to abolish everything and introduce what he has espoused in recent months. It is therefore with interest that we look at the debate in the Scottish Grand Committee two weeks ago, in which my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson) asked the hon. Member for Angus:

"Before the hon. Gentleman finishes his peroration, will he say whether he is committing his party to abolish loans and reintroduce grants? If so, at what level? Is he committing his party to unfreeze bursaries and, if so, at what level will they be restored?"

The Braveheart figure replied:

"We will make good, as far as we can within the limit of resources, given the mistakes of the present Labour Government."

Under repeated pressure, the hon. Gentleman admitted that he and his party have reneged on all their rhetoric to such an extent that the National Union of Students accused them of betrayal.

Mr. Welsh: All the hon. Gentleman's vitriol betrays his lack of policy and of faith in Scottish democracy. Such matters should be considered by the Scottish Parliament. The decisions should be taken in the Scottish interest. No amount of waffle, vitriol or attacks will disguise the fact that I am against tuition fees and the Minister is in favour of them.

Mr. Wilson: With respect, it is easy to be against bad weather and all sorts of things. Unless one is going to legislate on a matter, such comments are completely meaningless. Given the chance, the hon. Gentleman has again failed to say that his party would reverse the legislation. As he bravely said:

"We will make good, as far as we can within the limit of resources, given the mistakes"—

as he sees them—

"of the present Labour Government."—[*Official Report, Scottish Grand Committee*, 20 May 1998; c. 22.]

The grand old Duke of Banff has led his men to the top of the hill and marched them down again—without a shot being fired in anger.

Mr. Welsh: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Wilson: No, we must move on to serious matters.

I have heard the word "anomaly" used repeatedly tonight. [HON. MEMBERS: "From Labour Members."] Yes, from all over the place. I understand why some of my hon. Friends—including my hon. Friend the Member for Barking (Ms Hodge)—talk about anomalies. I understand why the Liberal Democrats talk about anomalies. I understand why the press talk about anomalies. However, I am astonished that the Scottish National party describes the Scottish education system as an anomaly.

We are talking not about anomalies, but about two different education systems within one state. No amount of casuistry or complaining about anomalies can make them fit perfectly. We have two different systems. We have two different school qualification systems. We have two different university admissions systems. We have two different higher education systems in these universities, conferring different degrees in Scotland and other parts of the UK.

8.30 pm

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): I would like to throw my hon. Friend the Minister a Mackinlay and stand the argument on its head. I accept the difference between the two education systems, but there is a strong argument in England that we ought to broaden the A-level system—for obvious reasons—which would put pressure on universities to run four-year courses. If that is followed through—many of us are in favour of it—will the education team grant an extra £1,000 for those deserving it within the new English system?

Mr. Wilson: That is an interesting debate within the English education system for which, I am pleased to say, I am not responsible.

Let me turn that around, as that matter relates to the point made by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (Mr. Gorrie), who complained that the four-year degree in Scotland was being perniciously removed. There is much talk about the tradition of the four-year degree. How long does it take to make a tradition? When I attended university in Scotland, about 30 per cent. of students in Scotland took four-year honours degrees and 70 per cent. took three-year degrees. These figures have now been transposed, for reasons which are not entirely educational.

For some people, three-year degrees are right, and they are wasting their time doing six years at school and four years at university. I do not accept the idea that to maintain some bogus tradition, it is inherently better to spend 10 years at that stage of one's life in education than nine or eight years. What is best for the individual is what is best for education and this country.

Sir Robert Smith: The Minister seems to forget that in his desire to force people through more quickly, he wants to take away the first year at university. The tradition from which he came involved students starting on a level playing field in their first year, and it is far more important to keep the breadth at the beginning. How far people go through university—and how they come out and what experiences they choose to take with them—is a debate for another day, but forcing people to accelerate their education at the beginning of university is a mistake.

Mr. Wilson: Which is precisely why we are not forcing anyone to do anything. We are giving them choice. At present, around 10 per cent. of students from England choose to go into second year at Scottish universities in that relatively small number of cases where it is both an appropriate course and they hold appropriate A-levels. In exactly the same way when the advanced highers come on stream, I will not say that any Scottish school leaver should spend six years at school obtaining advanced highers and then—to maintain a tradition—must do another four years at university to get an honours degree.

For many, it is better to do that in eight or nine years, rather than ten years. We should think of the interests of students, rather than maintaining the financial arrangements which are dear to the heart of some higher education institutions.

Dr. Godman: As one of the few Members of this House who has taught in a Scottish university, I agree

with what my hon. Friend says about the distinctiveness of our educational system, which I would not wish to change. Does he agree that our Scottish universities are enriched by encouraging youngsters—both as undergraduate and graduate students—to come to them from other points of the compass within the UK?

Mr. Wilson: Of course they are, but there is a wide range of proportions in Scottish universities: from 3 per cent. of students from England at Robert Gordon or 4 per cent. at Paisley, to between 45 and 48 per cent. at St. Andrews or Edinburgh. I do not believe that it is inherently better to have between 45 and 48 per cent. of students from England than it is to have a wider spread and to have students from a wider range of social backgrounds.

St. Andrews and Edinburgh are maintaining not only that they want students from England but, by definition—a point I made in answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion)—that they want students who will be liable for full fees. In other words, they want students from the upper range of the social classes—the ones who pay fees. If they felt that there was a shortage of students coming from England, they could resolve that problem instantly—if they see it as a problem—by taking more people who would not be liable for fees, and who thereby come from different social classes from those who are, perhaps, more accustomed to the cloisters of St. Andrews. Let us have a wider mix of students at all universities, but let us not hide behind the fallacy that the Opposition's case is in any way internationalist—it certainly is not.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Will the Minister confirm that the science departments of international repute at the university of Edinburgh are not concerned about the social class of their students?

Mr. Wilson: I will indeed, but they are concerned with getting more money into the university to maintain that international excellence. That is why university principals support what we are doing in terms of university funding, which will bring up to £140 million extra each year into the Scottish universities. The weakness of the Opposition parties is that we say exactly where Scottish higher and further education can get £140 million a year, but by prevaricating on the changes in student funding, they cannot say where that £140 million is coming from.

I grant this to the Tories. For many reasons which had nothing to do with education—and had a lot to do with very high unemployment—they were good at piling numbers through the gates of our higher education institutions. However, the money did not follow. We now have a system that delivers high numbers of students to higher education, but which is underfunded, creaking at the seams and needs the infusion of new money which only the Labour Government are proposing to provide.

Dr. Lynne Jones: Will my hon. Friend confirm that in allocating funding to universities, the Government will not take into account the proportion of students who pay the fees, as opposed to those from lower-income backgrounds who will not pay the fees?

Mr. Wilson: The way to address that is for universities to go out and promote wider access to university, as we are doing in Scotland. On 1 May, we had a marvellous conference in Glasgow to discuss widening access and we have put serious money into the support of access programmes, run by universities, which go out into non-traditional areas to attract students into higher education.

It makes me angry when I hear people speaking from a supposedly radical political perspective, who defend a funding system which, to this day, delivers only 11 per cent. of students from lower-income groups, as opposed to 80 per cent. from higher-income groups, into higher education. If that is some sort of golden age which we are supposed to defend, count me out. When I went to a Scottish university, I was the one out of 14 Scottish school leavers who went to university. I have been acutely aware all my life that many of those 13 who did not go to university were every bit as well equipped to benefit from it as I was. The reality, which we cannot disguise from ourselves, is that, under the present system, almost 50 per cent. of school leavers in Scotland go to university despite—or perhaps because of—the loans system. What determines whether people go to university is not the theory of a funding system, but access to resources when they go through higher education. That is what we shall maintain and improve upon.

Sir Teddy Taylor: Is the Minister saying that the document published by the university of St. Andrews—which shows that, as a result of the Government's proposals, the average student could be £3,000 worse off and the poorer student could be £5,400 worse off—is utter nonsense? Does he accept as a straight fact that, as a result of the proposals, poor students will be much worse off than those who come from higher-income families? He must know that that is true.

Mr. Wilson: Even the hon. Gentleman does not believe that a Government can, even if they wanted to, remove all society's inequities through a higher education Bill. He supported a Government who introduced student loans, which I have to accept led to an increase in applications to university. I have to recognise that the effect of student loans has been to give students money when they need it, which is when they are going through university.

We should all have a common purpose in telling students the truth, so that people are not deterred from applying to universities because of false information. Under the current system, which was introduced by the Tories, a graduate who earns £17,000 a year repays £87 a month whereas, under the new system, that student will be repaying £50 a month. Under our proposals, there will be far less to deter people from lower-income backgrounds from entering higher education.

We reject the amendments. The United Kingdom does not have a symmetrical system of higher education or, indeed, of education. If the Government had agreed to pay students from the rest of the United Kingdom for four-year degree courses at Scottish universities, there would have been the same demand on a larger scale in respect of four-year courses at universities in the rest of the United Kingdom. Moreover, all the money to pay for that would, by definition, have gone to better-off families instead of into higher education. The whole purpose of

[Mr. Wilson]

the Bill is to ensure that more money goes into higher education, to widen access and to give this country the educational and research base that it needs for the future.

Mr. Willetts: We have heard a speech from the Minister who came up with the wheeze of cutting the tuition fees that Scottish students in Scottish universities had to pay—they would have to pay them only for three years. Presumably, he thought that that would have an effect on the participation rates of Scottish students in Scottish universities. If that argument is good enough for Scottish students, it is good enough for English, Welsh and Northern Irish students.

The simple point behind our amendment is that students from different parts of the United Kingdom should not be discriminated against by reason of their residence—that is one-nation politics, and I hope that hon. Members from all parties will be able to support the amendment. I appreciate that some Labour Members feel a bit squeamish about supporting a Conservative amendment, although, in the debate, they seemed happy to endorse its principle. We should have been happy if the House had been able to discuss and vote on new clause 3, which was tabled by the hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan), but, sadly, that was not procedurally possible. The only way in which hon. Members will be able to express their belief that students from England, Wales and Northern Ireland should receive the same treatment as students from Scotland in going to Scottish universities is to vote for the amendment.

The Minister created the problem for his colleagues in the Department for Education and Employment by breaking ranks—I should have loved to have heard their reaction when he came up with his wheeze. He made a rather tepid defence of the Government's position. He described tuition fees as bad weather and the Scottish tradition of higher education as a bogus one. As we know, however, the four-year course is an integral part of the educational experience of going to a Scottish university, and there is no reasonable prospect that English students will all take up a course at a Scottish university in the second year. We invite hon. Members from all parties who believe in equity between the different countries of the United Kingdom to support the amendment.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 172, Noes 300.

Division No. 293] **[8.44 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Ballard, Jackie
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Cash, William
Chidgey, David
Clappison, James
Colvin, Michael
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Cunningham, Ms Roseanna *(Perth)*
Curry, Rt Hon David
Dafis, Cynog
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Fearn, Ronnie
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorrie, Donald
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Livsey, Richard
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Moss, Malcolm
Oaten, Mark
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swinney, John
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steve
Wells, Bowen
Welsh, Andrew
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Willetts, David
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John M. Taylor and
Mr. Tim Collins.

NOES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Banks, Tony
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Stephen
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Caplin, Ivor
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Ms Judith
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corston, Ms Jean
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Grant, Bernie
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Alun
Milburn, Alan
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Singh, Marsha
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stott, Roger
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David

Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Ms Bridget Prentice and Mr. Greg Pope.

Question accordingly negatived.

9 pm

Mr. Canavan: I beg to move amendment No. 35, in page 15, line 12, at end insert—

'(1A) Regulations under this section shall make provision requiring the Secretary of State to pay maintenance grants to eligible students whose income or parental income is less than a prescribed amount.'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 107, in page 15, line 45, at end insert—

'(2A) The Secretary of State shall ensure that—

(a) in any regulations made under this section in relation to any eligible student for any prescribed purpose for any academic year, provision continues to be made for maintenance grants to be payable to such a student, and

(b) the value of such grants shall be no less in real terms than the amounts prescribed at the time this section comes into force.'.

No. 121, in page 17, line 14, at end insert—

'(6A) The Secretary of State shall ensure that, in any regulations made under this section in relation to any eligible student for any prescribed purpose for any academic year—

(a) the maximum amount of any loan made available to that student is no greater than half the prescribed cost of maintenance for such a student for that purpose for that year, and

(b) provision continues to be made for maintenance grants to be payable to such a student, subject to—

(i) a maximum amount of half the prescribed cost of maintenance, and

(ii) assessment of any contributions applicable in his case.'.

No. 36, in clause 27, page 21, line 46, at end insert—

'(4) Regulations under this section shall make provision requiring the Secretary of State to pay maintenance grants to eligible students whose income or parental income is less than a prescribed amount.'.

Mr. Canavan: Amendments Nos. 35 and 36 would oblige the Government to pay maintenance grants to eligible students whose income, or whose parental income, is less than a prescribed amount. I am in good company in moving the amendment, because option B of the Dearing report—Dearing's preferred option—included payment of maintenance grants, especially for low-income families, because their withdrawal would act as a disincentive to potential students.

The case for maintenance grants seems self-evident. Before I was elected to the House, I spent virtually all my working life in education, teaching in comprehensive schools. At one stage, I was assistant head of one of the largest secondary schools in Scotland, and a fair number of my pupils came from disadvantaged home backgrounds, many of them from low-income families. Despite their disadvantage, a reasonable number managed to stay at school and, in some cases, to go on to college or university, and I know that that involved considerable sacrifice and hardship for the low-income families who encouraged their sons and daughters to do so. That would have been absolutely impossible if those sons and daughters had not received grants.

How on earth will a young person from a low-income family be encouraged to go to college or university if he or she is told, "You will receive no grant and you will have to borrow all the money for maintenance while you

are at college or university"? At the end of a course, students will have a millstone round their necks—a debt of more than £15,000 in some cases.

Most of the Government's Education Ministers used to be shadow Ministers, and some of them voted against Tory proposals to switch from grants to loans, arguing that that would be bad for students and for educational opportunity for young people. Now they are in government, they tell us that they have changed their minds, and that there is no evidence that the move from grants to loans will act as a disincentive because the participation rate is up, not down. However, that rate is up despite the movement from grants to loans, rather than because of it. Our participation rates are well behind those of countries such as the United States, Australia and Canada. Furthermore, our rates among socio-economic groups D and E are particularly inadequate, which is why Dearing recommended the continuation of maintenance grants to facilitate access for students from low-income families.

Dr. Lynne Jones: It is true that with the introduction of maintenance grants, the participation percentage went up for people from the lower socio-economic groups, but between 1991 and 1995, of the total of 60,000 additional places, students from group E took up only 3,000, and those from groups D and E only 10,000. Most of the additional places went to those from the higher socio-economic groups.

Mr. Canavan: My hon. Friend reinforces my point that a huge improvement is required to increase access for students or potential students from low-income families and deprived backgrounds.

I cannot for the life of me understand how a Labour Government can propose the abolition of maintenance grants, especially when that Government contain many Ministers who were themselves beneficiaries of the very generous higher education grant system introduced under an earlier Labour Government, when Harold Wilson was Prime Minister.

When I recently put that point to a senior Cabinet Minister, he said, "But Dennis, one in three or more now go to university, compared with only one in 14 when we went." I must confess that I fail to see the logic in that, because it would have been far fewer than one in 14 if there had been no grants.

Mr. Willis: I have a great deal of sympathy for the points that the hon. Gentleman is making, as I, too, have a background in education in deprived areas, particularly in Leeds and the north-east, but does he accept that the biggest barrier to young people from the lower socio-economic groups going on to university is not specifically finance, but their academic achievement in school?

Mr. Canavan: The hon. Gentleman's experience as a teacher may be quite different from mine, as I can remember some pupils of great academic achievement whose parents experienced grave difficulties in allowing them to stay on at school, let alone go on to university. The complete abolition of the grant system would be an even bigger impediment.

My brother and I were the first two members of our family to have the opportunity to go to university. We would never have had that opportunity had grants not existed. Our grandfather was forced to leave school at the age of 10, he went down a coal mine at 12 and he was a Labour councillor in the 1920s. He and his Labour colleagues had the vision to see that education was the key to the liberation of working-class people, and they laid the basis of a grant system to encourage working-class children to stay on in education. That continuing education would never have happened had it not been for the vision and foresight of Labour pioneers in local as well as national Government.

I now have four grandchildren and I think that I have a duty to pass on to them the same benefits that my grandfather passed on to me, but I fear that the Government's proposals will turn back the clock. I urge the House to support the amendment, which is forward-looking and will improve educational opportunity for many young people, and especially those from low-income families.

Mr. Willetts: The debate, which continues with this important amendment, shows how important and right it was that the Dearing committee was set up—and how significant a contribution to the higher education debate its report is. The reason why we set up the Dearing inquiry when we were in government—and, of course, we did so on a bipartisan basis, with the agreement of the then Labour Opposition—was that important questions needed to be asked about the future direction of higher education.

We had achieved a significant widening of access to higher education and a big increase in the number of students participating in higher education, but that was financed to a significant extent by a reduction in the unit of resource per student. Many people in the higher education world should be congratulated on delivering those efficiency savings, but they could not carry on indefinitely in that way; that is the first reason why we set up the Dearing committee.

We also set up the Dearing inquiry because we had had the objective of moving from a system of 100 per cent. grants to one of 50 per cent. grants and 50 per cent. loans. It was right, once we had reached that 50:50 mix, to take a step back and to invite an independent body of experts to review whether the 50:50 balance was correct or whether we should go further.

I will be frank with the House. I expected the Dearing report to conclude that the maintenance grant should be abolished, and I think that many people believed that that would be Dearing's conclusion. Indeed, in his report, Ron Dearing—Lord Dearing as he now is—makes a remark in passing that suggests that that is where he himself began. In discussing precisely the point before the House—the balance between grants and loans—he says:

"In going through that process"—

the process of careful scrutiny of the evidence—

"we all changed and developed our views: we did not end up where we started."

When they reviewed the evidence, the 15 experts under Ron Dearing concluded that the 50:50 split between grants and loans was the right split, and that the maintenance grant should not be abolished. Having set up the Dearing inquiry—as I say, on a bipartisan basis—we are persuaded by the arguments that Ron Dearing advances. Those arguments are persuasive. If we set up the Dearing inquiry on an honest basis, we should all accept the conclusions that he reaches.

[Mr. Willetts]

The core argument in Dearing's report is simple. It is that, with the proposals that are being put before the House by the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, a student from a low-income background will end his or her university career with a debt of £10,320, instead of a debt of £5,625. It is impossible for anyone contemplating the figures on the increased indebtedness of students who, by definition, will be from the poorest backgrounds, to maintain that that will have no impact on access to higher education.

It is extraordinary that the Secretary of State—and we all admire his decency and commitment to wider access to higher education—has got himself into the position of trying to maintain that doubling the debt of students from the poorest backgrounds is somehow compatible with the objective, which he believes in, of widening access to higher education. That is a problem that he has created for himself by not implementing the proposals in the Dearing report.

For the future of higher education, the best way forward is to take the entire package that is proposed by Ron Dearing; nothing else on offer from any party is more thought through, has more empirical evidence in support or commands greater consensus in the world of higher education. The onus is on those who want to do something different from the report's proposals to explain why they believe that, instead of keeping that 50:50 split between maintenance grant and loan, the maintenance grant should be entirely abolished. I suspect that there was an understanding on the part of many people in the world of higher education that if they agreed to the policies that the Labour party hinted at before the election—abolishing the maintenance grant—

The Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. David Blunkett): It was not a hint.

Mr. Willetts: It was not explicit in the manifesto, but let us give the Secretary of State the benefit of the doubt: Labour implied that it would get rid of the maintenance grant. The problem is that there was another part to the deal, which was that Labour would not introduce tuition fees. When the National Union of Students signed up to the deal, it believed that if it went along quietly with the abolition of maintenance grant, tuition fees would not be imposed. That is why the then Leader of the Opposition told the *Evening Standard* in the notorious questionnaire that he answered that he had

"no plans to introduce tuition fees."

People in higher education thought that they would have to sacrifice the maintenance grant in exchange for—

9.15 pm

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): Does the hon. Gentleman recollect that, before the election, the NUS was far more concerned about the idea of top-up fees, which his party said it would allow colleges and universities to introduce? They would have been a far greater deterrent to equality of access than the current proposals.

Mr. Willetts: We were careful not to anticipate the Dearing report. The Government are in such a muddle partly because they thought that the deal they were putting together would also be proposed by Dearing. They were caught out by the fact that Dearing did not recommend abolishing the maintenance grant and not introducing tuition fees.

We have no desire for the widespread use of top-up fees—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] I will tell the House about the problems faced by real life vice-chancellors. One of them heads a university offering a course in maritime engineering, training engineers to investigate North sea structures. He is rightly proud of the course, one of the best in the country. He cannot be expected to give his students a free diving course, even though they need to be qualified divers. He wants, therefore, to be able to carry on charging for the diving course; and he wants to know whether he will need a statutory instrument, cleared by the DFEE, to enable him to do so. Anyone who thinks that the way to reform higher education for the 21st century is to force vice-chancellors to go to the DFEE to clear their financial arrangements for maritime engineering courses has another think coming—it is nonsensical.

Mr. Derek Twigg (Halton): What exactly would the hon. Gentleman rule out for top-up fees?

Mr. Willetts: We would rule out a general regime of top-up fees. It is clear that the hon. Gentleman did not take part in the Committee debates. In Committee, we tabled an amendment making it explicit that the tuition fee should be no more than 25 per cent. of the cost of the university course; and to make it difficult for the Government to charge more than that. I know from our time in office how people often criticise reforms as the start of a slippery slope—there will be worse to come, they say. That is indeed what happened in Australia. We were trying to put more hurdles in the way of Ministers who might attempt to put up the percentage by more than price increases—but Ministers did not accept our amendments. The question asked by the hon. Member for Halton (Mr. Twigg) would, therefore, be better addressed to his own Government.

I do not want to go on for much longer, because I know that many Labour Members want to speak. The point is a simple one: it is whether or not the Secretary of State can honestly tell the House that the measures he is trying to get through tonight will widen access to higher education. Nobody can seriously believe that doubling the debt of students from the poorest backgrounds can contribute to that.

The Secretary of State has rushed out a package of concessions today which, no doubt, he will tell the House is intended to answer that anxiety about access. As I said earlier, today's package bears striking similarities to the one he launched before the Labour party conference to help get him through that event, and to the one he launched in early November to get him through a debate in the House, so little in the package is new to us. He has introduced some proposals on helping single parents, which seem to be focused more on the last Labour rebellion than on the issue before us tonight. Whatever he proposes in respect of mature students and single parents does not alter the fact that every person who seriously studied the issue concluded that the maintenance grant should stay on the 50:50 basis at which the Conservative Government left it.

I hope that I do not embarrass the hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) when I say that, if the House does not reach our amendment—it is unlikely that we shall have an opportunity to vote on it—the Conservatives will support his amendment. We shall do so because his amendment is consistent with the Dearing report, and it is the Dearing report on which we rest our case. We shall not be supporting him on the abolition of tuition fees because, unlike the Liberal Democrats, we recognise that one of the things that people in higher education want is an increase in resources; therefore, the obligation on anyone who is serious about contributing to the debate on higher education is to specify where those resources should come from.

Dearing thought that that increase should come from the tuition fee. Our objection to the tuition fee is not one of principle, but one of practice. The Government, instead of introducing the tuition fee on the basis envisaged by Dearing, which would have brought an overall increase in resources to universities, have not been able to accept our amendment, which proposes that there should be a guarantee that there will not be offsetting reductions in Higher Education Funding Council grants to universities that will reduce universities' grant according to whatever extra money they raise from tuition fees. That is the objection of many in the university world to the Government's tuition fees proposals, to which subject we might turn later this evening.

Mr. Blunkett: I congratulate the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) on his appointment as shadow Secretary of State for Education and Employment. I fear that courses in deep-sea diving may prove appropriate in the months and years ahead. I can help the hon. Gentleman out a little tonight, as my son is studying marine biology and has to undertake diving lessons—so far, at his own expense. However, if the hon. Gentleman examines amendment No. 77, he will see that his friend who teaches marine engineering will be able to organise suitable field trips so that his students can undertake diving. I thought that it would be useful to start off on a helpful note.

Mr. Willetts: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his kind words, and welcome the fact that the amendment to which he refers is one that Conservative Members tabled in Committee. The Government were not willing to accept it at that stage, but have now accepted it in response to the arguments that we advanced in Committee.

Mr. Blunkett: As long as I am in the job, I shall have the open-mindedness to see when even something from Conservative Members registers as acceptable. That is what we have done, and what we shall continue to do.

I fear that my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) will be less than pleased to be walking through the Lobby with Conservatives this evening, defending a system that is indefensible. Those who vote against our proposals tonight would have to put something in their place—not simply to replace our proposals on maintenance, or, for that matter, on a contribution by the better-off towards fees, but to replace the system that has clearly failed.

We are here tonight discussing this matter not for the benefit of our health or because we are masochists, but because the previous system was on the verge of collapse. The education system that we were offering had been eroded by the previous Government. There had been a 40 per cent. drop in unit costs. Universities were unable to envisage resources being made available in future to maintain and improve quality. At the same time, they saw a real danger that, as higher education became available to more students, restrictions would be placed, as they had been over the previous five years, on the number of students—certainly south of the border—who could go to university. That was the cap imposed by the Conservative Government, along with an erosion of quality and underfunding, and there were cries from the universities that they were on the verge of collapse.

Something had to be done. Students asked for something to be done because of the mish-mash of the mortgage-type loans scheme and the erosion of the residual grant, which the Conservative Government had cut year after year. Yet tonight, Conservative Members are telling us that they are suddenly in favour of maintenance grants, when it was they who started the process of removing them.

Mr. John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Blunkett: I will. I hope that you will not defend Opposition Members.

Hon. Members: Cheap.

Mr. McDonnell: I think that we deserve better than that. On the principle that you have raised

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. I would be grateful if both the Secretary of State and the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. McDonnell) used the correct parliamentary language.

Mr. McDonnell: I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Secretary of State said that the grant has been eroded and therefore must now be abolished, but pensions were eroded by the previous Government. Are we to abolish them?

Mr. Blunkett: I expected better of the hon. Gentleman, despite the remark I made when I gave way to him. [AN HON. MEMBER: "He is your hon. Friend."] He is "the hon. Gentleman" to me, and I shall describe him in the terms I want.

I point out to my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. McDonnell) that, if we were to do something about the mish-mash that existed, we would have to restore the grant in full, because to leave it in the circumstances that we inherited, with the mortgage-type loans scheme and the residual parental contributions, would do no student a favour. It would trap students in that mortgage-type scheme, fail to increase the grant element, and atrophy a mess in perpetuity. We would have to find the money for the grant and therefore raise money from elsewhere to fund further access and the opening up of places in higher education, which my hon. Friends who have put their names to the amendments would want.

At the same time, we would have to ensure that we funded priorities such as nursery education, literacy and numeracy programmes, the avoidance of exclusion,

[Mr. Blunkett]

investment in the infrastructure of schools, and the preparation for a new century in terms of investment in new technology. Nobody believes that there is a fairy godmother, and that we will not only find the money for expansion and the money the universities are desperate for to retain their world-class status and quality, as well as to restore the former grant levels, but to deal with pensioners, which my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington raised. One has to live in the real world of politics to make difficult decisions and see them through.

Mr. Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent): Is the Secretary of State saying that some of the poorest families, and, indeed, the poorest students, in my community would prefer no grant to even a small grant?

Mr. Blunkett: I think that they would prefer to have higher education rather than no education at all. That is the option. My hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith) should bear this in mind: if we were to retain the cap on higher education and not expand the numbers, which will cost a lot of money, who would get their sons and daughters into university? Who have historically found places for their sons and daughters in university?

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): Will the Secretary of State give way?

9.30 pm

Mr. Blunkett: In a moment.

Only 2 per cent. of children from manual labouring families get into university. Like me, my hon. Friend has a constituency with one of the lowest rates of adult higher education in Britain. My constituency is the sixth worst in Britain in that regard.

I know what students want. They tell me that they want support when they need it, and that they are prepared to contribute when they can afford to do so. It is a simple, old principle: to those according to their need from those according to their means. When people have the means—when their earnings from future prosperity allow them—they are willing to make a contribution.

That is what we are asking in our new programme: it is the nearest thing we have to progressive taxation. It is based on the simple principle of being attached to the Inland Revenue, with repayment determined by the level of income at a time when people can afford it and in circumstances that ensure that people receive the resources when they need them. The programme is entirely in line with the manifesto upon which my hon. Friends fought the general election.

For the benefit of the hon. Member for Havant, the manifesto said:

"The improvement and expansion needed"

in higher education

"cannot be funded out of general taxation. Our proposals for funding have been made to the Dearing Committee, in line with successful policies abroad. The costs of student maintenance should be repaid by graduates on an income-related basis, from the career success to which higher education has contributed."

We cannot make it clearer than that—it is not a hint or an implication, but a manifesto commitment upon which we won the general election.

Mr. Don Foster: Although the Liberal Democrats do not support the Secretary of State in introducing tuition fees, he will be aware that we support him in requiring an increased amount of money from students through the change from maintenance grants to loans. Does he accept that his argument would have considerably greater force if he would give a clear commitment that the additional money raised from students will be ring-fenced and spent in the higher education sector?

Mr. Blunkett: I shall give what I have given at least twice in the House: a commitment that the resources raised will go to further and higher education. We refer to "further and higher education" because of the overlap between those two areas.

In Scotland, where the level of entry into higher education is 45 per cent., compared with 32 per cent. in England and a similar figure in Wales, the number of students taking higher education courses is very much higher than the figure south of the border.

I am not prepared to discriminate against further education, which needs funding desperately. Adult students are not exempt from having to contribute towards their further education fees, and they have been treated disgracefully in the past in relation to maintenance. This and subsequent Parliaments will begin to resolve that inequity. I wish that those who are today opposing the manifesto commitment and Government policy were concerned about the problems in further education.

Mr. Dalyell *rose—*

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) *rose—*

Mr. Blunkett: To which of the group should I give way—the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott)?

Mr. Rowlands: Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney, I hope. It is a bit different from Hackney. In my manifesto to my constituency, Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney, I did not propose the introduction of tuition fees, and nor, to my knowledge, did we do so nationally.

Mr. Blunkett: I am dealing with maintenance, but I am not proposing to abolish free fees, and I am certainly not preparing to do so—as other parties would do—for those on low incomes. I am quite prepared, later tonight, to defend the situation in relation to protecting the better-off in relation to their having to pay a small contribution to—

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Blunkett: I give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell).

Mr. Dalyell: My right hon. Friend referred to the resources to be raised. What is the departmental estimate of the amount to be raised? What has the Department for

Education and Employment said, in its professional opinion, is the amount likely to be raised by these proposals? Is it about £140 million, or is that the wrong figure?

Mr. Blunkett: What will be raised is offset by the initial costs of the provision of the sums that must be repaid. That would be necessary whichever system we used. In other words, we would have to find the money—be it a grant or a loan—initially, to do so. However, the actual amount that will come in from maintenance next year—as opposed to the amount that must go out—is £600 million, and the year after, it will be £850 million.

That is the nub of the reason why we took the decision to extend the Dearing proposals, and combined that with the manifesto commitment. In that way, we would raise sufficient resources to ensure that we could provide access, retain and extend quality, and provide a fair system, which would hold for years to come.

Mr. Rowlands *rose—*

Dr. Lynne Jones *rose—*

Ms Abbott *rose—*

Mr. Blunkett: I shall not give way; I want to make progress.

Mr. Rowlands: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Secretary of State has said that he will not give way at the moment.

Mr. Blunkett: I shall give way later. I want to make progress, because we need to deal head on with the question why we are introducing the repayment system for maintenance.

At the start of the debate, the new shadow Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Havant, talked about what the Conservative Government had done. It is quite important tonight that we shed a little light on what the hon. Gentleman believed and believes, because, if he is to succeed in opposition, the first lesson he must learn is, "Always check what you have written yourself."

In his book, "Why Vote Conservative?"—an extremely good question—the hon. Member for Havant wrote:

"In the old days we spent a lot per student, including a generous maintenance grant. That high level of spending per student was only possible for a system aimed at a tiny elite of students: it acted as a barrier to expansion. The increase in student numbers has been associated with a change in the pattern of student support."

He said that nearly 2 million student loan accounts would have been issued and £4 billion would have been provided in loans. He said:

"That is a massive contribution to student welfare. It is inconceivable that taxpayers, often on modest incomes themselves, would have been willing to pay it all outright as grants."

The hon. Gentleman was right to say that the old system was designed for a small elite. He was right to say that modest income tax payers would be unwilling to fund others who would be better off in later life, if they did not believe that they would make a contribution themselves. He was right to say that the system would erode. Why cannot the hon. Gentleman stick to his guns tonight, and admit that his Government did not have the guts to reorganise the system? They did not have the bottle to set about the reforms needed. They left it to us to sort out the mess that they had created.

We are carrying through our manifesto and conference decision. I have always believed that conference decisions were important in ensuring that the parliamentary party was accountable to the party as a whole, and that conference was the decision-making body and should be respected by those who, as representatives of the party in Parliament, hold their place only because we stood on a common manifesto, not on one that we wrote ourselves on the back of an envelope.

Mr. Willetts: As the Secretary of State is so keen on the manifesto basis for maintenance grants, will he explain where in the Labour manifesto the introduction of tuition fees is mentioned? If the manifesto doctrine is the basis on which he defends maintenance grants, how will he explain the fact that, before the election, the Leader of the Opposition, as he then was, made it clear that Labour would not introduce tuition fees?

Mr. Blunkett: First, that does not relate to the amendment. Secondly, I made it abundantly clear at the general election that we would await the Dearing report. I said again and again, in Parliament and outside, that we would reserve our position, and that I was open to persuasion. That was included in the statements during the general election.

The proof of the pudding is in the eating. On ITN at lunchtime, a student was interviewed. I do not know where the political reporters were. The student said that, if these measures were introduced, half the students would not want to go to university. That was a little out of date. The numbers of students applying for the autumn term from school and college have gone up this year. Those who predicted a massive drop were simply wrong. We understand from the Universities and Colleges Admission Service—UCAS—based on data from postal codes, that there has been no change in the socio-economic make-up of students applying for university next year.

Part-time students will not be affected, except that they will be secure if they lose their job. We will support them and help them out. Such help was not available before.

There is undoubtedly concern about full-time mature students. The matter is close to my heart, as I made clear on Second Reading. I have every intention of ensuring that mature students are supported and helped wherever necessary. First, in the Green Paper "The Learning Age", we stated that we would consult on the issue of lifting the threshold—the age—at which someone would be entitled to help. I am delighted to announce that, having consulted, we will lift that figure, so that people under 55 will be entitled to support and help in the same way as younger students.

We said that we would look at how we could increase access funding. We are doubling access funding, and we are making it available in such a way that it can help people who are seeking places, not just those who are already experiencing hardship in universities.

We said that we would provide a non-means-tested special grant for disabled people. I can announce that we will increase it to £10,000 for those who need extra support because of their special needs.

[Mr. Blunkett]

We said that we would protect those who were worse off as mature students with dependants. We will retain the non-repayable grant for students with dependants, and we will retain as a non-repayable grant the £1,000 for single parents, as we recognise that they do not have the support at home that would otherwise be available to mature students. The package ensures that those in their later years who wish to enter higher education have nothing to fear from our proposals.

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): Will my right hon. Friend accept my congratulations on the excellent measures that he has brought forward? However, will he recognise that I have some disappointment that he has not yet explicitly addressed the issue of care leavers, who are grossly under-represented in the population of young people who go on to higher education? These people have explicit financial needs, and at least they should be supported through the long vacations.

9.45 pm

Mr. Blunkett: My hon. Friend is right. The scandal of 75 per cent. of school leavers from residential care leaving without any qualification must be recognised. Even more scandalous is that only 1 per cent. leave with an A-level qualification. We need to reverse that trend. As was said earlier this evening, it is the low standards that too many of our children receive at school that are the main barrier to them entering higher education. I am prepared to consider specific help for those leaving residential care as part of a much broader package between the Department for Education and Employment and the Department of Health, to support those people as a decent family would do if it had the necessary resources.

I do not pretend for a moment that the proposals that the House is considering right the wrongs of inequity within our society. I cannot overturn in terms of student funding and funding for universities the difference between the silver spoon that some children are born with and the wooden spoon of others. However, I can ensure that the education that those from poorer families receive enables them to provide that silver spoon for their children. In other words, it will be the foothold on the ladder of learning.

Dr. Iddon: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Blunkett: I shall give way one more time.

Dr. Iddon: I appreciate the raising of the age limit to 55, on which I have been lobbying my right hon. Friend. If, tragically, one of these mature students died, would repayment of the loan disappear, and not become a burden on the estate of such a person?

Mr. Blunkett: The difference between a mortgage-type repayment and an income-related scheme is that ability to pay is dependent on income. If someone is deceased, the debt dies with him. If his income drops, so does his repayment. That is why I said earlier that the proposal is as near as possible to the principle of progressive taxation. That is its basis.

Ms Abbott: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Blunkett: I shall not give way. I shall make two final remarks.

First, our proposals are a direct alternative to universities introducing top-up fees, which were mentioned by the hon. Member for Havant. The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that, had we not reorganised and introduced an entirely new way of funding universities and access for students, we would have faced a barrage of top-up fees from universities. Top-up fees play no part in our proposals, and it is not my intention that they should.

Secondly, we had to face the simple reality that, over the years, we have let down too many of our young people. We have failed them in terms of the standards they received at school and the expectations that they should rightly have for themselves and their future. These proposals enable them to get that foothold and to take up higher education, not by squeezing out other students, but by expanding the possibilities and the available options, and by doing so to ensure that they can pay back. They will be able to afford to pay back the contribution that has been invested in their future. That is why rights and responsibilities go together. It is why the Government have bitten the bullet, and decided to take these measures for the future of our country.

Mr. Welsh: The Secretary of State taunted one of his colleagues, but I believe that it was the right hon. Gentleman who was seeking to defend the indefensible. If the previous system was on the verge of collapse, it was because the Tories were inventing the policies that the right hon. Gentleman is now carrying out. The real problem is lack of resources. Instead of providing them, the Government are putting the financial burden on to individual students and their families, which is unacceptable for a party that said that its priority was education, education, education.

When the hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) and I were elected in 1974, we taught at neighbouring schools, and my hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) was a teaching colleague of the hon. Gentleman at his school. I therefore understand exactly the situation he described, and his motivation in moving the amendment. Although the introduction of tuition fees has received a lot of attention, the scrapping of grants is a more serious problem. Dearing proposed retaining grants, but the Government ignored his considered view, and are steamrollering through this unpopular and unwise policy. Dearing had hardly uttered his conclusions before the Government had overturned them.

Means-testing fees will help students from poorer backgrounds, but the fact that they will be expected to pay their living costs will result in many deciding against higher education because of the financial barrier.

Mrs. Anne Campbell *rose—*

Mr. Welsh: The Government's decision to abolish grants will force students on longer courses into debt of

£15,000 or more. The loans may be income-contingent, but they will still act as sufficient deterrent. Perhaps the hon. Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) does not believe that.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: By how much would the hon. Gentleman's party be prepared to raise income tax to pay for the measures that he suggests?

Mr. Welsh: The hon. Lady should look at our policy for an independent Scotland. We have fully costed such policies, but our problem—*[Interruption.]* An independent Scotland could well afford it.

Our problem is that we are inheriting from the Government an impoverished devolved assembly living on pocket money that will face, for exactly the same reasons, exactly the same problems that the Government have imposed on the hon. Lady. The Government are not making education their priority, and she will be answerable to her constituents for that.

The amendment would tackle a severe problem. I must point out to the hon. Lady, because I notice the great distinction between traditional Labour and new Labour, that the reality under the new Labour Government is that a student in receipt of a full grant who takes out a full loan receives almost £800 a year less than an unemployed single person claiming jobseeker's allowance and housing benefit. Under the proposed system, students will, if anything, be in a worse position, which is hardly an incentive for people on benefits to enter further or higher education. That is the policy supported by the hon. Lady, and she is answerable for that.

Students are most concerned about the abolition of grants. That is the clear message at student rallies and protest marches, and in petitions which have been organised throughout the country. Perhaps the hon. Lady wants to ignore that, but those people are voters, and they will let her know how they feel.

I must make a point to the hon. Lady from the Scottish perspective. The previous debate showed that the Minister in charge of Scottish education believes that the Scottish four-year degree is a bogus tradition. No wonder he is even more unpopular than his Tory predecessor—the Government are completely out of touch with educational institutions and with public opinion. The hon. Lady can defend that if she wants to do so, but the Government should abandon their proposal to abolish grants and think again.

I support the amendment, and I know the motivation of the hon. Member for Falkirk, West in moving it. I commend him for so doing. The Government were elected on a priority of education, education, education. They should say why they have abandoned that priority. I leave that to their conscience.

Miss Melanie Johnson (Welwyn Hatfield): First, hon. Members must ask how they want to use taxpayers' money. It is important to use a lot of that money to help people into the education system early and to give them every support, so that they come out of the school system with good qualifications and educated to a high standard. Secondly, we must ask ourselves what is fair for students and for taxpayers. Those questions must both be weighed in the balance. It is a matter of choice, and there are many choices to be made in this matter.

One way of looking at the issue is to imagine that we were making a decision without knowing, in this case, whether we were rich or poor. That form of decision making comes from the philosophy of a man called Rawls in deciding the meaning of justice. I recommend that way of looking at the matter to the House, because the Government's proposals, as opposed to those in the amendment, match the criteria for the best and most just way of making a decision.

Mr. Welsh: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Miss Johnson: I shall give way in a moment.

What we have here is a process that gives people a fair deal, whether they are poor or rich.

Mr. Welsh: The hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. McNulty), sitting two seats away from the hon. Lady, called me sotto voce "elitist" after my speech. I am a former pupil of Govan high school. Ordinary folk from Govan went to university and went on to do PhDs, which they could do then under the grant system. They will now be deterred from doing so by the massive loans that must be repaid. Is the hon. Lady really saying that putting a massive debt on individuals will improve access to further and higher education?

Miss Johnson: Several comments can be made about that. First, we have already heard this evening how, at one time, one in 14 people went on to university, whereas we now have a much better ratio of one in three. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] Quite right. To sustain the progress that has been made in that respect, we must look at how to proceed in the future. I spoke earlier about the decisions and choices that people have to make. Crucial to the debate is the fact that people must decide at one time in their life what university course to do and what to do with the rest of their life—we are trying to give people as much access to those courses as possible—and, at a later time, they must pay back into the system, according to their income. Those two events do not happen at the same time. Some Members of this House, if not deliberately then certainly mistakenly, conflate the two time scales. The issue of when students pay back is crucial.

Earlier in the debate, we heard the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (Mr. Gorrie) talk about the principle of angels dancing on a pinhead. Given his party, I was moved to wonder whether he was referring to the amount of Liberal Democrat policy that one could get from 1p on income tax. He talked about access to places such as Covent Garden and said that we could not get more access. People must pay now for the privilege of access to Covent Garden, which is why it is a privilege that few can afford. The proposals that we are discussing give people the opportunity to pay back later when they can afford so to do, which is why they are fair.

Ms Abbott: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Miss Johnson: The hon. Lady has come relatively late into the Chamber.

Dr. Lynne Jones *rose—*

Miss Johnson: I shall give way to the hon. Lady, who has been here for some time.

Dr. Jones: The hon. Lady is perfectly right to say that our priority must be to give more young people from

[Dr. Jones]

poorer family backgrounds access to higher education. That must be our top priority, but of the young people who are qualified to go to university, those from a lower socio-economic background are about half as likely to go to university as those from the top classes of society. Why does she think that is, and how does she think these measures will help to improve that situation?

Miss Johnson: The figures certainly do not show that the present system is successful. Were it successful, the hon. Lady would not be highlighting such figures. Nor would one of the other contributors to the debate have highlighted the same figures. If the system were successful, there would be much better access. That is what we are addressing.

10 pm

Caroline Flint: Will my hon. Friend comment on the fact that, following the introduction of student loans, between 1991 and 1997, the number of students from unskilled and semi-skilled families rose from 6 per cent. to 14 per cent., showing that previous maintenance loans were clearly not working for such people and that access to further funding to support them through college did? Today's proposals are a progression on that.

Miss Johnson: Exactly that point needs to be made.

I come now to the question of the future, in which there is every likelihood of good pay. Such a future is available to many graduates. If people do not receive a good income, they will not have to pay back the loans. In fact, they will have to pay back nothing if they earn less than £10,000 a year. At earnings of £17,000 a year, they will pay back only £12 a week—4 per cent. of their income.

I have felt able most strongly to recommend that extremely good investment to sixth-form students in my constituency, when I have spoken to them on the subject over the past six months or so. The comments were well received, and many local students were persuaded—quite rightly—of the Government's arguments. *[Laughter.]* Conservative Members may laugh, but those students were persuaded. I have received almost no letters of complaint about the changes from sixth formers. The proposals are finding much favour.

It is interesting to note, as does the editorial in *The Times* today, that there is an unholy alliance—*The Times* describes it as an "incredible alliance of convenience"—between the National Union of Students and the Tory party. The editorial expresses the hope that the arrival of the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) in place of his predecessor, the right hon. Member for Charnwood (Mr. Dorrell), as shadow Secretary of State for Education and Employment, will mean that the Tories will reconsider their opposition to the Government's proposals. My experience in talking to students is very much in line with the sympathies expressed in today's editorial in *The Times*.

Mr. Green: I assure the hon. Lady that, as long as the NUS is prepared to support the Conservative party, we Conservatives are happy to have its support. I am happy that she is happy to throw such support away.

Miss Johnson: I am reliably informed that the NUS is not entirely with the Conservative party in these matters, because it supports us on the question of maintenance. None the less, it seems to be making an unholy alliance with the Conservatives on other related matters.

We must bear it in mind that, although Conservatives and, indeed, some Labour Members are expressing concern, part-time, Open university and postgraduate students already pay fees of the kind that is envisaged. Indeed, most further education students pay fees. We are proposing that much more of the higher education sector should fall into line with much of the further education sector and the remainder of the HE sector. Parity between different sectors is important. There is no reason in justice why somebody on one course should receive markedly different support from the state from that received by someone doing a similar course post school.

Ms Abbott: The hon. Lady referred earlier to fairness and justice. She must be aware that after examining the options in great detail, Dearing expressly rejected completely abolishing the maintenance grant—a means-tested grant—as that would bear most heavily on the poorest students. Could the hon. Lady explain how loading young people from Hackney with a burden of debt—which would not be the case if the maintenance grant were not abolished—will encourage them to go to university?

Miss Johnson: The trouble with the hon. Lady's argument is that it takes no account of the fact that no remission was envisaged in the provisions to which she refers. Therefore, she is not comparing like with like. Under the proposals—which I support—twice the level of subsidy will go to those from poorer homes than to those from richer homes.

It was entertaining to hear the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) describe his support for his daughters, and the fact that they would end up with no debts as a result of their time as students. I commend his support for them, but the fact is that many families cannot afford to do that. The question is how we provide people with access to higher education. We cannot usefully compare students from families with a lot of money, which will always be able to support and buy more for their children, with those from poorer families, which can never hope to do that.

Five years after a person graduates, he or she is likely to be earning 15 per cent. more than a non-graduate. After 10 years, the figure is 20 per cent. Those arguments meant that the position that I argued with the sixth formers found favour.

It was interesting that—probably because I was a member of the Standing Committee—I received correspondence from the local branch of the NUS, which decided to take out a full-page wrap-round in the local free paper to advertise my membership of the Standing Committee and to give its views of the Government's proposals. As a result of that extensive publicity—the paper was circulated to all local residents—I received no phone calls and only, I think, two letters at my constituency office.

Despite the Opposition's position—and although some students have joined them—their complaints are not finding support among the public, because the public recognise that there is an issue to be addressed. We cannot run the system that was left to us with 40 per cent. less

per head going in with each student to each university place. Many students will find that we shall not be able to increase access. Something will have to give—the access or the quality, or both. I would suggest that it is close to being both, but quality is currently at risk.

Mr. Willis: The hon. Lady's last point is incredibly important. Dearing said that we needed £365 million this year, £550 million next year and £1 billion by 2000 simply to stand still with the existing number of students. Fees this year will raise £150 million. How does the hon. Lady—and her Front-Bench colleagues—propose to make up the difference, to give us the quality that we need for our existing students, let alone more students?

Miss Johnson: We have spent £165 million this year, and proposals will emerge from the comprehensive spending reviews, which are about to report. The Government need take no lectures from Opposition Members—particularly the hon. Gentleman, who would spend 1p on income tax many times over. In Committee, we saw him spend that 1p many times over.

I reiterate my belief that the proposals will produce a much more just system—they will produce greater fairness and better access. In particular, people from poorer backgrounds will be helped; they will be able to afford to say, "I can invest in my education. As I can pay back the money when I can afford to do so, I can, as a young adult, take responsibility for this investment and pay back the system."

I am sure that this year's figures, which show an increased interest among 18 to 21-year-olds in university places, will be followed by even better figures in the years to come. We shall find that access is enhanced, especially for the groups that we want to be better represented in the universities.

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): There are three principal differences between the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Miss Johnson) and me—*[Laughter.]* I should say that there are three principal differences beyond those that are patently obvious. First, I recognise the extent of public disquiet about the Government's proposals—for the hon. Lady to say that she has received no correspondence about them is incredible, although I understand that she is ex-directory.

Miss Melanie Johnson: I did not say that I had received no correspondence; I said that, as a result of the student union advertisement, I received no additional correspondence. I have had some correspondence, but not a significant amount.

Mr. Hayes: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her qualification, although it throws even less light on the amount of correspondence that she received than her original comments did.

The second difference is that I come from a working-class background, so I might not have qualified to become a new Labour Member of Parliament. I was the first in my family to enjoy the opportunity of going to university, partly because sufficient funds were available to me. Anyone who believes that access to higher education is solely, or even principally, a matter of academic qualifications—as the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) suggested—misunderstands the cultural problems and social issues associated with the varying staying-on rates across the country. Even a superficial glance at those rates confirms that deep-rooted assumptions and preoccupations—about leaving school early, going to work and earning a first pay packet—prevent many people from working-class families from applying to university.

Mr. Coaker: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hayes: Nottinghamshire, from where the hon. Gentleman comes, is a good example of what I am talking about—I give him that tip before he intervenes.

Mr. Coaker: The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point. Does he agree that the difference in staying-on rates is the key issue? Culture and educational achievement, not grants, impact on low-income families. Unless expectations and achievements are raised, and unless the way in which low-income families view education is changed, access to higher education for those families will never be improved.

Mr. Hayes: The hon. Gentleman speaks a lot of sense—expectations are a key issue. To separate expectation from finance—from the burden that working-class families are likely to endure—is a nonsense, as he must know. Anything that aggravates that burden and increases apprehensions will surely have a detrimental effect on attempts to widen access.

Dr. Nick Palmer (Broxtowe): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hayes: I have already given way to one Nottinghamshire Labour Member, and I do not intend to make a habit of it.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) said, the truth of the matter is that Dearing looked into this issue carefully. The assumption was that just as all parties accepted and welcomed the setting up of Dearing, they would accept and welcome the conclusions because it was an independent and empirical study and it therefore was not prejudiced. Frankly, it was also assumed that Dearing would recommend the abolition of the maintenance grant. However, the Dearing committee believed that abolition would damage the prospects of working-class children. Let us make no bones about it, because that is what the report said. It viewed abolition as the likely cause, not of an increase in children from working-class homes going to university and a widening of access, as many hon. Members have said, but of a narrowing of access and a disincentive to those very children, which is why it recommended keeping the maintenance grant. Let us not be under any misapprehensions about that either.

I said that there were three differences between the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield and me—the third is that I am going to be concise. It is disingenuous to suggest that the public were made aware of the proposals before the election. I spoke in a number of places then—on NUS platforms and against Labour representatives.

10.15 pm

Mr. Phil Hope (Corby): Will the hon. Gentleman explain why the previous Administration—the Conservative party, which he now represents—left university finances in such dire straits and capped the number of places, which meant that many young people in Corby simply could not get into university, because there were no places? Can he also explain why the Conservatives will tonight support charging all students in Corby tuition fees and why they are not opposed to universities being able to charge extra fees on top?

Mr. Hayes: I do not want to go off on a tributary towards Corby, but there was a massive expansion of higher education under the previous Government, as has been acknowledged by hon. Members on both sides of the House. The figures have been made clear. Higher education mushroomed during the previous Government. Also, the Conservative Government set up Dearing, mindful of the very issues that the hon. Gentleman draws to the attention of the House. The Conservative party did not assume that those were not problems that needed to be faced or challenges that needed to be met. It reflects badly on the Labour party now that it is in government that it does not accept the advice of that independent committee.

Finally, as I do not want to fall into the trap of being quite as long-winded as the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield: I meant that kindly, of course—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] Well, I meant it fairly kindly. The truth of the matter is that there was no open acknowledgement or clear manifesto pledge. I have the Labour manifesto here—I carry it with me all the time, to see how many promises have been broken—and there is no clear indication that tuition fees would be introduced. That is not mentioned. The section on higher education is very short and does not mention tuition fees at all.

Let us be absolutely frank. Hon. Members on both sides of the House, if they care about widening access to higher education, should resist the proposals. Furthermore, those proposals do no credit to the new Labour Government.

Mr. Bill Rammell (Harlow): I am disappointed that the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) is not still in his place. I understood his argument about tuition fees to be that they would simply be a mechanism to deal with course fees. I think that he also referred to maritime students. That was very different from the interpretation of the right hon. Member for Charnwood (Mr. Dorrell) in Committee when we debated these matters, when it was clear that the Conservative party was in favour of the general principle of top-up fees for institutions. That may well be part of the reason for the right hon. Gentleman's removal. It is a problem when one thing is said in the Standing Committee and a different thing on the Floor of the House.

I am happy to support the package of proposals that the Government are putting forward and recognise that many of them are challenging. When moving from a minority system of participation in higher education to a mass education system, we clearly need and desire a new funding system. As someone who worked in the university sector for 10 years before the general election, I am conscious that the universities need a substantial injection of cash, which simply will not be produced from the annual Treasury spending round.

It has been argued many times that to restore student grants to the 1979 level, to remove the cap on access and to restore university funding would cost the equivalent of 3p or 4p on the standard rate of income tax. Even if the Government were committed to raising taxation by that amount, the idea that we would spend it on students and universities instead of schools, hospitals and public transport is simply not the politics of the Government, or of the real world.

Mrs. Fyfe: My hon. Friend is doing as others have done in assuming that the amendment is about restoring the old level of maintenance grant. The amendment mentions a maintenance grant but specifies no amount, and it refers to income of a "prescribed amount", not a specified amount. It is so open-ended, I wonder why hon. Members cannot accept it.

Mr. Rammell: No matter how beneficial our system of Government finance, we will always live with a limited budget. There is a choice between retaining the current proportion of student grant and protecting students from the poorest backgrounds from tuition fees. I believe that the latter is the higher priority.

I support the Government's position because there was an explicit commitment in Labour's manifesto at the general election. I acknowledge that individual Members may have taken a different personal view, but I did not. There was a specific commitment in my party's manifesto to move from a system of student grants to an income-contingent loans system, and that is what we are debating. I want to highlight some of the disingenuity—I would say hypocrisy, but that would be unparliamentary—in the Conservative party's statement that it is opposed to scrapping maintenance grants. When in government, the Conservatives steadfastly whittled away student grants year after year. How can their position this evening be squared with the statement in November 1993 of the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke)—then the Chancellor of the Exchequer—when he introduced the dramatic, unprecedented and previously unannounced expansion of loans as opposed to grants? He said:

"the recent explosion in student numbers has revealed as ridiculous the fears that the student loan scheme might deter students from poorer families."—[*Official Report*, 30 November 1993, Vol. 233, c. 931.]

That is what the Tories said in government, but they are putting forward a different story this evening. They are crying crocodile tears, and playing politics with a crucial issue.

The evidence shows that the increase in loans has not deterred access. I have come to terms with that over time, and the fact is that participation by students of lower-income backgrounds has increased since the introduction of student loans—from about 6 per cent. of students from unskilled family backgrounds in 1991 to 14 per cent. in 1997. In supporting the Government, I very much welcome the substantial increase which has doubled access funds. It will address real needs in universities and institutions in which students are genuinely struggling to make ends meet, and it should be highlighted.

Part of my reason for supporting the overall package came up when I answered the intervention of my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe):

this issue is about choice within a limited budget. When it comes to deterring access, the imposition of tuition fees on students from poorer backgrounds would act as a greater disincentive to entering higher education than would the absence of a student grant. It is a question of choice, and a matter of weighing the arguments.

We must tackle the defence of the existing system which is based on traditional, principled arguments about the welfare state. It is argued that the welfare state was created to allow people to contribute according to their means and benefit according to their needs, but that is not the way in which universities and higher education have operated over the years. Over time, the people who have benefited from university education have predominantly been those from better-off backgrounds, with the vast majority coming from socio-economic groups A and B.

The key issue is how to get more students from the lower socio-economic groups to go to university. It is a matter of opening minds and raising ambitions, and the current system is inadequate. Money is important, but it is certainly not everything.

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): My hon. Friend said several times that people from working-class and lower socio-economic backgrounds do not have the expectation of going on to higher education, but he is absolutely wrong: the whole tradition of the Rhondda and the mining valleys of south Wales is that people from those very backgrounds have indeed gone to university, and that is one reason why they have supported the Labour party so solidly; they have always supported the idea of free access to higher education. My hon. Friend should come to my constituency to find out whether working-class people have those aspirations.

Mr. Rammell: It is not my intention to trade working-class credentials, but the matter is one on which I feel passionately, because I was the first person from my family to go to university. I grew up in a council house and come from a working-class background, and I very much value the benefit that I received from a university education. The fundamental problem with that argument is that, for every one of me or of my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) who benefited from the system, eight or nine of our contemporaries simply did not get the opportunity.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Will my hon. Friend explain to me and to my constituents how it is an incentive for people from poor backgrounds to go to university if they know that, at the end of their course, they will be £10,000 in debt? That is surely the fundamental issue: either we support poor students in going to college or we do not; if we do not, it is the middle classes who will benefit.

Mr. Rammell: There is nothing in the proposals to force students to pay before they go to university. If we are genuinely interested in opening up higher education and creating a mass opportunity for at least half our people, we must square the circle and ask the question how we are to fund the system.

Another key question is how we are to encourage people from lower-income backgrounds to go on to higher education. It is not simply a matter of finance. One of the most striking statistics that I have come across is that the proportion of students from socio-economic groups D and E who go on to higher education is about 14 per cent. but that the proportion of those same students who gain two A-levels is greater than 50 per cent. We must improve our school system and open up new opportunities.

Some will argue that we must retain decent grants and not have tuition fees, paying the price of a reduced number of students in higher education. I do not support that elitist argument, and nor should the Government. We need to consider how genuinely to open up university education to allow as many people as possible to benefit.

The proposed reforms are necessary. The Conservative party's insistence that we accept the Dearing proposals lock, stock and barrel is interesting, but the idea that, had it won the general election, it would have accepted all 70 or 80 proposals without any intervention or independent thinking, is clearly unrealistic.

Overall, the package of reforms is necessary if we genuinely want to open up higher education. It is a package that must be viewed against the background of determination to open access and to increase student numbers. Part of the reason why we should support it is that, overall, we have ensured that students from lower-income families do not have to pay tuition fees.

This is a difficult issue. Many hon. Members have thought about it, but the key issue is opening access and getting more students from poorer families into higher education. The previous system has not done it. This one has a chance of doing it and we should support it.

10.30 pm

Mr. Don Foster: Unlike the Labour and Conservative parties, which were unable at the last general election to go to the electorate with clear policies for the future funding of higher education—because they decided to wait until the Dearing committee reported—the Liberal Democrats considered this issue well before the general election. In our policy document "The Key to Lifelong Learning", we considered all our concerns, which are shared by hon. Members on both sides of the House, about the future funding of higher education, and we were able to come to some clear conclusions as to what the way forward should be.

We acknowledge, as Labour Members certainly do, that the 40 per cent. cut in funding over the past 10 years under the previous Government led to severe difficulties for universities. The financial pressures on them will be increased still further if the new Government do as we hope they will—ensure an increase in quality and opportunity to widen and extend access for students. If that is to happen, it is clear that higher education needs a significant injection of additional funds.

We considered how best that might be done. Of course, one of the options was the introduction of tuition fees. Very rapidly, we chose to reject that option. We easily came to the conclusion that their introduction would be an extension of a tax on learning—a student tax—and we were therefore fundamentally opposed it.

The Secretary of State for Education and Employment would respond by saying that some students, notably part-timers, already pay tuition fees. We acknowledge that, but the right hon. Gentleman's solution to the problem of creating a level playing field is not to say that

[Mr. Don Foster]

we will try gradually to remove tuition fees for all students, including part-timers, but to say that we will introduce tuition fees for all students. Sadly, he is supported in that policy by the Conservative party.

As we have already seen, the introduction of tuition fees has led to considerable confusion. I do not need to repeat all the difficulties; we already know about the fiasco involving gap-year students, about the problem of Scottish universities, and about the confusion of students doing courses for four, five, six or even more years. We also know that means-tested tuition fees are socially regressive.

It is very surprising to find a Labour Government introducing a socially regressive policy. *[Interruption.]* I am asked, "Why is it socially regressive?" It is simple. It is based on parental income, rather than on the future income of students. It seems ludicrous that a child from a wealthy family will end up paying fees, but, later, when perhaps doing a relatively low-paid job, have to repay that amount, whereas someone from a low-paid family who ends up in a well-paid job will have nothing to pay back. Indeed, the Prime Minister told the House that the Government's policies were based on the future earnings of students. That is simply not true. Either the Prime Minister was misled by the Department or he is misleading himself.

Any political party that has stated that our universities need increased income also has a duty to be honest with the electorate and say where the additional funding will come from. In our policy documents, before and during the election, we made it clear what our solution was. We said that there are three beneficiaries from high-quality higher education. The first is the nation; so some of the additional money should come from the nation through increased income tax. Secondly, employers benefit; so they too should make an increased contribution, perhaps through an education and training levy. We also believe that students benefit; they too should pay more towards their costs.

That is why we accept the need to convert the current maintenance grant to a loan. In that respect, we support the Government. We accept the Secretary of State's argument that we have a simple choice: either to revert to a complete grant, or to revise the system completely and make it a loans system, based on a much fairer repayment regime.

The real difficulty tonight is not just with the Government's proposal to introduce tuition fees, but with the Government's refusal to ring-fence the money being raised from students for use in higher education. It is no good implying, as the Secretary of State did today, that if students want higher-quality higher education they should pay for it, if he will not even ensure that the money raised from them will be used to that end.

Ring fencing, coupled with a new system of resource accounting—I know the Secretary of State wants that introduced as quickly as possible—would release, by 2001, an additional £1 billion for use in higher education.

Although we will support the Government in the Lobby in this vote, we are disappointed that there will be no opportunity for a vote on tuition fees. We would definitely have voted against the Government on that. We are disappointed, too, that we will not have the chance to vote on the ring-fencing of fees. On that also we would have voted against the Government.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): The one thing upon which the House is agreed is that the former Government left us with a very serious situation affecting the universities. There were serious anomalies, including the fact that students in further and part-time education paid fees while those in full-time education did not. But what the House has not been told is that the money saved by the previous Government was given in tax cuts to the very rich—that has hardly been mentioned in the debate.

I have listened carefully, but I am unpersuaded that the Government's proposals are the right ones. No one has mentioned the fact that if someone goes to college he or she forgoes three years' earnings. Those earnings may be from a low-paid job filling shelves in a supermarket; but someone doing that at £120 a week would end up with £18,000 after three years. That is the investment that students make in their education.

The Liberal Democrat spokesman was right to say that education benefits everybody. When I go to see my doctor from Chesterfield, I benefit from her education. Everybody in the House has benefited from the education of doctors and lawyers—[HON. MEMBERS: "Lawyers?"] Of course: everybody benefits. The idea that the only beneficiary of education is the person who receives it is an illusion.

Then we come to the assertion that graduates make more money and therefore should pay more. What about people who make more money without being graduates? We should tax the rich, not the educated. The other day, I was picked up by a cab driver and I always ask cab drivers what they did before. The driver was about 20 years old and he said that he had worked in the City. When I asked what he had earned, he said "About £70,000 a year, but the firm went bust and now I'm back driving a cab." It is a ludicrous idea that those who have a degree ought to pay more tax than people who have more money and no degree.

I do not know how many hon. Members read the evidence given by Bernie Ecclestone to the Nolan committee. He said that what he did had nothing whatever to do with formula one; he gave the money to the Labour party because he had read that the Labour party would not increase personal taxation. These proposals are taxes on those who go to colleges to protect the wealthy from having to make any contribution.

As to the question of whether this measure was in the manifesto, one can use all sorts of phrases, but, throughout the whole election campaign, I never heard any member of the Front-Bench team say, "If you vote Labour, we will have tuition fees." It was never put like that. One can say, "We are going to ask people to make a proper contribution," or put it other ways, but if it had been said, "Vote Labour and there will be tuition fees," it would at least have alerted people to what was in the Government's mind, even if it would not have affected the outcome of the election.

One other point worries me: the arguments in favour of loans for higher education could apply equally to schools. The principle would be exactly the same if the Government were to say, "We need more money for schools; people who go to school do better; so we will let you go to secondary school, but you will have to take out a loan." I can imagine people saying to me, "Mr. Benn, we will give you an operation, but you will have to take a loan if you can't afford to pay now." The principle at stake is that of the welfare state: that we benefit collectively from the health and education of the nation. That is the argument and I fear that we are eroding it.

I do not know the Secretary of State's own view, but, having been a Minister for many years, I know that every Minister has a row with the Treasury. What we are doing tonight is paying the price for what the Chancellor said two days ago, reaffirming the continuation of the public expenditure limits set by the previous Chancellor before his Government were defeated. I might be wrong, but I did not meet anyone in the election campaign who said, "I'm voting Labour to be sure that the public expenditure limits of the Government now in power will be retained for the next five years." Perhaps there were some who did—perhaps new Labour made such an appeal, but it certainly did not do so in Chesterfield.

I shall support my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan). I wish we had more time to debate fees, but at least his is a solid amendment, reaffirming the Labour party's historic commitment to opening the way for people to go to college. I benefited from a free education before the grant system came in, because at the end of the war, if one had been in the Royal Air Force, one was allowed through; but I would find it awfully hard to watch any Member of Parliament who had benefited from grants going into the Lobby tonight to vote to replace those grants with loans and to introduce tuition fees.

Mr. Coaker: I rise to oppose the amendment and support the Government, because I do not believe that it is the lack of grants that will deter students from going on to higher education. In my view, grants do not determine who goes on to higher education.

If we look at the number of people going to university under the current system, we can see that that system is failing. The figures force us to confront the stark reality that the current higher education system benefits the higher socio-economic groups and disadvantages those at the bottom. Only 2 per cent. of those from the unskilled social group go on to higher education, compared with 14 per cent. and 39 per cent. from the top social groups.

Mr. Hayes: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Coaker: If the hon. Gentleman will allow me to elaborate my points, he will then be able to attack them.

Those are phenomenal figures. In 1997, 4,895 home applicants in the unskilled social class were accepted to degree courses. In the intermediate group—the second-highest social class—109,020 applicants were accepted. In the top, professional class, 37,758 applicants were accepted. That policy is not working to benefit the lower socio-economic classes; it is failing them. If we do not confront that fact and do something about it, we will continue to fail those people, even if we now feel that we are doing them a disservice.

10.45 pm

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Coaker: I shall develop my arguments first.

The repayment of the loan is progressive—it relates to income. That progressive tax is the system with which we want to replace grants. If people's incomes are below a certain level when they go to work, they will not repay the loan. They will repay it only on the basis of what they are earning. It is about time that we stopped frightening people by talking about students incurring debt, and started talking about lending people money so that they can invest in their future. We will then be able to move forward.

Mr. Hayes: Is the hon. Gentleman telling the House that this is a matter of semantics and marketing? Is he suggesting that the groups that he has described, which are not benefiting from the current system, will be encouraged and assisted by getting rid of the maintenance grant?

Mr. Coaker: That is exactly what I am confronting head on—the fact that the existing system is failing. If we fail to recognise that, all we will do is perpetuate that failure. These are hard choices, but we must make them.

We should consider why people from lower socio-economic groups are not going on to further and higher education. I have experience of working in schools, trying to encourage young people from those backgrounds to stay on in education. It is a question of getting those young people, not into higher education, but into further education. We cannot persuade many of them to stay on at 16, let alone 18. Again, if we do not confront that fact, we will not be in a position to do much about it. We should consider that in the context of all the reforms that we want to introduce.

The question is not one of money or grants, but one of raising people's educational achievement and their expectations, and of encouraging them to believe that they can stay on. We must expand opportunities in higher education and further education so that young people in the social groups about which we are particularly concerned can make progress. The Bill must be seen in conjunction with the School Standards and Framework Bill.

Mr. McDonnell: My hon. Friend said that we should not scare potential students about the level of debt but say, "We are transforming your grant into a loan and that is an investment opportunity for you." A number of years ago, the Conservative Government abolished the grants to several of my constituents under social security legislation and loaded them with debt. Was that an investment in their future?

Mr. Coaker: I am talking about trying to encourage young people into further and higher education. The current system does not work, but if we start talking about loans as investment for the future that allows people to go into further and higher education so that they can learn more and have all the opportunities and advantages that education brings, we will encourage more people from those backgrounds to stay on and, in doing so, we will create opportunities for all.

[Mr. Coaker]

I taught for many years in schools that served those communities and, for the last few years, I worked as a deputy head teacher. The problems that we faced did not involve money—although that is also important. We could not encourage young people to stay on in education at 16 and go to college. We could not raise their expectations and we could not create a culture of educational achievement. That will be the real mark of the Government's success: if we achieve those aims, we will ensure that more young people go on to further and higher education. In that way, we shall create opportunities for all groups in society, but particularly for those at the bottom of society.

Lorna Fitzsimons (Rochdale): I speak in this debate as the first person from my family to enter higher education and as one who spent a long time representing students in post-16 and post-graduate education.

I praise the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Mr. Rammell), who encapsulated the lessons that I learnt the hard way by representing students and the real politics that faced us when we gained office and read the Dearing report. Those who advocate swallowing all of Dearing forget that that report suggested that every student, regardless of his or her socio-economic background, should pay a flat tuition fee. *[Interruption.]* I do not find that funny. The reality for students under your Government was debt because of the way that you whittled down the student grant.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. The Chair does not have a Government.

Lorna Fitzsimons: I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but the passion carries me away.

Under the previous Administration, the student grant was whittled down to such a small amount that debt was a way of life for the majority of students. Therefore, I think that it is fickle for the Opposition to talk about student debt in relation to the maintenance grant. They had plenty of time to address the problem of debt among students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Labour turned honestly to the Dearing report before the last election—as did all three main parties. We recognised that we had a limited amount of money and a crisis on our hands and we considered how we would spend those funds.

As my colleagues have pointed out eloquently, the Government's priority was ensuring that the barrier to higher education was not at the point of access. I am disappointed that hon. Members have confused students with graduates in this debate. Students will pay off loans for tuition fees or maintenance grants only after they have graduated and their incomes have reached a certain level. Under the previous Administration, we had the most expensive student loans system that was ever manufactured. Despite all the economic expertise of the banks, London school of economics graduates, professors and so on, it would have been cheaper to give students the money than administer the old student loans system. We must be honest about the plight that many students face.

The other argument I wish to nail is the claim that we have enjoyed free state higher education and that this Government are somehow responsible for its abolition. As has been said in the Chamber tonight, that denies the fact that many students have been responsible for meeting their own fees for years—only a minority of students were privileged to receive the state subsidy. That fact is swept under the carpet. The Opposition are not bothered that those students have had to shoulder the load; they have had to pay their fees and it has been hard. The reality, however, is that new Labour is about principles.

Mr. Richard Allan (Sheffield, Hallam): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Lorna Fitzsimons: No, I will not; I have limited time.

With limited money and with the crisis that we inherited, we had to ensure that there was no barrier to access for those poor students who, we believed, would have been more disfranchised by having to pay a tuition fee. That is where we put our subsidy. We are putting our policies and principles into practice. I am sad that some of my colleagues cannot see the reality of the system that we inherited.

In a perfect world, of course we would like everyone—

Mr. Allan: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Lorna Fitzsimons: No; I have limited time and I am trying to let more hon. Members speak.

In an imperfect world, it is necessary to prioritise. We have prioritised, ensuring that poor students do not have to pay fees. If there is one message that must go out of the Chamber to the students of the future, it is: "If you come from a low-income background, you will not have to pay a fee under the present Government's proposals."

Yvette Cooper (Pontefract and Castleford): Tonight, we have heard many arguments about access—especially access for people from low-income and low-skill backgrounds. Labour Members passionately agree about that. We all believe in that, we all want to achieve it and we are all passionately angry about the previous Government's failure to do enough to get children from lower-income backgrounds into higher education. However, we must be hard-headed about the way in which we act to pursue that goal.

In my constituency, the problem is not only the low number of people entering higher education, but the low number of people who stay on, after age 16, in any form of education. Nationally, 77 per cent. of 16-year-olds stay on in full-time or part-time education. In my constituency, only 50 per cent. do. From some schools, only 25 per cent. do.

Mr. Swayne: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Yvette Cooper: I shall not give way. I am sorry, but I have little time and it has been a long debate.

In my constituency, 30 per cent. of teenagers leave school at 16 and go into unemployment or into a job with no training. That is the problem that we must face if we are to improve access to the crucial skills and education that, at the moment, are the key to prosperity in life. To tackle inequality in this country—

Mr. Corbyn: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Yvette Cooper: I am sorry; I must make progress, because it has been a long debate and I want to finish to allow other hon. Members to get in.

To tackle inequality in this country today, we must do so through education. If we leave those 16-year-olds in my constituency without access to further or higher education, we are failing to tackle inequality. Faced with a choice between a continuation of the existing maintenance grant system, a return to the 1990 maintenance grant system, as suggested by amendment No. 36 and a new, fair, loan system that liberates hard cash to do something radical for the 16-year-olds in my constituency, enabling them to stay on and have a chance, I shall go for the fair loans and the cash, to do something more substantial.

It is a fair principle that graduates who earn more—

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Yvette Cooper: I am sorry; I shall not take interventions.

It is a fair principle that graduates, as they earn more—because they do earn more—should pay something back. Even taking into account the three years that they may spend not earning, they still earn more. They earn masses more than the people in my constituency who are not going into any form of further or higher education—some figures say 10 per cent. more, others say 25 per cent. Either way, a degree is the key to getting on in life, and to higher earnings throughout life.

Of course, society also benefits from higher education, so society must continue to contribute to it. That is a central part of the Secretary of State's higher education funding proposals. Society must continue to pay, but it is fair that people who earn the most pay something back.

I have been very lucky. I have benefited not only from higher education and an undergraduate degree, but from being able to take a master's degree at the London school of economics. As a result of the latter, my earning power—my salary—doubled. I took out a career development loan to pay for that, and I have only just finished paying it back. I think that it was fair that I should take out a loan, rather than asking people in my constituency who have been taxpayers in low-income jobs to pay that subsidy to my higher earnings.

Of course, post-graduate education is different from undergraduate education. I do not say that the same principles should apply, but the underlying principle that if one earns more and is benefiting more, one should pay something back is surely right.

I ask the House, having listened to the debate this evening, not to vote for the status quo, which has not helped my constituents, but to take the radical approach, to go for the new, fair student loan system and to give us the cash to do something far more powerful to help my constituents to get a better chance in life.

11 pm

Mr. Green: Behind much of the passion that we have seen this evening lies a good deal of sadness. I share that sadness because the House will take an historic decision this evening if it votes against the amendment and votes with the Government today and tomorrow, and it is a historically wrong decision.

The maintenance grant has served many thousands of people well since it was introduced, and I see no reason why it should not continue to do so. Like many hon. Members on both sides of the House, I benefited from it. I was educated at a state school, and my sister and I were the first generation of our family to go on to higher education. We benefited from maintenance grants.

Clearly, we cannot continue with the previous system if the expansion of higher education is to continue; we all accept that. That is why the previous Government introduced a mixed grant and loan system, and we can be proud of that. I am extremely proud of the massive expansion in higher education over the past 18 years. When we came to power, one in eight went into universities; when we left, the figure was one in three. That gave many thousands of young people the opportunity to go into higher education—an opportunity that they would never have had in any previous decade.

We should be proud of that expansion, and we should recognise that we achieved it through a balanced financial system which mixed grants and loans for those students. Many Labour Members pointed out that access did not diminish after loans were introduced, and we can all be proud of that. One Labour Member noted that since the loan system was introduced, not only did the numbers go up, but the range of those going into higher education increased. There can be no hon. Member who does not believe that we must do better in extending the range of those who have access to higher education.

The objection to the Government's proposals, and the reason why we support the amendment, is that their proposal will move sharply in the opposite direction. Many Labour Members are embarrassed about it because they feel that they are breaking their election pledge. The right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) observed that his constituents did not think that they were voting for the introduction of tuition fees if they voted for a Labour Government. He can go further than that.

A month before the election, in his 50 answers to the *Evening Standard*, the Prime Minister was asked in question No. 6:

"Will Labour introduce tuition fees for higher education?"

He replied:

"Labour has no plans to introduce tuition fees for higher education."

Perhaps the Secretary of State could argue that something has happened since that has changed the situation.

Mr. Dawson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Green: My time is limited and I want to give the hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan), who moved the amendment, a chance to get in.

What has happened since that might have changed the situation? The Dearing committee reported. It was set up on a cross-party basis; everyone agreed that it was a sensible way forward and that we needed to examine the funding of higher education. I remember that my Labour opponent at the general election, who was a teacher at a university, always said that the Labour party could not make any commitments about higher education because it was waiting for Dearing to report.

That is how Labour fought the general election. What did the Government do as soon as they received the Dearing report? On the day that it was published, they started rubbishing it, and they decided not to implement one of its most important proposals. That is a betrayal not

[Mr. Green]

just of the students of this country, but of everything that Labour told the British people during the general election campaign.

The Dearing committee was clearly set up with the idea that the time for maintenance grants might have gone. The issue has been discussed by those who care about funding for higher education for many years. There was a clear presumption that the Dearing report would come down on the side of saying that the time had passed for maintenance grants. We should respect the fact that after 14 months of study, the distinguished group that made up the Dearing committee decided, rather unexpectedly, that there was a role for maintenance grants to play in the future of British education. That decision was made precisely because the committee was most concerned with access to higher education for those who would not otherwise be able to afford it.

It is not simply a matter of adding up how much students might pay or determining who should not have to pay tuition fees. It is, as many hon. Members have said, a matter of culture. Those who say that we are reclassifying debt as investment and who claim that by so doing, everything will be all right, are talking nonsense. People know when they are in debt. They know that they will have £10,000 to pay back when they leave university.

Students who come from less well-off backgrounds are much less likely to take the risk. It would be a tragedy for those individuals and for the country as a whole if less well-off children, thinking about higher education, decided that it was too high a risk and said, "I'll play it safe and not go into higher education." If the Government force through their proposal, they will condemn thousands of the less well-off to a less good life than they could achieve by their own efforts and damage our economic performance by narrowing the base of those who will develop the skills that we as a country need to ensure that our prosperity continues.

The position is worse than that, because there is no guarantee that the money that will be raised from the fees and saved on the maintenance grant will be put into higher education. We have had half a commitment for this year and we have no commitment for future years. This is a Treasury-driven agenda which will do nothing for higher education. The Government have disappeared into the logic of their own focus groups. They have decided that if the Treasury demands it, they prefer to clobber the poor rather than the better-off. That is an historic mistake.

I admit that the motives of many of those on the left of British politics have been good. I think that they have been wrong-headed, but socialism clearly arose from a desire to promote common decency. Uniquely, the Government are throwing out the baby of common decency with the bath water of socialism. Socialism has been proved to be intellectually wrong and not to work. However, behind it there was a thought—many Labour Members must have gone into politics with this in mind—that there must be some common decency. The Government are betraying the sense of common decency that brought many Labour Members into politics in the first place.

Mr. Blunkett: The hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) will have to do much better than that if he is to succeed on the Opposition Front Bench. He said that he was proud of the Conservative Government. Is he proud of a 40 per cent. cut in unit costs per student? Is he proud of capping entry into university, to prevent increased access? Is he proud of a Government who halved the grant, but who did not provide additional funds for access or for hardship, which we are doing by means of the Bill?

The hon. Gentleman's opponent at the general election was right. We spelled out clearly what we would do on maintenance, and we said that we would review the Dearing proposals on fees.

Mr. Nick St. Aubyn (Guildford): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Blunkett: No, I will not.

We are voting on the issue of the maintenance award. We are voting not on fees, but on whether a manifesto commitment, which was explicit, will be carried forward. We are voting on whether a Labour party conference decision, which was overwhelming, will be carried this evening. We are talking about ensuring that students have the money at the point when they need it, and that they repay it when they can afford to do so.

That is the simple issue before us. It is not a matter of principle about free post-16 education, because that is not even at stake within the amendment. If it were, part-timers and further education students would be in a different position from full-time undergraduates. No principle is being laid aside. We are talking about a provision to ensure that no one is in hardship at university, with additional provision for those who find themselves in difficulty, with loans to be repaid at a real nil rate of interest based on the Inland Revenue system and linked entirely to ability to pay.

We are asking the House to carry forward this signal reform in the funding of the higher education system, so that the majority, not the minority, can benefit. For the sake of a modern Britain in a new century, we ask hon. Members to vote against the amendment.

Mr. Canavan: The Government propose to abolish maintenance grants and to make students completely dependent on loans. To put sugar on the pill, the Government are telling students that they will be able to borrow more money and repay it over a longer period. May I say to the Secretary of State that it is little consolation, especially to students from low-income families, to be told that the millstone around their necks will be heavier and there for longer?

May I also say to the Secretary of State that nothing in my amendment is inconsistent with Labour party policy or with the manifesto commitment, which was a bit ambiguous? It said that the costs of student maintenance should be repaid by graduates on an income-related basis. Some graduates might argue that they already do that by paying income tax. May I also say to him that, sooner or later, the Government will have to grasp the nettle and realise that the introduction of a progressive taxation system is essential for a fair education system?

The Secretary of State has already introduced some special financial support for students with disabilities and lone parent students, and I welcome that. If my amendment proposed the abolition of loans and the

reintroduction of a comprehensive system of maintenance grants for all students. I might be able to understand part of his argument that, in some way, it conflicts with his reading of the manifesto, but I am not proposing that. All I propose is that there should be some maintenance grant for students from low-income families. I imagine that most hon. Members, at some stage in their careers, have received the advantage of a maintenance grant to enable them to go on to college and university. I appeal to every hon. Member please not to kick away the ladder of opportunity from future generations, and please to support my amendment in the vote.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 176, Noes 313.

Division No. 294] **[11.13 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Arbuthnot, James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Canavan, Dennis
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Clappison, James
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Ms Roseanna *(Perth)*
Curry, Rt Hon David
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Etherington, Bill
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flight, Howard
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Garnier, Edward
Gerrard, Neil
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Grant, Bernie
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Hopkins, Kelvin
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Livingstone, Ken
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McAllion, John
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mitchell, Austin
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Pickles, Eric
Pollard, Kerry
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Rogers, Allan
Rowlands, Ted
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Salmond, Alex
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Swayne, Desmond
Swinney, John
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Welsh, Andrew
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wise, Audrey
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Maria Fyfe and
Mr. John McDonnell.

NOES

Ainger, Nick
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Banks, Tony
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Berth, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom
Breed, Colin
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Stephen
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Ms Judith
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corston, Ms Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cummings, John

Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davies, Rt Hon Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Eilman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronnie
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gorrie, Donald
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Alun
Milburn, Alan
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Rt Hon Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Norris, Dan
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Singh, Marsha
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stott, Roger
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Wallace, James
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Wilson, Brian
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Robert Ainsworth and
Mr. Jon Owen Jones.

Question accordingly negatived.

It being more than six hours after the commencement of proceedings on consideration of the Bill, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER, *pursuant to the Order [19 May] and the Resolution [this day], put forthwith the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that hour.*

Amendments made: No. 69, in page 15, line 45, at end insert—

'(j) modifying any enactment or instrument (whenever passed or made) so as to provide for the treatment, in connection with any calculation with respect to the income (however defined) of persons to whom grants or loans are made under this section, of amounts due from or payable to such persons under such grants or loans;

(k) for appeals with respect to matters arising under the regulations (including provision for determining, or enabling the determination of, the procedure to be followed in connection with appeals).'.

No. 71, in page 16, line 32, leave out 'any government department,'.

No. 76, in page 16, line 37, leave out 'remuneration' and insert 'emoluments'.

No. 65, in page 17, line 3, at end insert—

'(ca) requiring the payment, by persons or bodies to whom requirements imposed in pursuance of any of paragraphs (a) to (c) apply, of—

(i) penalties in cases of non-compliance with, or otherwise framed by reference to, such requirements, and

(ii) interest in respect of periods when such penalties are due but unpaid;

(cb) requiring the payment by borrowers, in respect of periods when amounts due under their loans are unpaid, of—

(i) interest (applied to such amounts at a rate calculated otherwise than in accordance with subsection (4)(a)), or

(ii) both such interest and one or more surcharges (together with further interest in respect of periods when such surcharges are due but unpaid);'.

No. 66, in page 17, line 10, leave out 'Income Tax' and insert 'Taxes'.

No. 70, in page 17, line 12, at end insert—

'(f) determining the priority as between deductions falling to be made by virtue of paragraph (a)(i) and deductions falling to be made from emoluments payable to borrowers by virtue of other enactments (whenever passed).'.

No. 67, in page 17, line 14, at end insert

', and "the Taxes Acts" has the same meaning as in the Taxes Management Act 1970'.

No. 72, in page 17, leave out lines 32 to 38.— *[Mr. Jamieson.]*

Clause 26

INTERPRETATION OF CHAPTER I

Amendment made: No. 77, in page 20, line 45, at end insert—

'(ba) fees payable for field trips (including any tuition element of such fees).'.—*[Mr. Jamieson.]*

Clause 27

GRANTS AND LOANS: SCOTLAND

Amendments made: No. 40, in page 21, leave out line 34.

No. 41, in page 21, line 36, leave out from 'loans"' to end of line 1 on page 22 and insert—

'( ) After that section there shall be inserted—

"Delegation or transfer of functions relating to student support

73AA.—(1) If the Secretary of State so determines, any function exercisable by him by virtue of regulations made under section 73(f) of this Act shall, to such extent as is specified in his determination, be exercisable instead by such body or person as is so specified.

(2) A person or body by whom any function is for the time being exercisable by virtue of subsection (1) above shall comply with any direction given by the Secretary of State as to the exercise of that function.

(3) The Secretary of State may make arrangements for any person or body specified in the arrangements to exercise on his behalf, to such extent as is so specified, any function exercisable by him by virtue of regulations under section 73(f) of this Act (including any such functions as to appeals).

(4) Any arrangements made under subsection (3) above shall not prevent the Secretary of State from exercising the function in question himself.

(5) The Secretary of State may make provision for enabling appeals—

(a) to be made with respect to such matters arising out of the exercise by any person or body of any function by virtue of subsection (1) or (3) above as he may determine; and

(b) to be so made to a person or body appointed by him for that purpose.

(6) The Secretary of State may pay to any person or body by whom any function is exercisable by virtue of subsection (1) or (3) above—

(a) such amounts as he considers appropriate for the purpose of meeting expenditure incurred or to be incurred by that person or body—

(i) in making grants or loans by virtue of regulations under section 73(f) of this Act, or

(ii) by way of administrative expenses,

in, or in connection with, the exercise of that function;

(b) in the case of any such person, or of any body with which the Secretary of State has made arrangements under subsection (3) above, such remuneration as he may determine.

(7) Any payment under subsection (6)(a) above may be made subject to such terms and conditions (including conditions as to repayment) as the Secretary of State may determine.

(8) The Secretary of State may pay to any person or body appointed by him under subsection (5) such remuneration or administrative expenses (or both) as he may determine.

(9) In relation to any function which, by virtue of subsection (1) or (3) above is exercisable to a specified extent, references in any other provision of this section to the exercise of that function are accordingly to its exercise to that extent.'.

No. 42, in page 22, line 3, leave out '73(1)' and insert '73'.

No. 43, in page 22, line 17, leave out 'any government department'.

No. 44, in page 22, line 25, leave out 'remuneration' and insert 'emoluments'.

No. 45, in page 22, line 40, at end insert—

'(ca) requiring the payment by persons or bodies to whom the requirements imposed in pursuance of paragraphs (a) to (c) above apply, of—

(i) penalties in cases of non-compliance with, or otherwise framed by reference to, such requirements, and

(ii) interest in respect of periods when such penalties are due but unpaid;

(cb) requiring the payment by borrowers, in respect of periods when amounts due under their loans are unpaid, of—

(i) interest (applied to such amounts at a rate calculated otherwise than in accordance with subsections (6) and (7) below), or

(ii) both such interest and one or more surcharges (together with further interest in respect of periods when such surcharges are due but unpaid).'.

No. 46, in page 22, line 47, leave out

'under section 73(1)(f) of this Act or under this section'

and insert

'to which this section applies'.

No. 47, in page 22, line 49, leave out 'Income Tax' and insert 'Taxes'.

No. 48, in page 23, line 2, at end insert—

'(f) determining the priority as between deductions falling to be made by virtue of paragraph (a)(i) above and deductions falling to be made from emoluments payable to borrowers by virtue of other enactments (whenever passed);

(g) modifying any enactment or instrument (whenever passed or made) so as to provide for the treatment, in connection with any calculation with respect to income (however defined), of amounts due from or payable to such persons under loans granted by virtue of regulations to which this section applies.'.

No. 49, in page 23, line 5, at end insert

'and "the Taxes Acts" has the same meaning as in the Taxes Management Act 1970'.

No. 50, in page 23, line 42, at end insert—

'(10A) Regulations to which this section applies may make provision for appeals with respect to matters arising under such regulations (including provision for determining, or enabling the determination of, the procedure to be followed in connection with such appeals).'.

No. 51, in page 23, line 42, at end insert—

'(10B) Regulations to which this section applies may, in relation to a borrower's discharge under or by virtue of section 54 of the Bankruptcy (Scotland) Act 1985 or on an order being made under paragraph 11 of Schedule 4 to that Act, make provision for the treatment of any debt or liability to which a borrower is, or may become, subject in respect of sums received, or which he is entitled to receive, after the date of his sequestration.'.

No. 52, in page 23, line 44, leave out '73(1)(f)' and insert '73(f)'.

No. 53, in page 24, line 25, leave out '73(1)(f)' and insert '73(f)'.—*[Mr. Jamieson.]*

Clause 28

IMPOSITION OF CONDITIONS AS TO FEES AT FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN SCOTLAND

Amendment made: No. 54, in page 26, line 7, leave out 'respect of' and insert 'connection with'.—*[Mr. Jamieson.]*

More than six hours having elapsed since the commencement of proceedings on the Bill, further consideration of the Bill stood adjourned, pursuant to the Resolution this day.

Bill, as amended (in the Standing Committee), to be further considered tomorrow.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): We have four motions before the House; it may be convenient to take them together.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): No.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: We shall take them one by one—first, motion 3.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

CONTRACTING OUT

That the draft Contracting Out (Functions relating to National Savings) Order 1998, which was laid before this House on 6th April, be approved.—*[Mr. Jamieson.]*

The House divided: Ayes 296, Noes 56.

Division No. 295] **[11.28 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell–Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Casale, Roger
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Grant, Bernie
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John

Iddon, Dr Brian
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mowlam, Rt Hon Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stott, Roger
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Robert Ainsworth and Mr. Jon Owen Jones.

NOES

Allan, Richard
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Jackie
Beith, Rt Hon A.J
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burnett, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Cotter, Brian
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorrie, Donald
Grieve, Dominic
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Leigh, Edward
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Livsey, Richard
Loughton, Tim
Maclean, Rt Hon David
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
Mates, Michael
Oaten, Mark
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tyler, Paul
Viggers, Peter
Wallace, James
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Webb, Steve
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John Bercow and Mr. Eric Forth.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

MARINE POLLUTION

That the draft Merchant Shipping (Control of Pollution) (SOLAS) Order 1998, which was laid before this House on 21st April, be approved.—[*Mr. Kevin Hughes.*]

The House divided: Ayes 307, Noes 10.

Division No. 296] **[11.39 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Jackie
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Butler, Mrs Christine
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Casale, Roger

Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dismore, Andrew
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Fyfe, Maria
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Gorrie, Donald
Grant, Bernie
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Livsey, Richard
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Norris, Dan
Oaten, Mark
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Rendel, David
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stringer, Graham
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Vis, Dr Rudi
Wallace, James
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Robert Ainsworth and Mr. Jon Owen Jones.

NOES

Bercow, John
Browning, Mrs Angela
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Leigh, Edward
Maclean, Rt Hon David
Swayne, Desmond
Wilshire, David

Tellers for the Noes:
Dr. Julian Lewis and Mr. Eric Forth.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

DEFENCE

That the draft Army, Air Force and Naval Discipline Acts (Continuation) Order 1998, which was laid before this House on 11th May, be approved.—*[Mr. Kevin Hughes.]*

Question agreed to.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

That the draft Fire Services (Amendment) (Northern Ireland) Order 1998, which was laid before this House on 12th May, be approved.—*[Mr. Kevin Hughes.]*

Question agreed to.

HOME AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That Mr. Richard Allan be discharged from the Home Affairs Committee and Bob Russell be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. John McWilliam, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

Playing Fields (Planning Permission)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kevin Hughes.]*

11.52 pm

Miss Julie Kirkbride (Bromsgrove): I thank the House for this opportunity to talk about playing fields—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. Due consideration must be given to the hon. Member who has the Adjournment debate.

Miss Kirkbride: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

As I say, I thank the House for this opportunity to discuss the important issue of playing fields. I know from colleagues on both sides of the House that this issue affects many constituencies where there is concern about the pressure to develop playing fields, but I hope that the House will forgive me if I talk particularly about my constituency and our concerns about the threat to a playing field in Bromsgrove, which is commonly known as the recreation ground.

I should like to make clear the circumstances in which this debate has arisen. There is a proposal to build an arts and leisure complex on an area of ground known as the rec. It is in the very centre of town, and was covenanted in 1911 for the purposes of recreation. This green space has been used for those very purposes for the best part of a century. The Labour district council proposed to build the complex in its 1995 manifesto; we learned only subsequently that it was to be built on the green space in the centre of town.

I do not oppose the idea of an arts and leisure complex for Bromsgrove. As an ancient market town in north Worcestershire, we have been stripped of many of our services. They have gone to other towns in the area—especially to the new town of Redditch. It is important to the cultural life of Bromsgrove that we have an arts complex. Only a few weeks ago, I visited the local operatic society. It had been forced to hire part of the district council's offices, known as the Spadesbourne suite, at huge cost; and had had to install a tiered seating system to enable an audience to attend. Three thousand pounds, which is what it cost the society, is far too much for a small operatic company to expect to get in gate money—hence the need for such a local facility.

The campaigners believe, as I do, that the complex should not be sited on the recreation ground. The proposal is to use a site fronting Market street on the east, or town side, with Recreation road to the north and Churchfields to the west. The area under consideration has an Asda superstore to the south; in front of the superstore is a car park. The proposal is to move the car park to the green space known as the rec, and to build the arts and leisure complex on the area that is now the car park.

We object to the proposal first and foremost because the park is a green lung in the centre of our town. It is an attractive old market town, although more could be done to make it more attractive still. Building an arts complex in this location, however, would do a great disservice to the attractions of our town centre. The green space in the centre of Bromsgrove is used for all sorts of recreation:

[Miss Kirkbride]

walking dogs, lunching on sunny afternoons out of office hours, and so on—all this in addition to the regular sporting activities held on the site.

The proposed plan would also cause severe traffic congestion. It is already almost impossible to move around the centre at teatime, when office workers are leaving for home. The new facility would only worsen the traffic problems, and prolong the hours of severe congestion. The centre of town is not well served by roads; most traffic is taken by the ring road outside, but for those who need to enter and leave the centre, the congestion is acute at certain times of day. I do not believe that the proposal will make that any better; nor is there any way in which roads could be constructed to alleviate the traffic problem if an arts and leisure complex were built.

Our third objection is that the complex could have a severe impact on the town centre itself. Like many small market towns, we have been severely affected by the growth in out-of-town shopping centres. I am not here to oppose what many of my constituents want—they like to shop in Merry Hill, and we all understand that it is easy to park and to shop there. The future for Bromsgrove is not to compete with what Merry Hill does, but to provide a different shopping experience, by giving resources and making improvements to the town centre.

As I shall be knocking my Labour council quite a lot during my speech, I should say that I was pleased to see in the local newspaper this week that improvements are to be made to the town centre to do it up a little. That is a welcome development, because we must cash in on our antiquity, our uniqueness and our having a high street which does not contain only predictable stores. It has niche stores which casual shoppers find more interesting and entertaining on a Saturday afternoon. The fear is that a rival centre, not based in the high street, will only add to Bromsgrove town centre's problems.

The recreation ground is used for sporting activities, and until last year, when the proposal appeared clearly on the agenda, goalposts were erected during the season on the recreation ground. It was mean of the council not to erect the goalposts this year as the precursor to the proposal to build on the ground, and perhaps in acknowledgement of the fact that the campaign to save the rec was gaining ground. The removal of the goalposts is disappointing to the teams that regularly used the ground for weekend sports. For all those reasons, we are concerned that the proposal should not be allowed to proceed, and I hope that the Minister has taken on board those objections.

Many thousands of objections have been sent in, although the district council disputes who, what and where, and active petitions have been raised to object to the plans. I should like to put on record the efforts of Dennis Norton, who has led the campaign to save the rec. He is a respected business man in Bromsgrove, and has a great love and affection for the town. He has left his collection of material relating to Bromsgrove for the benefit of the townspeople, and no one could suggest that his heart does not lie with the best interests of Bromsgrove. However, that kindness and love for our town has been repaid by those who object to his objections, with a high-handed and unsatisfactory response.

I do not wish to name all those involved in the campaign, but I should like to mention a dear friend, Lorna Priddey, who has acted as an unofficial secretary to the campaigners and worked to save the rec for the benefit of the people of Bromsgrove in her characteristic unstinting, dedicated and kind-hearted way.

Those of us who object to the proposals are unhappy with the way the council has treated us. Some high-handed letters have been sent to people who have sent in objections, and the discussions on the proposals for the recreation ground have, in large part, been held in private council chamber. I doubt that the new Government would approve of that, given their determination to have more open government. It is only fair to the people of Bromsgrove that such discussions should take place in more open proceedings.

There is also a sense of legitimate grievance that the two local newspapers that bear Bromsgrove's name were not used to advertise the plans, on the spurious ground that they did not cover the entire constituency. A paper that is not, perhaps, as well read was therefore given the notice, which caused offence.

I am sorry to tell the Minister, but it is true, that Bromsgrove has the misfortune to be served by a rather second-rate Labour council—unlike our new Labour Government—which is out of touch with what the people of Bromsgrove want. It is belligerently determined to continue with the proposal, despite the objections that it is receiving. I appeal to the Minister to listen to the wider views of the community, and to persuade his colleagues on the council to choose an alternative site for this development.

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset): Does my hon. Friend realise that the tale that she has told, which is fascinating and new to me, is replicated, almost word for word, by a case in my constituency of West Dorset, and, I suspect, by similar cases in the constituencies of many other hon. Members?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is going far too wide of the subject before the House.

Miss Kirkbride: I am very much aware that the use of playing fields for all sorts of schemes affects all hon. Members. I congratulate my hon. Friend on his efforts, and those who have written to me about their experience in West Dorset, on a successful campaign to stop such a development. That is what can happen when an assiduous Member of Parliament is representing the people's interests.

There has been rudeness in the Labour council's dealings with those who have objected to the planning permission, including myself. It has been suggested that we are getting our facts wrong, but the council is refusing to admit that there is public hostility. I shall read a little from the letters that the council has received. People who live very close to the site concerned wrote:

"We would like to assure the council that the land is most definitely still regularly used for the purpose in which it was intended as an open space and recreation facility. We live opposite the field and feel we are in a far better position to know how often people play football, cricket, walk their dogs and generally use the area than councillors sat behind closed doors . . . If they came to the area regularly in particular on a Saturday or Sunday they would see for themselves."

That letter is symptomatic of the objections and feelings of the people of Bromsgrove about the fact that their opinions have not been taken into account.

That letter raised another objection about the likely increase in noise pollution. It says:

"We would like to point out that we have suffered sleepless nights, caused by groups of youths playing loud music from amplifiers on the existing car park"—

which is some distance from the houses—

"at 2 and 3 am".

and it goes on to say:

"by moving the car park . . . nearer the houses this would again become a very real problem."

That is what the people of Bromsgrove feel.

Clearly, I took up this issue before I had the good fortune of having this debate. I took it up with the English Sports Council. When I last spoke to the council, it had yet to proceed with the final acceptance of planning permission, and it is only at that stage that the Sports Council will be officially and finally asked for its views. As an interim—albeit pretty clear—indication of the likely response, this letter was copied to me after being sent to the chief executive. It states:

"The English Sports Council has considered the application in the light of its playing field policy . . . It is not considered that the applicant has demonstrated satisfactorily that any of the identified special circumstances apply in this case and in the absence of a suitable justification for the development we wish to register our objection to the planning application."

We know that the English Sports Council disagrees with the proposal.

I ask the Minister to address two issues on the record. First, if the sports council continues to disapprove of the development when the council has submitted its final planning application, can I be reassured—and may I reassure my constituents—that the matter will go to the Secretary of State for planning approval? Bromsgrove district council must not be allowed to act unilaterally: it must seek the final approval of the Secretary of State if the sports council objects.

Secondly, will the Minister amplify the Government's policy on playing fields? I understand that Labour's sports manifesto, entitled "Labour's Sporting Nation", states specifically that the Government will end the policy of selling playing fields. It seems likely that this Labour council will conflict with the Labour Government's policy. Labour's manifesto states clearly that the Government will not allow this sort of development of playing fields, yet for some extraordinary reason that message has not reached Labour councillors.

As this is a fraught issue, it has been suggested that I am wrong to raise the matter on the Adjournment of the House tonight. I am aware that, if it becomes a matter for the Secretary of State, his judicial functions will preclude the Minister from stating clearly the Government's attitude to the planning procedure. We also face the problem—I do not wish to stray from the subject under discussion—of hospital cuts and closures in my area affecting the Kidderminster general and Alexandra hospitals. No one would suggest that I should not raise the difficult subject of hospital closures in the House of Commons until the decision is taken to close those hospitals.

Therefore, I point out to my critics that I am not willing to stand by and see the recreation ground developed without mentioning the proposal in every forum available, in an effort to stop the development before a final decision is taken. When that occurs, my constituents and I will have nowhere else to go to raise our legitimate objections.

12.12 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. Nick Raynsford): I congratulate the hon. Member for Bromsgrove (Miss Kirkbride) on her success in securing the debate, and on presenting the case on behalf of her constituents. I fully understand why she has raised the issue, but I hope that she will appreciate that it would be improper for me to comment on the merits of the case as it is likely to be referred to my Department. In those circumstances, the Secretary of State would have a quasi-judicial role in considering the matter, and it would be improper for us to prejudice in any way our consideration of the facts. That is why we must be circumspect in responding to the specific case.

I hope that the hon. Lady will accept that I am happy to respond in the spirit in which she initiated the debate by outlining the Government's policy on the matter, and what we are doing to protect playing fields.

Under the previous Government, local authorities faced considerable pressures on their resources, and many felt that they had no alternative but to look to the disposal of assets in order to generate additional resources. That led many authorities to sell off open spaces and playing fields.

The present Government believe that selling off playing fields and open spaces is wrong, and we have proposed that the practice should be subject to greater scrutiny. We believe that playing fields are vital for maintaining the quality of our communities. They provide an essential recreational resource for schools and the wider community. It is important that people have access to playing fields and open spaces close to where they live.

We therefore attach a high importance to retaining playing fields in urban areas. In recent years, too many have been lost, and grass-roots sport has suffered as a result. I entirely endorse the anxieties that the hon. Member for Bromsgrove expressed about people's need for access to open space for recreational purposes. That is why the Government made a manifesto pledge to stop the sale of playing fields that schools and communities need.

The current Government policy is contained in planning policy guidance note No. 17, on sport and recreation. That emphasises the special significance of all playing fields, and stresses that they should usually be protected. It advises local planning authorities that they should distinguish in their development plans between parks and other open spaces that need protecting from development, as against sites that are temporarily in recreational use, or unused open land which may be suitable for development.

PPG17, which dates back to the previous Government, says that playing fields should not be developed for other uses unless it has been established that the sites will not be required, in the longer term, for school or community use. The emphasis is on identifying whether there are local deficiencies in provision, and protecting such facilities by policies in plans and showing sites to which the policies apply on the proposal map in the local plan. That is the current position under PPG17.

As I have stressed, and as I believe the hon. Member for Bromsgrove recognises, despite the guidance in PPG17, there are growing pressures on the potential use

[Mr. Nick Raynsford]

of playing fields. Those pressures could well increase—for example, in light of our need to accommodate a growing number of households. On 23 February 1998, the Government issued their policy document "Planning for the Communities of the Future". The document stressed the importance of locating new development, wherever possible, in existing urban areas. That is common sense, in order to safeguard the countryside, but there is the difficult corollary that, unless development is controlled, pressure on open space may increase.

We want to make it absolutely clear that good-quality playing fields and open spaces will remain available in urban areas, and will not be swallowed up as part of the process of trying to accommodate increasing amounts of housing in urban areas. Urban quality should not be sacrificed, which means that open spaces and playing fields need greater protection.

Since 1 August 1996, local planning authorities in England have been obliged to consult the English Sports Council on any planning application involving the development of playing fields. We have carried out a review of the first year of operation of that new arrangement, which showed that planning permission was granted for 26 of the 35 applications to which the sports council objected. That strongly suggests that there are real grounds for concern.

Accordingly, we assessed 22 of the cases that were granted planning permission, to discover whether there were any significant problems. As a result of that analysis, on 16 January the Government announced how they would fulfil their manifesto pledge to stop the sale of playing fields that schools and communities need.

The initiative that we announced in January co-ordinates three measures, respectively from the Department for Education and Employment, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, and the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions. The object was to send a clear message to all local authorities to discourage them from selling and permitting the development of local authority-owned playing fields that are needed.

The Department for Education and Employment currently has legislation before Parliament which will require the prior consent of the Secretary of State for Education and Employment where the local authority, a governing body or a foundation proposes to dispose of a school playing field, or where a local authority proposes to change the use of a playing field. The DFEE will consult shortly on the criteria on the basis of which decisions will be taken.

With regard to our position, the Deputy Prime Minister announced that the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions would be tightening up planning controls in respect of development of all local authority-owned playing fields where the English Sports Council advises against the proposals. We are suggesting that a local planning authority will be required to notify the Secretary of State of any proposal for development of a local authority-owned playing field, where the English Sports Council has objected because it would have a detrimental effect on the provision of playing fields.

The notification procedure will be triggered where a relevant sports council has lodged an objection to an application because it is concerned that there is an existing deficiency of playing fields, or that the proposal may result in such deficiency. We consulted all local planning authorities about the proposed arrangements on 12 February, and there was overwhelming support for our proposals. We propose to issue a direction shortly under the general permitted development procedure order to bring the arrangements into operation.

The hon. Lady might reasonably ask—if her speech had not been completed—what we will do in the interim. We have advised local planning authorities to consider whether it is possible to defer making decisions, or alternatively to inform the local Government office of any contested cases that would meet the requirements of the new arrangements.

The Secretary of State has the power to issue a direction under article 14 of the general development procedure order that would prevent the granting of planning permission by a local planning authority, if the Secretary of State considered it necessary to use that power because the local authority was unlikely to refer the matter. However, we are advised by the Government office for the west midlands that the particular case will be referred to the Secretary of State. Assuming that that is correct, the hon. Lady has no grounds for concern.

As for the future, local planning authorities are required to determine planning applications in accordance with their development plans. For planning applications involving the development of playing fields and open spaces, local authorities must take into account the longer-term needs of the wider community and consider whether there is, or is likely to be, a deficiency of playing fields and public open space.

If the application is likely to result in local deficiency in the supply of playing fields, there should be a presumption in favour of rejecting it. If there is doubt as to whether there is deficiency or whether the application is likely to result in deficiency—in other words, where the local planning authority and the English Sports Council disagree—the application should be referred to the Secretary of State, who will decide whether to leave the application for the local authority to determine or to determine it himself.

I hope that that satisfies the hon. Lady that the Government have acted and are acting in the interim to ensure greater protection for playing fields. That is our overriding concern. I am sure that she will appreciate why I cannot comment on the particulars of the individual case, which are likely to come, by one means or another, to the Secretary of State for final decision.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-two minutes past Twelve midnight.

House of Commons

Tuesday 9 June 1998

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Water Prices

1. **Dr. Vincent Cable** (Twickenham): What plans he has to ensure that environmental considerations are included in the periodic review of water prices. [43225]

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Michael Meacher): As part of his price review, the Director General of Water Services has requested guidance on the environmental obligations that water companies will be expected to meet. We have invited views on the issue and will publish our guidance in the summer.

Dr. Cable: Does the Minister accept that, hitherto, water regulation has given too much comfort to shareholders at the expense of both the consumer and the environment? When he gives guidance, will he take account of public opinion as reflected in independent surveys, which suggest an overwhelming preference for environmental improvement and reduced leakage, rather than for reduced prices in the next review?

Mr. Meacher: The hon. Gentleman is right to say that the previous price review was, in retrospect, unreasonably generous to the water companies and their shareholders—I think that that lesson has now been learned. I take note of the suggestion of the chair of the Environment Agency that cost efficiencies achieved since the most recent periodic review, and further cost reductions in future could fund a £10 billion improvement in environmental goals without any real-terms increase in bills. The Government are considering those matters.

Mr. Cynog Dafis (Ceredigion): On the Government's consultation paper on water charging in England and Wales, does the Minister recognise that circumstances in Wales may be different from those in many parts of England? In Wales, we have a plentiful supply of water, so water metering may not be appropriate in encouraging sustainable attitudes. Does he agree that the matter should be left to the National Assembly for Wales, which will be up and running in June next year, so that we can adopt in Wales an approach that is appropriate to the social and environmental realities of Wales?

Mr. Meacher: We certainly want Wales to adopt a system that is appropriate to the different water conditions that, as the hon. Gentleman rightly says, exist in Wales. As I am sure he knows, the Government are clear in their view that, over and above the new houses that are being built, water metering should not be extended unless people want a meter. If individual householders apply to the water company for a meter, that is fine, but the Government do not believe that there should be universal compulsory metering, as we have made clear in our document.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): Will the Minister explain why the rate of investment in the water industry has doubled since the 1980s? Is that, perhaps, one of the achievements of new Labour?

Mr. Meacher: The hon. Gentleman is, as always, very selective. He has failed to recognise that the price of water has increased in real terms by between 35 and 40 per cent. since privatisation, which is faster than any other commodity.

Environment Agency

2. **Mr. Eric Martlew** (Carlisle): What was the cost of the Environment Agency's new headquarters in Cumbria. [43226]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Angela Eagle): The Environment Agency estimated that the annual rent and rates for its new area office in Cumbria would be £297,000 initially, rising to £402,000 by the 10th year of the lease.

Mr. Martlew: That seems a lot of money to pay, given that the Environment Agency could have expanded on its existing site in Carlisle. Instead, it moved to a green-field site on the edge of the Lake district, which hardly seems a good idea for the Environment Agency. Planning permission was given in secret by Eden district council, whose reputation in planning is currently very low. Is the Minister aware that the National Audit Office is considering the matter? If it finds, as I think it will, that money has been wasted, will she consider renting out the new property and relocating the agency headquarters back to my constituency of Carlisle, from where the staff did not want to move in the first instance?

Angela Eagle: I am aware that my hon. Friend has raised these issues with the National Audit Office. Clearly, we await the results of the inquiry that it is conducting, and he would not expect me to commit myself to any action until I have seen the report. He must also recognise that the Environment Agency was founded from the old National Rivers Authority and Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution, which had a lot of surplus office space that they had to rationalise. We await the NAO survey to find out whether they did so and got the best value for money.

Local Authority Capping

3. **Mr. Simon Hughes** (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): What proposals he has for removing the cap on local authority budgets. [43227]

The Minister for Local Government and Housing (Ms Hilary Armstrong): Our proposals are set out in the consultation document "Modernising Local Government—Improving Local Financial Accountability".

Mr. Hughes: That is helpful. When the Minister has considered the responses, will the Government hold firm to the principle that one cannot have proper local democracy unless local councils can raise the money that they think fit for the services that they are obliged to carry out? Does she accept that, unless boroughs such as Southwark, the one in which she lives when she is in London and which I represent, can do that, the social services, housing and other needs of a community with deprivation such as ours just will not be met—unless the Government give them the money if they cannot raise it themselves?

Ms Armstrong: The hon. Gentleman seems to be putting forward contradictory arguments. In the beginning, he argued that local government should be able to raise the money that it wished and in the second part of his question, he suggested that it was up to central Government to ensure that it got sufficient, which could then be supplemented locally. The consultation on local government finance is precisely about how we get a fair proportion from central and from local taxation. We have received good representations from a wide variety of bodies on that matter, and I shall look at the initial responses with the working group from the Local Government Association tomorrow.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Can I add my voice to those that are calling for an end to the capping mechanism? Does the Minister, with whom we have been dealing about Derbyshire county council's capping experiment, accept that one of the sad features about that settlement, which cannot be ignored—I lay the blame at the door of the Chancellor of the Exchequer rather than the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, but I will not take that any further—is that we have to pay about £500,000 in re-billing? Can I make a plea that when Derbyshire's settlement is arrived at for the forthcoming year, and we have this bright new dawn with no capping, that extra £500,000 will be taken into account?

Ms Armstrong: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the Government's commitment to getting rid of crude and universal capping. We have said that this is the last year that that will take place. It is part of our commitment, through the local government finance review, to find our way forward into a new regime, in which local and central Government can be clear about what their responsibilities are and we can work together in partnership to ensure that we get the most efficient and effective response to local people's expectations and needs.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard (South-West Norfolk): I note that the Minister used a phrase about capping that she used when in opposition, saying that she would abolish this "crude and universal" mechanism. Could she perhaps share with the House a little more of her thinking on the timetable for that abolition?

Ms Armstrong: I have told the House that the current year's settlement will be the last to include the crude and universal capping introduced by the previous Administration. We will pursue a different route next year, and we are discussing that in the light of responses to our consultation document.

Mrs. Shephard: I thank the Minister for that helpful reply. Will she guarantee that she will not use changes in the capping mechanism as the excuse to shift millions of pounds away from shire areas for the second year running? Does she accept that that shift of funding, which was the idea of her Government, not of the previous one, has imposed an average 10 per cent. rise in council tax in shires, a rise entirely of her Government's making?

Ms Armstrong: The right hon. Lady chooses her statistics selectively. The amount going to shire areas has not decreased by anything like that amount. Her predecessor used to complain that we had removed money from London. The difference between council taxes in London and in shire counties was remarkable, but the real difference was that London faced the electorate this year, whereas the shires did not.

Mr. Bill O'Brien (Normanton): I thank my hon. Friend for working to help local government. When she is reducing the cap on local government, will she have regard to the tremendous problems of local government, which the Treasury must do a great deal to ease? The shadow Minister, the right hon. Member for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard), referred to a 10 per cent. increase in shire counties, but my authority, Wakefield, had an 11 per cent. increase, showing that there has not been a transfer of resources to our district from the shires. We are suffering in many ways because of 18 years of Tory Government attacks on local government. Will my hon. Friend speed the reduction of pressure on local government finance, which is doing injury to our services?

Ms Armstrong: My hon. Friend knows that we are determined to get a fair settlement for all authorities in the United Kingdom. There must be a balance between central and local government funding. One of the problems is that the previous Administration dug themselves into the deep hole that we all called the poll tax. Getting out of that hole has been damaging to local government, and we are still trying to deal with the consequences. Our local government finance review will take us to the next stage, but it will still take time to achieve real fairness in the system after the appalling damage done by the previous Government.

Brown-field Sites

4. **Mrs. Caroline Spelman** (Meriden): What estimate his Department has made of the potential for siting new housing development in brown-field sites. [43228]

The Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. John Prescott): My

Department has made estimates based on past performance. We also encourage local authorities and the regional planning conferences to conduct appropriate surveys. In addition, we have started to develop a national land use database, and we have set up the urban task force led by Lord Rogers to examine how authorities can best use previously used land.

Mrs. Spelman: What assurance does that give to those who live in the vulnerable green belt in my constituency that the Secretary of State is not simply shrugging off to the regions the responsibility for enforcement of a higher percentage of new builds on brown-field sites?

Mr. Prescott: I do not think that this Administration can be accused of shrugging off our responsibilities. In our first 12 months, we have published "Planning for the Communities of the Future", and we were the first Government to establish that 60 per cent. of future building should be done on brown-field sites. That is a clear commitment, and we have reiterated it constantly. We are completely satisfied with it, and Lord Rogers's urban task force will identify brown-field sites and begin to prioritise them for the building of houses.

Dr. Ian Gibson (Norwich, North): When does my right hon. Friend expect to issue guidelines on soil that will determine the levels of polychlorinated biphenyls—PCBs—organic chemicals, dioxins and radon gas on brown-field sites? That will be important to ensuring that the health of home owners and others who inhabit the sites will not be adversely affected.

Mr. Prescott: As my hon. Friend knows, the contaminated land study was published last December. I think that I could give a fuller answer, but I cannot at the moment. I will write to him.

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro and St. Austell): It is now some months since Ministers announced the abandonment of predict and provide. Many people in rural counties are concerned about the new-build housing allocations that are required of them. Can the Deputy Prime Minister give examples of reductions resulting from the Government's new position?

Mr. Prescott: One of the consequences of our policy since last May is that an additional 30,000 hectares of land will be added to the green belt. That shows the priority that we give the matter. We have left it, in the main, to the individual authorities and panels assessing housing to make the decisions. We have confirmed most of them, and one or two are before the courts. The hon. Gentleman would not expect me to comment on those.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the problems is getting a working definition of brown-field or, more particularly, recyclable land? Will he urge the urban task force led by Lord Rogers to produce one as soon as possible and say how it applies to rural areas, which also have recyclable land for use?

Mr. Prescott: I agree with my hon. Friend. That point is in the terms of reference of Lord Rogers's urban task force. We await its report of the end of this year to make such judgments.

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk): Will the Secretary of State explain why, four months after his announcement in the House of a higher target for the proportion of houses to be built on brown-field sites, his Department is still engaged in legal action to force on West Sussex 12,000 more houses than any of the three political parties on the county council wants? Why has Hampshire not been allowed to cut the number of houses being forced on it? Is not this yet another example of Ministers taking the decisions at the centre against the wishes of local people and their elected representatives?

Mr. Prescott: The hon. Gentleman served in the previous Administration. They could not make up their mind what proportion of houses should be built on brown-field sites. They started with 50 per cent., went up to 60 per cent. and then to 75 per cent., before reducing it back to 66 per cent. Whether in government or in opposition, the Conservatives are not clear about what needs to be implemented. We are satisfied that we have got the target right, and we will implement it.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): My right hon. Friend knows that I share his enthusiasm for bringing brown-field sites back into use. He will agree that, whenever a brown-field site is used for any purpose, pressure is taken off green-field sites. Will he use his characteristic charm and diplomacy on the Treasury, and on the Chancellor in particular, to ensure that we have the mechanisms to make brown-field sites competitive with green-field sites, because many of us believe that some tax help is needed to raise their competitiveness?

Mr. Prescott: My hon. Friend knows that final decisions on taxation are left to the Chancellor of the Exchequer; that is normal in all Governments. We are discussing other measures in respect of taxation and planning controls that are important to achieve the overall objective. They are under active discussion and we will report to the House at the appropriate time.

Boundary Commission Recommendations

5. **Mr. Nick St. Aubyn** (Guildford): What progress his Department has made in considering the recent recommendations of the boundary commission. [43229]

The Minister for London and Construction (Mr. Nick Raynsford): We are considering the representations received on the Local Government Commission's latest recommendations relating to Cumbria, Hertfordshire, Cheshire and the former Avon. We intend to announce our preliminary decision on them shortly. The commission recently completed consultation on draft recommendations for Surrey, and we expect to receive its final recommendations in September.

Mr. St. Aubyn: There is growing concern in Surrey that, despite the fact that the Government will receive the representations in September, they will not implement them in time for the local elections next May. That means that the recommendations will be five years out of date by the next round of elections. Will the Minister give a commitment to make an effort to implement the recommendations in time for next May's elections, or does his Government's commitment to fair votes extend only to situations that suit their party advantage?

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman will be aware, from correspondence that has passed between our

Department and the chief executive of Guildford, that a period of 14 weeks must elapse between the presentation by the Local Government Commission of its recommendations and the first date on which an order can come into effect. I am afraid that that takes us considerably beyond the October date for the compiling of the electoral register, which is the register on which next April's elections will be fought. That is a normal procedure; it has been followed by previous Governments and is being followed by this Government, and there is no political element in it whatsoever.

Standard Spending Assessment

6. **Mr. Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield): If he will make a statement on the standard spending assessment formulae for shire counties. [43230]

The Minister for Local Government and Housing (Ms Hilary Armstrong): The standard spending assessment formulae for shire counties are the same as for all other classes of authority that provide the same services.

Mr. Fabricant: The hon. Lady will be aware that, during the election, candidates for the Labour party addressed the fact that the standard spending assessment for education in Staffordshire was about half the shire average. They said that, if a Labour Government were elected, they would ensure that problem was rectified in a matter of months. We have had a Labour Government for more than a year, but all we hear is the same old song: we are reviewing the situation.

Ms Armstrong: The review of SSAs we had last year and the additional money that the Government have given to education mean that the hon. Gentleman's local authority of Staffordshire received an extra £17.58 million for education this year.

Mr. George Stevenson (Stoke-on-Trent, South): When my hon. Friend looks at the formula for shire counties and other authorities, will she address the chronic injustice of the area cost adjustment? I know that the matter is under review, but can she give an assurance that the area cost adjustment and its unfairness will play a prominent role in that review?

Ms Armstrong: The area cost adjustment is one of the issues that is being discussed with the Local Government Association this year in the SSA working party. There are differing views throughout local government on what would be a fair system, and one of my concerns, which I urge my hon. Friend to take hold of, is that, although he may perceive injustices in the current system, some of the proposals tabled would result in what he would perceive as even greater injustices. The reality is that we have had a period of severe inequality and injustice in the way in which local government has been dealt its hand; we want to redress the serious injustices, but there is no easy way forward in respect of the area cost adjustment.

Greater London Assembly

7. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton** (Macclesfield): If he will make a statement on the proposed powers of the assembly and mayor of London. [43232]

Mr. Raynsford: My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister made a statement to the House on Wednesday 25 March, when we published our White Paper setting out our proposals for a mayor and assembly for London. The White Paper included the proposed powers of the mayor and of the assembly.

Mr. Winterton: I have a great deal of respect and regard for the Minister, but does he accept that, both at home and abroad, the Lord Mayor and corporation of the City of London do an immense amount of good for this country, and that that benefit should not be undermined? Will he indicate that there needs to be a close and sensitive arrangement between the new mayor and assembly for London and the Lord Mayor and the City of London? I speak as one who holds the office of Upper Bailiff of the Worshipful Company of Weavers, which is the oldest City livery company and which seeks to do good, not only in the City, but throughout the United Kingdom. Can the Minister tell the House how an assembly in which each assembly representative will represent 500,000 people will bring local government closer to the people of London?

Mr. Raynsford: The position relating to the Lord Mayor and the court of common council of the City of London has been discussed on several occasions by me and representatives of the City. We have agreed a clear and sensible way forward which will allow amicable and constructive working relationships between the Lord Mayor of the City of London and the new mayor of London, recognising the contributions that each can make to representing London internationally, which is our main objective.

We believe that it is right that the assembly, like the mayor, should focus on strategic issues that are of Londonwide significance, leaving local administration as the prerogative of the individual London boroughs. In that context, it is sensible to have the larger constituencies, which—if I may correct the hon. Gentleman—consist of about 350,000 electors for each assembly member.

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): Does my hon. Friend agree that, in the new structure, it will be important for the assembly to maintain a check on the mayor, and that it should have sufficient powers to do so? Will he consider how assembly members can be given the resources and, most importantly, the time to devote to that job without being financially disadvantaged?

Mr. Raynsford: My hon. Friend makes a fair point. We set out in the White Paper the important role that the assembly will perform in scrutinising the actions of the mayor and keeping the mayor in a proper framework of accountability. To enable that to happen, we have recommended that assembly members should be salaried so that they can concentrate full-time on that important task, providing effective scrutiny as well as good government in London.

Sir Paul Beresford (Mole Valley): The mayor, the new assembly and the development agency are three new tiers between the boroughs and the Government office for London. All those tiers will have a greater or lesser role in planning, and all of them will interfere, which is a natural local government tendency, to justify their existence. How does the Minister propose to curb the tendency for economic planning blight in London?

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman is out of touch with the opinion of the vast majority of Londoners, who

recognise the terrible mistake made by the previous Government when they abolished London's democratic citywide government. We are putting right that deficit, and we are doing so with the wholehearted support of the business community in London. If the hon. Gentleman had attended the London First reception in the House last night, he would have heard the business community's clear endorsement of the Government's agenda.

Moss Roads

8. **Mr. Hilton Dawson** (Lancaster and Wyre): What representations he has received on the condition of the moss roads in the Wyre district of Lancashire. [43233]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Ms Glenda Jackson): My Department has received 51 letters about Lancashire's moss roads. Lancashire county council bid for support for moss road reconstruction work in its transport policies and programmes submission last year.

Mr. Dawson: Does my hon. Friend agree that we have grievous problems in the Wyre district, where the moss road infrastructure is crumbling? The moss roads are vital to rural community life, but they are unsafe and present threats to anyone who uses them. My constituents desperately need the investment necessary to reconstruct those roads.

Ms Jackson: As my hon. Friend knows, funding for the maintenance of such roads arrives via the revenue support grant. It is for Lancashire county council to decide how to prioritise those funds for the roads for which it is responsible.

Heathrow Airport

9. **Mr. Gerald Howarth** (Aldershot): If he will make a statement on progress relating to the public inquiry into Heathrow airport's proposed terminal 5. [43234]

The Minister for the Regions, Regeneration and Planning (Mr. Richard Caborn): The public inquiry into the proposed terminal 5 at Heathrow airport began in May 1995 and is currently expected to end in November 1998. The timing and conduct of the inquiry is a matter for the inspector.

Mr. Howarth: Does the Minister agree that it is a national scandal that an inquiry begun three years ago and unlikely to lead to a decision for another two years is still proceeding? Is he aware of the damage that the delay is causing to British Airways and to the British Airports Authority? Does he agree that the quality of the eventual decision will not be improved by dragging the process out? Has not the time come for a timetable for inquiries into issues of great national importance?

Mr. Caborn: I cannot comment on that particular project, but I can say that the procedures for dealing with issues such as terminal 5 were set up by the previous Administration. On 15 January, I presented to the House plans for modernising the planning system so that issues of national importance such as terminal 5 can be dealt with differently.

I add that, like the inspector, I hope that the local authorities will give their summing-up evidence to the inquiry. Their decision to withdraw is regrettable, and I hope that they will try to make sure that their views are represented at the inquiry.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): Is the Minister aware that the line put forward by the hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) is also being peddled by the applicants, who have taken up 30 per cent. of the public inquiry's time? Another 6 per cent. of its time has been taken up by British Airways, and individual objectors—the small men and women—have had only 41 per cent. of the inquiry's time. *[Interruption.]* Yes, 41 per cent. It is important that the ordinary, simple objectors have their day in court to resist the big battalions of BAA and British Airways.

Mr. Caborn: It is right that everybody gets the opportunity to object to a planning application. Three, possibly four, years is far too long for any planning application to take. We are revising the system from top to bottom. We shall deal not with the symptoms but with the cause—the planning system. We shall revise and modernise the system when we have completed the consultation, which I hope will be by the end of the year.

Railways (Disabled Access)

27. **Mr. Tony McNulty** (Harrow, East): What proposals he has to improve railway accessibility for people with disabilities. [43255]

The Minister of Transport (Dr. Gavin Strang): We have recently published draft regulations to require all new trains and trams coming into service after 31 December to be fully accessible to disabled people, including wheelchair users.

Mr. McNulty: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Government's welcome proposals will work only if the privatised railway companies take note of them and implement them in full? Can he tell the House what penalties might be used against the privatised railway industry if it does not implement in full our regulations and make the public railway system completely accessible to disabled people?

Dr. Strang: My hon. Friend is right, and we shall not hesitate to take action. We propose that the regulations be enforced by Her Majesty's railway inspectorate, which will carry out inspections of the new rolling stock at various stages of construction to make sure that all the technical requirements are met. The Department will issue guidance on their operation.

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that disabled people, more than any other sector of society, are dependent on public transport? Is he aware that RMT's decision to hold a series of strikes will keep thousands of disabled people prisoner in their homes? Will he condemn that action unreservedly on behalf of those disabled people? Does he agree that it does little to enhance rail as part of an integrated transport policy?

Dr. Strang: All hon. Members want strike action to be avoided and early agreement to be reached between the

employers and the trade union. However, the Government's responsibility is to move as quickly as possible to give disabled access to the railways and London Underground, where it is badly needed.

Birmingham Northern Relief Road

28. **Dr. Tony Wright** (Cannock Chase): If he will make a statement on the refusal of MEL to agree to the publication of the contract terms for the Birmingham northern relief road. [43256]

The Minister of Transport (Dr. Gavin Strang): This matter is currently under consideration by the courts. It would therefore be wrong for me to comment.

Dr. Wright: My right hon. Friend will know that there is great concern about many aspects of this private motorway. What are people to think when a Minister of the Crown has to go to the concessionnaire and ask permission to publish the terms of the contract for that road, and has that permission refused? What are people to think when the construction of a privately funded road turns out to involve over £20 million-worth of public money? Does not the whole sorry saga of the BNRR provide an object lesson in how not to make transport policy?

Dr. Strang: On the latter point, my hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that we are committed to spending £20 million to help meet the cost of that new junction on the M42. That is partly because much of the traffic on that junction will not be on the BNRR; it is also the result of the agreement entered into by the previous Administration. My hon. Friend's earlier point is the very point that is before the court at present, and I am sure that he would not expect me to comment.

Mr. Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington): Does the Minister agree that it is regrettable that the deceit perpetrated by the previous Government in claiming that the initiative was privately financed has been matched by that of the Labour party, which claimed in opposition that it opposed the BNRR but which now supports it in government? Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that it is time to abandon that environmentally damaging project?

Dr. Strang: No. The hon. Gentleman will recall that we set out our position clearly following the receipt of the inspector's report and when we announced our decisions on the accelerated roads review. We do see the need for a new strategic through route, to benefit the west midlands, the north-west and Scotland. Moreover, we very much hope that the new rail terminal at Hams Hall will encourage more freight on to the railway.

School Journeys

29. **Mr. Lawrie Quinn** (Scarborough and Whitby): What plans he has to encourage more children to walk, cycle and use public transport for their journey to school. [43257]

36. **Mr. Brian White** (Milton Keynes, North-East): What measures he proposes to reduce the number of car journeys to school and term-time peak-hour traffic congestion. [43264]

The Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. John Prescott): We will shortly publish a White Paper following the comprehensive spending review, which will deliver on our manifesto commitment to introduce an integrated transport policy to fight congestion and pollution. An important objective will be to reduce car use on journeys to school.

Mr. Quinn: You, Madam Speaker, will know that this week is national bike week. May I commend to you all those people who joined me this morning on the cycle ride to the House? Let me ask my right hon. Friend a very serious question: do not many parents find it difficult to allow their children to progress to school outside the confines of the motor car, because they fear for their safety? Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating local authorities such as Scarborough borough council, which is introducing a cycling strategy especially for children, to allow them to go to school safely?

Mr. Prescott: Yes. That is a very important matter. I welcome national bike week, which is this week. The responses to our consultation about the use of the cycle will be embodied in our forthcoming integrated transport White Paper. We believe that we should make it easier for people to cycle and walk, and that will be a key element in our White Paper.

The question of how we encourage people to cycle or walk to school is important. Between 1975 and 1994, the use of cars taking youngsters to school more or less doubled, from 12 per cent. to 27 per cent. We look to local authorities to think of imaginative schemes to improve that situation. I congratulate Warwickshire county council on the improvements that it has made regarding Myton school. The council built a bridge over the River Avon, which has enabled the number of people going to school on foot or by bicycle to increase—to more than 700 walking and more than 400 cycling each morning.

Mr. White: Many Labour authorities have introduced innovative schemes. In Leicester, 20-mph schemes, among others, have reduced accidents by about two thirds. Many of us hope that, following publication of the White Paper, such schemes will be promoted throughout the country, not left to one or two authorities.

Mr. Prescott: We certainly see that as an important issue. It is one reason why we should like to decentralise some decision making, to allow local authorities more resources and powers to encourage such developments.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): We were sorry not to see the Secretary of State on the bike ride this morning, although we were delighted to see the Minister for the Environment bicycling to work for a change.

When does the Secretary of State expect to publish the White Paper? There have been very encouraging noises, with which most hon. Members would agree, but we have yet to see the substance; it seems to have been delayed—according to newspaper reports—by another month.

On peak-hour congestion, will the Secretary of State encourage fellow Ministers to use public transport, bicycle and walk, as question No. 29 suggests?

Mr. Prescott: Yes, I would certainly like to encourage that. My hon. Friend the Minister for Transport in London is very much involved in achieving such objectives. I flew in from New York this morning—and I do not think that anyone has considered cycling from there yet. As I said in my first reply, the White Paper dealing with integrated transport issues will be published after the comprehensive spending review.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): I am sure that cycling from New York will shortly be Liberal Democrat policy.

May I press the Secretary of State on the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan)? We are more than a year into the life of this Government and there is still no comprehensive transport policy. Why are we still waiting for the Government's White Paper, and when did the Secretary of State first learn from the Treasury that he would not be allowed to publish a White Paper until his whole Department had been vetted by the Treasury?

Mr. Prescott: I suppose that I should offer my congratulations to the hon. Gentleman on appearing at the Dispatch Box for the first time in his new capacity. He should not believe everything that he reads in the press. We are conducting a proper and intelligent discussion and we shall publish the White Paper after the comprehensive spending review, which will determine expenditure for the next three years.

Mr. Jenkin: The right hon. Gentleman has never said that before.

Mr. Prescott: Whether or not I have said it before, it is a proper decision. I do not know when the comprehensive spending review will be concluded or when it will come before the House. Governments make judgments about such matters. The hon. Gentleman should not criticise us for not producing a White Paper after only 12 months in government. I spent an awful lot of time undoing the mess that I inherited from the previous Administration, trying to find the £5 billion that is needed for the underground and a similar amount for the channel tunnel rail link. The previous Administration did nothing about those messes, and I have spent considerable time securing a more successful conclusion involving a public-private partnership that is now offering a tremendous amount of investment in our public infrastructure.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): Those of us who took part in the parliamentary cycle ride this morning appreciated the fact that my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment joined us on the ride and that the Minister for Transport in London was here to greet us when we arrived at the House of Commons. My right hon. Friend will appreciate that a great gift to cyclists would be a reduction in the number of motorised vehicles and the separation of those vehicles from pedestrian and cycle lanes. Can he confirm that the White Paper will encourage local authorities to put in place such schemes in order to make cycling less hazardous?

Mr. Prescott: I assure my hon. Friend that we are already encouraging local authorities to do that. When they see our White Paper, they will realise that it is an important part of achieving an integrated transport system and a better environment.

Drink Driving

30. **Mr. Robert Syms** (Poole): If he will make a statement about his plans to reform drink-driving laws. [43258]

The Minister of Transport (Dr. Gavin Strang): We recently consulted on a range of proposals further to reduce the number of deaths and serious injuries caused by drink driving, and will make a statement in due course.

Mr. Syms: As the key to reducing the number of deaths on our roads is a crackdown on hard-core drink drivers and the tough and rigorous enforcement of existing laws and limits, do the Government intend to reduce the blood alcohol limit from 80 mg to 50 mg—especially as Downing street has made its concerns known?

Dr. Strang: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right: we certainly need to crack down on hard-core drivers who continue to drink heavily before operating a motor vehicle. In our consultation document—the consultation has concluded—we propose a range of measures that we believe will reduce the death toll on our roads as a result of drink driving. I am sure that all hon. Members agree that we need an effective package of measures that will drive down further the number of people who are killed as a result of drink driving.

Mr. Lawrence Cunliffe (Leigh): Does my right hon. Friend agree that many drivers would prefer not to have alcoholic drinks if cheaper soft drinks and non-alcoholic beers and lagers were available? The 400 per cent. mark-up on non-alcoholic lager is an outrageous rip-off and an absolute disgrace. We should consider making representations to breweries on reducing the price of such drinks. That would save us having to investigate this issue, although many of us think that it is high time that it was sent to the Office of Fair Trading.

Dr. Strang: My hon. Friend raises an interesting point, and I shall draw it to the attention of my hon. Friend the Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs. There are still far too many people who are not complying with existing legislation, so it is vital that we achieve more compliance.

Jubilee Line Extension

31. **Mr. John M. Taylor** (Solihull): If he will make a statement on progress on the Jubilee line extension. [43259]

The Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. John Prescott):

Tunnelling and track laying for the Jubilee line extension are complete; 58 of the 59 new trainsets have been built, and the last is under manufacture. Work on station fit-out and electrical and mechanical equipment is well under way. On-site testing of the signalling and communications software has begun. London Transport has undertaken a thorough review of the programme, and plans to open the entire line in spring 1999.

Mr. Taylor: Will the Secretary of State accept from me that the Jubilee line extension is extremely important—almost as important as the Birmingham northern relief road—but will come as poor deliverance to travellers unless he can sort out industrial relations on the London underground?

Mr. Prescott: It is interesting that the hon. Gentleman considers the Birmingham northern relief road alongside the Jubilee line. That road was delayed for well over 10 years owing to the previous Administration's failure to make any decision whatever on the matter. I agree that the Jubilee line extension is an important first new underground line for this generation. It will provide many interchanges, and will be an important part of the integration of London's transport system, and absolutely essential for the millennium.

Mr. John Austin (Erith and Thamesmead): Having visited the Jubilee line, does my right hon. Friend share my view that it is a shining example of civil engineering excellence that has brought much-needed regeneration to an area of London which has probably suffered more job losses than any other part of the country? Does he agree that, if the Conservatives had not abolished the Greater London council, the Jubilee line would probably be up and running, alongside the Woolwich rail tunnel and metro, which are well on target for opening in the new millennium?

Mr. Prescott: I agree with my hon. Friend that the Jubilee line is a good piece of engineering. Hon. Members on both sides of the House will be sad that it was delayed for 12 months, although, to be fair to the people involved, one delay was caused by the failure of a tunnel at Heathrow, which had implications for construction for six months, and the other was caused because the signalling system was not as modern as we had hoped. That cannot reflect on the management of the Jubilee line—I am satisfied that the management is doing well and that the line will be opened in the time that I have mentioned.

Mr. Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the concept of the Jubilee line was one of the great achievements of the previous Government, and that it is in danger of being ruined by this Government's incompetence? Will he repeat the confirmation that he has just given, or will he accept that there is serious danger that it will not be running at full capacity by the millennium? Will he attempt to remedy that by increasing work on the line from 16 to 24 hours a day? Will he deny reports that contingency plans have been drawn up for bringing in visitors to the dome by coach, through the Blackwall tunnel, because the Jubilee line will not be able to cope with the volume of traffic? In short, will he stop messing up a good Tory project?

Mr. Prescott: As is so often the case, the hon. Gentleman's remarks are not consistent with the truth. He should consider what has happened on the Jubilee line and the reasons for the delay, which I have mentioned. The extension will be completed: it was started by a publicly owned enterprise and it will be finished by a publicly owned enterprise. The previous Government decided to invest in private entrepreneurial business such as the channel tunnel link, which failed totally. We have had to reorganise it, so he has been a bit unfair in his ideological comments.

The hon. Gentleman should examine the amount of traffic that is expected to be carried to the dome by the underground—which is about 40 per cent., so it makes sense to consider alternative transport. Not everyone will travel by the underground. People will go by bus, by train and by other means of transport, including a river service, which we have brought back and which the previous Administration could not maintain. We are not doing too badly after all.

Rema

32. **Yvette Cooper** (Pontefract and Castleford): If he will make a statement on the sinking of the Rema merchant shipping vessel. [43260]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Ms Glenda Jackson): The marine accident investigation branch will be investigating the loss of the Rema. It is intended that a report detailing its findings will be published in due course.

Yvette Cooper: I thank my hon. Friend for her answer. She will be aware that men from Castleford went down on the Rema, and that this week some of their relatives have been out to the spot where the ship sank to pay tribute to them. Will she ensure that the forthcoming consultation paper on fishing vehicles accidents is widened to include evidence on marine vessel accidents, such as that of the Rema? I also urge her to consider improving support for the relatives of those involved in fatal accidents, who may be in great distress, unable to have an inquest and bury their loved ones, and unsure of where to turn to find out what happened.

Ms Jackson: The consultation document to which my hon. Friend referred will exclusively look into the appalling record of tragedies in the British fishing fleet. If it were expanded to include merchant vessels, the Rema would be excluded because she was sailing under a foreign flag. However, it will address the issue of flag-state implementation and the Government's commitment to working with the International Maritime Organisation and the European Commission to ensure that substandard ships are taken from the oceans of the world, because they carry with them the risk of appalling loss of life and pose a threat of pollution.

My hon. Friend referred to those who suffered a grievous loss in that accident. The Government will certainly consider all the issues that she raised. I feel sure that the entire House would wish to extend their condolences and their sympathy to her constituents.

Vehicle Emissions

33. **Mr. Laurence Robertson** (Tewkesbury): What discussions he has had with vehicle manufacturers about the steps they are taking to reduce emissions. [43261]

The Minister of Transport (Dr. Gavin Strang): My right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and I have held discussions with manufacturers and their suppliers. We have established a cleaner vehicle task force to advance work in this area.

Mr. Robertson: I thank the Minister for that answer. The Government of the United States are working with approximately 300 manufacturers of cars and car components on the programme for a new generation of vehicles. The Americans and the Japanese seem to be more advanced than we are with the development of alternative fuel vehicles. Has the Minister had any discussions with those Governments? If so, has that advanced our position?

Dr. Strang: Yes, the Government are active in this area. The cleaner vehicles task force has been involved in all these matters. Indeed, the foresight vehicle programme of the Department of Trade and Industry supports the research to which the hon. Gentleman referred. These are important matters, and we want to encourage alternative fuels. Technology has the potential for great advances in this area.

Mr. Paul Burstow (Sutton and Cheam): Given that the Government are keen to promote low and nil-emission vehicles, will they take a leaf out of local government's book and draw some lessons from the experience of a consortium of United Kingdom local authorities through the Zeus project? They are funding the procurement of some low and nil-emission vehicles in concert with other European cities, which, by working together, have been able to lever into place a market for such vehicles. Will the Government use their market power in the procurement of vehicles to make a real difference by buying those vehicles in numbers, so that the prices will come down and the technology will advance?

Dr. Strang: My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister launched the ALTER project at Chester only a few weeks ago. It is aimed at encouraging a number of European cities to exclude vehicles that emit such pollutants. We are also doing a great deal at home. As the hon. Gentleman said, many local authorities are making good progress. The Government often prime those developments with grants from the Energy Saving Trust.

Rail Passenger Safety

34. **Ms Claire Ward** (Watford): If he will make a statement on his policies to improve rail passenger safety. [43262]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Ms Glenda Jackson): Railways are already one of the safest forms of transport but we cannot be complacent. We look to the Health and Safety Commission and Executive, as the safety regulators for the railways, to use their advisory and enforcement powers as appropriate to see that rail safety standards are maintained and improved where necessary.

Ms Ward: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. Does she agree that one of the most important lessons that we must learn from the tragic accidents on the railways in recent years, including the accident in Watford in 1996, is that we should put in place a system that prevents trains from going through red danger signals? Does she agree that the safety of passengers must be paramount and that they must have confidence in the recommendations resulting from any inquiries. Will this Government—unlike the previous Administration—translate those lessons into law?

Ms Jackson: My hon. Friend will be aware that, on 21 May, the Health and Safety Commission launched a consultation on a draft regulation that would require train protection systems to be fitted to all trains and at all key junctions by 1 January 2004. The consultation period ends on 21 August. My hon. Friend also referred to the crash that took place in her constituency. The findings of that inquiry will be furnished to the inspector who will be holding the Southall inquiry. My hon. Friend is quite right to say that safety is of prime importance, not only to passengers' sense of security, but to the Government.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): Will the Minister confirm that she and her officials will be in touch with the German authorities to find out whether there are any lessons to be learned from last week's tragedy, in case there are implications for the operation of our railway system?

Ms Jackson: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that the Health and Safety Executive has already made contact with its German counterpart and will be kept informed of everything that is discovered from that appalling accident. My right hon. Friend the Minister of Transport sent his condolences to the German Minister, which I am sure the House and the country would endorse.

Points of Order

3.30 pm

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. This morning, in evidence to the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, Sir John Kerr, the permanent under-secretary at the Foreign Office said that Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean, junior Minister at the Foreign Office was briefed on the investigation into Sandline International before she answered questions in the House of Lords on 10 March. Baroness Symons did not refer to the investigation on 10 March, and when on 15 May she was asked when she knew of the investigation, she again failed to refer to that briefing. Moreover, on 6 May the Foreign Secretary gave the House the clear impression that no Minister had been briefed about the investigation until April.

As you will be aware, Madam Speaker, the matter is of fundamental importance. Everyone in the House wants the Government to play an effective part in the world. We cannot be confident that they are doing so unless they account fully, openly and honestly to the House. This morning's evidence to the Select Committee—

Madam Speaker: Order. I am very tolerant and the right hon. and learned Gentleman is an experienced parliamentarian, but I now seek to know what the point of order is for me.

Mr. Howard: The relevance is this. In view of the gravity of the matter, as indicated by the proceedings before the Select Committee this morning, have you had any intimation at all that the Foreign Secretary, or any of his Ministers, intend to make an urgent statement to the House, as I believe they should?

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. I shall respond to that point of order, which indeed was not a point of order. The right hon. and learned Gentleman is fully aware that I certainly cannot comment on exchanges that took place in a Select Committee. The House must wait for the report of the inquiry of that Select Committee and that is the answer.

Mr. Andrew Stunell (Hazel Grove): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. It relates to the publication this morning of a consultative paper by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions on waste disposal in the domestic sector. As it was widely reviewed in the media this morning, I attempted to obtain a copy from the Vote Office. I have been notified that it will not be available to hon. Members until Thursday. My concern increased at lunchtime when I met the chairman and chief executive of the Local Government Association and discovered that they had been supplied with copies of the document and have been free to comment on it since this morning. Will you use your good offices to have it made available in the Vote Office without further delay?

Madam Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me notice of his point of order. I have made inquiries, and I understand that a copy of the consultation paper has been sent individually to every Member of Parliament—he might check with the Post Office—and that, at any rate, the document can be seen in the Library. Although, as he says, further copies will be available in the Vote Office on Thursday, my latest information is that every individual Member has been sent a copy of the document.

Youth Parliament

3.34 pm

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Faversham and Mid-Kent): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to establish a parliament of young people in the United Kingdom; to make provisions for the powers and functions of that parliament; and for connected purposes.

The argument for my Bill starts from three main premises. First, law making in a democracy expects that those affected by the laws should be consulted about them. For young people, that is still almost unheard of. Some schools run excellent school councils on which pupils have a chance to shape the regime of the school and influence the staff, but that is still comparatively rare. Some local authorities have established youth councils, but by the time that young people work their way through all the adult rules and procedures, it is scarcely surprising that very few feel inclined to take an enduring share in the enterprise. The problem is exacerbated because very few councils make resources available to back the suggestions of the young.

Secondly, since the young will inherit the mess that we leave behind, they have a right to play some part in defining the shape of that mess. Moreover, many young people are perfectly capable of both inventing sensible projects and of carrying them through with a little help from people who are old enough to have met some of the problems before. My experience with InterAction many years ago, and with Community Service Volunteers to this day, has shown me just how effective, responsible and imaginative young people can be if they are encouraged to be so.

Thirdly, our democracy is threatened by many pressures, but that of voter apathy is certainly important. In the 18 to 24-year-old age group, 32 per cent. are judged not to have voted at the last election. The British Youth Council survey in December 1997 found that 84 per cent. of young people believed that politicians do not listen to their concerns. A huge 81 per cent. said that they did not learn enough about politics at school, and asked for it to be included in the national curriculum.

Just before the general election, I chaired a gathering in Coventry cathedral, entitled "Heirs to the Millennium", which was attended by 750 people, including more than 200 young people. Those young people crafted a youth manifesto, which we presented to the main political parties. One of the most articulate of the young people said:

"The organisers"

of the event

"deserve to be congratulated but I don't believe anything will change. In 20 years' time, our successors will be standing here still saying that nobody pays any attention to what we say."

I do not want to be part of that cynicism. I believe that we can and should change the situation.

I draw some encouragement from the Under-Secretary of State for Health, who made clear to the all-party children group yesterday that the Government have begun to realise that the opinions and ideas of young people leaving care are at least as valuable as those of the adults who have made such a mess of looking after them. I understand that about 40 pieces of legislation affecting young people have either been passed already or are in the pipeline. I wonder how much consultation there has been with the beneficiaries of such energetic law making.

If we want to find out how to deal with truants, playground bullies or the spreading drug culture, we should talk to those who are in the thick of it: the victims and, perhaps, even the perpetrators. I have seen enough successful peer-group teaching about sex, drugs, racism and bullying to know just how responsible 17-year-olds are when entrusted with the task of educating their juniors. Even more important, I know how much better they are at it than even young teachers.

It is true that we have a Minister who is responsible for youth affairs, the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment, the hon. Member for Pontypridd (Dr. Howells). The only problem is that he is also responsible for information technology, constitutional reform, legal issues, green issues and public-private partnerships. What sort of message does that send our young people about the priority that they command in government?

We live in a vastly different world from that in which I grew up. For almost half the young population, full-time employment does not begin until well into their 20s, yet we treat most students as if they had no role to play in the running of their country. We neither consult them nor give them tasks to perform. A handful show what they can do by running student unions with huge budgets or by taking a year out to challenge themselves with responsibilities far greater than they can hope to shoulder at home.

There are plenty of reports to back me up. The Advisory Centre for Education has published "Children's Voices in School Matters" and the Gulbenkian Foundation's inquiry into "Effective Government Structures for Children" made a powerful case for a more effective mechanism for gathering young people's views and doing something about them. Bernard Crick's committee on education for citizenship and the teaching of democracy is about its task as I speak, but children and young people have no direct political power, and play no direct part in the political process. Even when report after report shows the value of participation, nothing is done. The cost of that exclusion is recognisably high and will get higher.

I am calling for a national youth parliament, composed of representatives from local youth forums or councils registered by a certain date. I realise that that will exclude many, but we have to start somewhere. If we wait until we find the perfect inclusive mechanism, we shall wait for ever. I suggest that a representative could sit until the day before their 19th birthday. That is an arbitrary cut-off, but at least those over 18 are allowed to vote, even if they are not allowed to stand for Parliament. I hope that the local representatives will include a wide range of young people and will not be confined to school pupils. One group that could usefully be represented is that which includes those who have been in local authority care.

I have drawn heavily on the proposals put to the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children—of which I am a trustee—by Kate Parish, whose report is an excellent starting point. The Parliament should sit only once a year to start with. I propose that, subject to your approval, Madam Speaker, it might sit here during a recess. It would set its own agenda, centred

[Mr. Andrew Rowe]

on what the young wanted to discuss, not issues foisted on them by an older generation. Ministers would be required to respond in proper form to the proposals emanating from the parliament. Whether they should do so from the Dispatch Box or in writing is a matter for consideration.

In common with the youth parliament structures already existing in areas such as British Columbia and Tasmania, I propose that the objectives of our youth parliament should be: to provide a forum for young people to express their views on issues of relevance to them; to produce a UK youth manifesto that would raise concerns to be acted on by the Government and taken into account in party manifestos; to produce local manifestos to develop an interest in the parliamentary system by combining it with practical experience; to assist in the development of the skills and self-esteem of individual participants; and to give youth concerns more visibility.

I am not alone in my ambition. Among the forces ranged on my side are the NSPCC, the National Childrens Bureau, Save the Children Fund, the Citizenship Foundation, the British Youth Council and the YMCA. Setting up such a parliament would meet several objectives. First, we would give a considerable boost to local youth councils, which would see that their voices could truly be heard in Westminster. Secondly, we would create a mechanism that would allow Government proposals to be discussed by those whom they affected. Thirdly, we would create an opportunity for young people to break out of the disenchantment with the political process that will one day put the whole of our democracy at risk.

I am not allowed to discuss finance in such a Bill. I merely observe that, unless proposals have a real budget, they seldom get anywhere. The record of local authorities around the country is not so wonderful that they can properly refuse to risk the relatively tiny sums that local youth councils need. There are many councils that make me feel safer with a 17-year-old in charge of the finances than with the present Treasury team. I hope that the Government will take the Bill seriously and allow it to progress.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Andrew Rowe, Mrs. Llin Golding, Mr. Peter Luff, Mr. Giles Radice and Mr. Anthony Steen.

YOUTH PARLIAMENT

Mr. Andrew Rowe accordingly presented a Bill to establish a parliament of young people in the United Kingdom; to make provisions for the powers and functions of that parliament; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 3 July, and to be printed [Bill 199].

Orders of the Day

Teaching and Higher Education Bill *[Lords]*

[2ND ALLOTTED DAY]

As amended (in the Standing Committee), further considered.

Clause 2

FUNCTIONS OF THE GENERAL TEACHING COUNCIL FOR ENGLAND

3.45 pm

Mrs. Theresa May (Maidenhead): I beg to move amendment No. 120, in page 3, leave out lines 15 to 26 and insert—

'(2) Those matters are:

(a) the standards of professional conduct of teachers;

(b) the standards of medical fitness required to teach;

(c) the powers which it needs to perform its functions under section 2 of this Act;

(d) recruitment to the teaching profession;

(e) the training and career development of teachers;

(f) methods of teaching;

(g) methods of assessing the performance of individual teachers; and

(h) methods of assessing the effectiveness of different methods of teaching.'.

Madam Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 115, in page 3, leave out lines 35 and 36.

Government amendments Nos. 82, 83 and 11.

Mrs. May: Amendments Nos. 120 and 115, in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) and myself, go to the heart of chapter I of the Bill, which deals with setting up General Teaching Councils. The amendments concern the powers that such a council should have, its responsibilities and its ultimate functions.

The issue has been the subject of much debate both in another place and at the various stages of the Bill. The Government have moved slightly, and clause 2(2) as it now stands is different from the provision in the original Bill. An amendment was made in another place, and although the Government defeated it in Committee in this House, they chose to take part of the recommendation in the amendment tabled in another place into subsection (2).

The Government have moved a little way, but they need to move further. Amendments Nos. 120 and 115 probe them further about exactly what they believe the General Teaching Council is being set up to do. We are probing for clarification, especially about the advice that it will give the Secretary of State—such as whether it should be general and what its nature should be.

The General Teaching Council should be the body that protects the professional status of the teaching profession. I believe that, if it established, enhanced, maintained and improved teachers' professional standing, teachers would

welcome it. However, I fear that the body proposed in the Bill will not be a General Teaching Council that will fulfil those functions.

The Government are missing a golden opportunity to reinstate the professional status of teachers and to bring about the recognition of that status. That is important, because we have a growing crisis in our schools—a crisis of teacher supply and recruitment. Any hon. Member who visits schools in his or her constituency, as I have been doing since I was elected, will hear head teachers talk about the difficulty of finding teachers with particular educational qualifications, especially in certain subjects. Science is a good example. I was in a school in my constituency last Friday, and concern was expressed about the difficulty of obtaining a qualified physics teacher.

There is also concern about the fact that when any post, especially a senior post such as that of head teacher, is advertised, a limited number of people come forward. The Government could help to address that problem through the General Teaching Council that they are to set up. Sadly, however, the GTC that they propose in the Bill will not meet that requirement.

Some might say that to refer to a crisis in our schools is rather too emotive, but that is not my description. The report of the Select Committee on Education and Employment on teacher recruitment, published last autumn, said:

"Many of the submissions to our inquiry, and to that of the previous Committee, argued that there was a 'recruitment crisis' in initial teacher training. The Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals . . . stated that 'the recruitment crisis in initial teacher training continues to escalate', while Mr Nigel Gates, until recently the admissions tutor for a university ITT course, referred to 'a rapidly deepening and very real crisis'. A similar phrase was used by the Secondary Heads Association. The NUT argued that, as 'every single indicator measures in a negative way', there was a 'crisis' in teacher supply."

The Select Committee itself came to the conclusion that its inquiry

"leads us to believe that the situation has deteriorated and that the Government must act to prevent serious shortages worsening."

Some might ask why the establishment of a General Teaching Council can play a role in helping with the developing crisis in our schools. The answer is best given by my experience in talking to some student teachers in the school in my constituency that I visited last Friday. I asked what had brought them into the teaching profession. One student was rare, in that he was a maths graduate coming into teaching. Maths graduates are really needed—there is a paucity of them. I asked why they thought that people were put off coming into teaching. Pay was discussed, but some said it was not just about pay—it was about the image of teaching, how teachers were recognised and whether or not they had professional status.

In introducing the General Teaching Council, the Government could have created a body which would truly have nurtured the professional status of teachers and would have helped to overcome the image problems that the student teachers identified as one of the real reasons why people are not coming into the profession and why we have this growing crisis in our schools.

At first sight, it seemed that the Government were going to fulfil that demand. In a debate in another place, the noble Baroness Blackstone said:

"Teachers are our greatest educational resource. Teachers, in particular, head teachers, are at the heart of our drive to raise standards."

She went on to say that the Government

"are determined to restore pride and professionalism to the teaching profession. There has long been agreement that a key element in this is the establishment of a general teaching council . . . An effective GTC will be an engine for change and a driving force in our new deal for teachers."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 11 December 1997; Vol. 584, c. 253-55.]

Sadly, the Bill—and clause 2 in particular, on the functions of the General Teaching Council—shows that the Government have failed to follow even their own words of expectation about what the General Teaching Council should do to provide for the professional status of teachers. They have not delivered on the early promise. That is why we are probing the Government with amendments Nos. 120 and 115.

The concerns have not been raised only by the Opposition. Information has been sent to me by a number of outside organisations—for example, the Local Government Association, which, in a paper that it sent to a number of hon. Members, said that it

"has a concern that the GTC operates, and is seen to operate, independently."

As we know from the clause—and from the Bill in general—the GTC will be a body which primarily advises the Secretary of State, and the Secretary of State will very much oversee the work of the GTC. It will be far from independent, as the LGA requires.

The LGA went on to say that, if the GTC was to be successful in giving teachers "a clear professional voice"—what the Minister for School Standards himself has said the GTC should provide—

"the Secretary of State, and other stakeholders . . . will have to demonstrate their trust in the profession by giving, and being seen to give, real powers to the GTC."

I suggest that a power merely to give the Secretary of State general advice is not the sort of power that the LGA was thinking of in terms of developing the General Teaching Council to maintain and protect the professionalism of the teaching profession.

The Association of Teachers and Lecturers said:

"From . . . concern for the quality of education for all learners comes our commitment that a General Teaching Council should establish agreed professional standards."

It said that it wanted the public to be

"assured that these standards and that advice are genuinely independent of any constraints to quality that may for pragmatic, economic or political reasons be proposed by Government and gain the professional respect to act as a single voice for the teaching profession."

Similarly, the Association of University Teachers said that it

"would like to see the GTC provided with executive powers rather than advisory powers".

Sadly, the clause will not achieve those results.

The Government have shown yet again that the reality of their proposals does not live up to the rhetoric. The Minister for School Standards can say all that he wants about the need to establish a clear professional voice for

[Mrs. May]

teachers and to restore morale for teachers, who for too long have had too little say in determining the shape and future of their profession—

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Dr. Kim Howells): Hear, hear.

Mrs. May: The hon. Gentleman says, "Hear, hear." I suggest that he thinks about the Government's proposals very carefully, as they will not restore morale by providing teachers with a clear professional voice. The body that the Government are proposing will largely be a talking shop to maintain the register of teachers; it will be subservient to the Secretary of State.

Like so many of the Government's education policies, the proposals for the General Teaching Council will not give powers to people who are involved in education—they will not give teachers powers over their profession—but will ensure that powers are vested at the centre in the Secretary of State. The Government are missing an opportunity to create what is gravely needed—an independent council with real powers to maintain and enhance standards in the teaching profession.

Amendment No. 115 would delete clause 2(6), which states:

"Any advice given by the Council . . . shall be advice of a general nature."

I hope that our concerns about the council will be echoed by the Liberal Democrat spokesman, the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster), who said in Committee:

"Matters such as standards of teaching, the conduct of teachers and medical fitness to teach are crucial. We do not want the GTC to give general advice on those, but specific and detailed advice . . . If the GTC is to play its role in raising standards, its advice needs to be clear and specific."

In response, the Minister for School Standards said that, if the clause did not refer to general advice,

"there would be a danger that the general teaching council's comments would refer to individual teachers."

As my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) pointed out:

"The Minister is arguing for such comments to be anonymous; I am not sure why he is arguing that they must be general."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee F*, 2 April 1998; c. 44-47.]

There is a very real difference. I hope that the Government will confirm today not that, as the Minister suggested in Committee, it will be open to the council to provide specific—rather than merely general—advice, but that they expect the council to give such advice.

I suggest that the Minister thinks about that carefully. If he wants the General Teaching Council to be able to help the teaching profession to regain its status and to improve its image, and if he is to find a way in which to encourage young people—and others, perhaps later in their careers—to enter the teaching profession, he must ensure that teaching is regarded as a proper profession. In establishing the council, the Government have the opportunity to ensure that that happens.

Sadly, the Government are missing that opportunity—they are simply setting up a body with the name of General Teaching Council so that they can say, "We did it. We promised that we would set up a general teaching council and we have. So there is no problem, is there? The teaching profession is okay, professional status is assured and the GTC is in place."

The reality is that, by establishing a body that will be seen not to have any teeth and not to be having the effect that they proclaimed it would have, the Government could be setting back the necessary work to re-establish the professional status of teachers in everyone's eyes. One concern is that the Government may well say, "It's all very well talking about the GTC in its early stages; we see it as an evolutionary body that might in due course take on other powers," but it will require primary legislation to change the body set up in the Bill, as has become clear in a number of the Minister's answers. So, far from being merely an evolutionary way forward, the Government are establishing what they believe to be appropriate for the GTC.

4 pm

Amendment No. 120 would introduce within the list of matters on which the GTC can advise the Secretary of State, in addition to the standards of professional conduct of teachers, the standards of medical fitness required and recruitment to the profession, methods of teaching and methods of assessing the performance of individual teachers. Assessment of performance is becoming increasingly important and it is a matter about which there is concern within the profession—genuine concern about how appraisal systems are operating and, in particular, how appraisals undertaken through the medium of the inspection of any school are being undertaken. A number of teachers have raised that issue with me.

If the General Teaching Council is truly to be a body for and of the profession, it should have the opportunity to look into methods of assessing the performance of individual teachers and making recommendations. It is more important for it to be an independent body that establishes those methods and the professional standing of the teaching profession, but sadly the Government are not going down that route. I hope that the Minister will look favourably at the possibility of at least including within the GTC's remit the recommendation that it should study methods of assessing the performance of individual teachers.

The amendment would also introduce the power for the GTC to advise on methods of assessing the effectiveness of different methods of teaching. That is an area about which there is always much dispute between those who favour particular teaching methods. To suggest that the GTC has nothing to say on that issue, as appears to be the case judging by the original proposals in the Bill, is to miss the opportunity that setting up such a body offers to support the teaching profession. In his reply, I hope that the Minister will deal with those issues and say why the Government have so far not been willing to take them on board within the powers of the GTC.

As I said, that body, as it is being set up, will not fulfil the requirement out there in the education system and the education sector—the real feeling among teachers that they need to be treated as a profession and that the GTC could be the answer to that problem. I know that from talking with teachers about the GTC. Yet again, the Government have, sadly, failed to deliver. In this, as in so many other areas, the reality of their proposals does not match their rhetoric.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Not one Scot was involved in the Standing Committee, which was no one's fault—it was the fault neither of the Whips nor of the Selection Select Committee, but merely the way things happened. It does entitle me to ask succinctly a question that I believe to be relevant to the Bill, because we are still one country, are we not? I have given notice of the question to the Minister for Education and Industry, Scottish Office, who was in his place a moment ago.

What is the latest estimate of the shortage of teachers of physics, to a lesser extent of chemistry, and certainly of maths, in Scotland? Manpower advance prognostication is difficult at the best of times, and a few years ago it was generally thought that there was a surplus of teachers. I understand that the surplus may, over a year or two, have turned suddenly into a deficit. I am asking only for the facts, which are not very different from those in England.

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): It is perhaps a truism to say that teachers feel undervalued, but that truism bears some relation to the fact that the status of teachers has declined socially and culturally over a generation or so. That may be due to many things, some of which the amendments address. It may be that what was once perceived as a vocation is now seen as a job. It may be because of a general challenge to authority figures, or it may be partly the result of the changing nature of teaching and learning, and the changing role of the teacher.

It is certainly true that teachers need to have their value recognised once again. Their professional standards must be high, and must be recognised as such by society. To achieve that, the General Teaching Council should be independent and professional and able to deliver judgments on the competence of individual teachers and on the quality of teaching per se. Unfortunately, the Government's proposals do not satisfy those criteria.

The GTC will be a creature of the Government rather than a genuinely independent professional body able to make objective assessments both of teachers and on more general teaching issues. In that sense, the proposals are a missed opportunity, and they will be seen to be so by teachers and by history. We had a real opportunity to have a renaissance in the social and professional status of teachers. I would have welcomed that, as teachers are vital.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) said, it is time that people in positions of authority recognised, and stated, that teachers make a vital contribution to our children, our nation and our future. I am unashamed to make such a comment: too often, we forget our teachers, who are genuine heroes. Duty and self-sacrifice, the hallmarks of good teachers, are unfashionable values; perhaps we place more emphasis on starry glamour, although I will say no more about that, and do not intend to point a finger in any particular direction.

The GTC offers an opportunity to re-evaluate the role of teachers, to restate the importance of teaching and to raise professional standards. Our amendments would make that happen by increasing the GTC's independence from Government, because it must not be seen as a creature of the Government. I hope that the House will support the amendments if they care as much as my colleagues and I do about teaching, learning and the teaching profession.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): I had the opportunity to speak on the General Teaching Council on Second Reading, and it does not seem nearly three months since then. I was grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) for taking us through what occurred in Standing Committee; I have read the proceedings, but I did not immediately understand them, and I was not a member of that Committee, so I am catching up. From what she said on Second Reading and in Committee, I understand the motivation for the amendment that she moved so well.

On Second Reading, I and others, not least Labour Members, made the point, powerfully reinforced by my hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes), that the creation of the General Teaching Council was an opportunity to give recognition and status to the teaching profession, with the council perceived not simply as a creature of the Government but, to some extent, as a creature of the teaching profession. I qualify that by noting that it is important that, although most of the council's membership should be drawn from the teaching profession, it should include people with an interest in the quality of teaching, such as parents and employers.

In Committee, it was sensibly noted that those who teach in further or higher education should be able to see that the General Teaching Council, through the school system, is delivering young adults capable of benefiting to the greatest possible extent as they move into further or higher education. That is not the subject of these amendments, so I will not dwell on it, but the Government could have done more to achieve that through the council's composition.

The Government could have done more to seek to use the General Teaching Council as a body responsible for, and capable of, promoting teaching as a profession. The hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) made those points in Standing Committee, and may do so again. As the Government have not done those things, our amendments would help to reinforce and expand the council's role by giving it some responsibility for giving advice, which would help the teaching profession to regard it as a body that enjoys the status it demands of the council. The Local Government Association, of which I have the honour to be a vice-president, has sought such a role for the council.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead said, matters such as methods of teaching, assessment of the performance of teachers and the vexed question of assessing the effectiveness of different methods of teaching are important issues that go to the heart of the quality of teaching and of our school system. As the General Teaching Council has no specific responsibility to act on those issues, many in the teaching profession and outside will regard it as an essentially bureaucratic body exercising a bureaucratic function, perhaps usefully in respect of medical fitness and related matters concerning the conduct and dismissal of teachers. It will not be regarded as acting positively and proactively in the system to help to deliver higher-quality teaching and to raise the status and competence of the profession.

[Mr. Andrew Lansley]

I say that advisedly, because I do not regard that exclusively as the role of the council, even if the amendments are passed. Whatever happens, there are separate roles. First, the General Teaching Council is a statutory body for giving advice to the Secretary of State and others as necessary in bringing together teachers and those with interests in the teaching profession and the school system. Secondly, it is important to recognise that there should be a self-regulatory body in the teaching profession responsible for self-promotion to try to improve the quality of teaching.

On Second Reading, I asked the Government to endorse—I again ask for positive comment—the initiation of a college of teachers whose aims would be to promote the teaching profession, to give its members a network of support, to forge relations with other learned professions and to advise the Government from an independent stance on professional issues.

I know that, in Standing Committee, reference was made to the desirability of not, at this stage, drawing exact parallels between the GTC and the General Medical Council, or between the college of teachers and the royal colleges in the medical profession, with which I am a little more familiar than with the teaching profession. Even so, the structure of institutions created within the medical profession over a far longer period has merit, and, even if this is not a case of moving at one leap to a structure for the teaching profession that has exactly the same characteristics, there is every reason to give oneself the flexibility to move in that direction.

I was sorry that my hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead had to chastise the Government for their fixed sense, at this stage, of what the responsibilities of the GTC should be and for not building in flexibility. I am sure that my hon. Friend is right to try, through the amendment, to expand the GTC's role and increase the flexibility available to it. In time, both that body, with an expanded role, and a college of teachers, with an independent, teacher-led role, might give the teaching profession the greater status that it richly deserves.

Madam Speaker: Mr.—

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): Brady.

Madam Speaker: Mr. Brady.

4.15 pm

Mr. Brady: I am clearly not speaking often enough in the Chamber. I shall endeavour to put that right, with your help, support and encouragement, Madam Speaker.

My hon. Friends the Members for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) and for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) wisely referred to the importance of building in a degree of flexibility to enable the GTC to evolve over time and allow it to assume the role and functions that Opposition Members and, I suspect, Ministers want.

The Minister for School Standards will recall that, in another Standing Committee of which we were both members, one of his colleagues said that I had appeared to be painting a picture of Altrincham and Sale, West as a sort of educational nirvana. I plead guilty to that charge, because we are in many ways as close to that stage as can be achieved. My constituency contains some extremely good schools, and, partly because of their local standing and the results that they achieve, there is higher morale among the members of the teaching profession in my constituency than in many other areas.

On Monday, I had an interesting discussion on the subject of the GTC with teachers at a school in my constituency. I have to report to the Minister that their view—an unfortunate one, which highlights the Bill's failure—is that the proposed GTC is a completely wasteful bureaucracy and an empty shell, which offers them nothing and which might load on extra bureaucracy and burdens. That is not to mention the fact that it might load extra costs on teachers by levying a compulsory registration fee on those becoming members of the GTC, which would have to be paid alongside their teaching union membership fees.

I suspect that the reason why so little has been made of the GTC during the Bill's passage lies in some of the tensions in respect of the teaching unions and the question of how the teaching profession should redefine itself—whether it should move in the direction of the medical profession and become a proper self-regulating profession which would not take strike action and in which the role of trade unions would diminish as the role of the GTC and other self-regulatory bodies increased. The direction that the Bill appears to set may be laudable, but I fear that the Minister for School Standards has suffered a loss of courage in drafting the specific provisions in the Bill.

Dr. Howells: Impossible.

Mr. Brady: The Bill does not make proper provision for the GTC to assume the role of a genuine self-regulatory body. I have the highest regard for the Minister of State, but he occasionally marches in a slightly different direction from that taken by other Labour Members, so it is understandable that he is sometimes less than entirely open about his ultimate objectives.

The movement away from some of the LEA powers that have caused so much damage to many schools throughout the country has been whole-heartedly welcomed in many schools and by many teachers. The Minister should take heart from that. *[Interruption.]*

The Under-Secretary mutters about the impossibility of a failure of courage on the part of his hon. Friend the Minister for School Standards, but the Minister should take heart from the proposal, which represents an opportunity for the Government to do something of value for the teaching profession and to enhance the standing of the profession. The opportunity is sadly missed in the detail of the General Teaching Council in the Bill.

The Minister for School Standards (Mr. Stephen Byers): Taking my courage into my hands, I shall deal first with the three Government amendments, which are technical, and then with the meat of the debate—the amendment moved by the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May).

Amendment No. 11 is a simple amendment which will allow the costs incurred as a result of a teacher being a member of a General Teaching Council to be borne in

exceptional circumstances by the General Teaching Council. We are confident that, in most cases, the costs of an individual teacher and the time necessary for the teacher to attend the GTC can be met from the school's budget. Indeed, many schools would see it as a benefit if a member of their teaching staff served on the GTC. The teacher would gain a depth of experience as a result of exchanging views with other professionals, and benefits would accrue not only to the teacher, but to the school.

However, amendment No. 11 recognises that the burden of those costs may be too great for some schools—for example, a small rural primary school with perhaps only two or three members of staff would have to provide supply cover if one of the teachers was away attending meetings of the GTC. We would not want to place that burden on the relatively small budget of such a school. The amendment would allow those costs to be met by the GTC, which we consider an appropriate way forward.

Amendment No. 82 closes one of the loopholes which we have identified. If a teacher is ineligible to register as a teacher—for example, in Scotland or Northern Ireland, having been disqualified because of activities or conduct in one of those countries—he or she should be disqualified from registering as a teacher under the General Teaching Council for England or for Wales. Amendment No. 82 achieves that objective.

Amendment No. 83 is a purely technical amendment which brings clause 3 into line with clause 19. As those three Government amendments are uncontroversial, I hope that they will meet with the approval of the House.

Like the hon. Member for Maidenhead, I visit many schools. Indeed, I had the pleasure of visiting a school in her constituency as a guest at its prize-giving evening—a very good school it was, and I was pleased to discharge that responsibility.

Many teachers are doing a good job, often in difficult circumstances. That was not said often enough by the previous Government, but I am glad to acknowledge it on behalf of the Government. One of our reasons for establishing a General Teaching Council is to give the profession a unified voice. The GTC will be a body independent of the Government, but will work with them to raise standards in our schools.

That is the teachers' objective and the Government's goal. Opposition Members speak about the roads down which the Government are travelling. The Government are united in their desire to raise standards in our schools—not just in a few schools, but in all our schools, for all our children. That will require a sea change in thinking about our school system. At present, far too many schools are not offering the quality of education that our children deserve. It is the Government's responsibility to do what we can to raise standards, and we shall do precisely that.

One of the key ways in which we can raise standards in our schools is to ensure that the quality of teaching is improved. We can achieve that by establishing a General Teaching Council, which will raise teachers' morale and give them a voice. That is why we are keen that most of the council's members should have teaching experience and should only recently have left classroom teaching.

The two Opposition amendments would not add much to the Bill, and one—No. 115—is potentially damaging. Amendment No. 120 would change the functions that the General Teaching Council will carry out by adding to the list in clause 2(2) two new functions: the assessment of performance of individual teachers and the assessment of the effectiveness of different methods of teaching.

It may help the hon. Member for Maidenhead to know that our legal advice is that the assessment of the performance of individual teachers is covered by the references to standards of teaching in clause 2(2)(a) and to the training, career development and performance management of teachers in clause 2(2)(d). Our legal advisers' view is that the assessment of the effectiveness of different methods of teaching is also covered by the reference to standards of teaching in clause 2(2)(a). We have therefore dealt with the concerns expressed by the hon. Lady in moving the amendment on behalf of the Opposition.

On amendment No. 115, it is simply untrue to say that the Bill does not give powers to the General Teaching Council. As we said yesterday, we shall give the council a power of regulation over individuals who go on the register as qualified teachers. The council will have the power to strike off that register people who are professionally incompetent or who have been involved in serious professional misconduct. However, it is important to draw a line between that responsibility and the council's need to advise the Secretary of State on how certain functions should be discharged.

We are drawing a clear distinction between the General Teaching Council's power of regulation over the register and its advisory role in addressing broader teaching issues of how standards are to be raised in our schools. We do not want the council to be drawn into disputes involving individual teachers, which is why it is important to retain clause 2(6), which provides that the advice given by the council should be of a general nature. That will allow the council to use case studies and individual examples to demonstrate practical ways in which the Secretary of State may want to pursue policy objectives. We believe that the present wording will do that, and will not create the confusion that amendment No. 115 would.

I listened with interest—as I did on Second Reading—to the argument by the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) in favour of founding a college of teachers. There is a danger of duplication. We are about to establish a General Teaching Council. If a college of teachers came on the scene, how would that complement the work undertaken by the Teacher Training Agency, which is responsible for recruitment, the promotion of teaching as a profession and the provision of teacher training courses? How would a college of teachers link with the General Teaching Council? There is a danger that, at this time, a college of teachers would not be helpful in developing a clear and coherent vision of the progress that we want.

4.30 pm

The hon. Member for Maidenhead spoke about the crisis in the supply of teachers. There is indeed a crisis, but it was not created in the past 13 months. The Government are tackling the genuine problems in teacher recruitment, which were created by year after year of indifference and complacency by soft Governments, representing the party to which the hon. Lady belongs.

The previous Government's incompetent handling of the teachers' pension fund helped to cause the crisis in teacher numbers. Last year, there was a massive exodus

[Mr. Stephen Byers]

of teachers, often with considerable experience—good teachers, who did not want to leave the profession, but who were forced out of because the guillotine came down in terms of pension arrangements. Thousands of good teachers were lost to the profession, and to our children.

Today, we hear Conservative plaudits about a General Teaching Council, but when the former Chairman of the Select Committee on Education, Sir Malcolm Thornton, introduced a private Member's Bill to establish a general teaching council, supported by hon. Members now in government and by the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster), the Conservative Government Whips—one of whom was the present shadow Secretary of State for Education and Employment, the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts)—killed it off. They did so not 10 years ago, not 18 years ago, but in the past three years. When Conservative Members say that the General Teaching Council will play an important role in establishing and re-creating the teaching profession as something that should be valued, people should bear in mind their record, which has condemned teachers to lacking a voice to speak on their behalf.

The Government are taking action. Within months of taking office, we made the establishment of a General Teaching Council a commitment in our White Paper. It appeared in the Bill, and we are now introducing legislation to put it into effect.

The present Government do value teaching as a profession.

Mr. Dalyell: May I ask the Minister about the teachers who left prematurely, often against their will, because of the pension arrangements? Is there any chance of re-entry, even for three to five years, in the present situation, for those who realise that it may have been a mistake to leave—they may have been forced to leave, incidentally—because of the pension arrangements? Is there any possibility of arrangements being made for them to return, even for a short time, as some of them would wish to do, having been away from teaching for a year, and having found that there is no other work for those of their age?

Mr. Byers: As always, my hon. Friend raises a consideration that is important and relevant to the debate. We must consider how to encourage people to return to the teaching profession. The Government are mindful of the fact that, currently, the number of qualified teachers who are not teaching—more than 400,000—exceeds the number of those teaching. That number has increased in the past 12 months because of the exodus of teachers as a result of pension fund changes. My hon. Friend raises an important issue, and I shall consider whether there are ways of attracting people back into the teaching profession. There may be difficulties concerning individual pension arrangements, but the matter certainly deserves detailed consideration.

The Government value teachers and recognise that they play a vital role in offering our children the best quality education. The General Teaching Council will fulfil the important role of speaking on behalf of the teaching profession. That view is fragmented at present, and the General Teaching Council will put the interests of the profession first and raise standards.

The most disappointing aspect of the speech by the hon. Member for Maidenhead is that it reflected only producer interests. The hon. Lady quoted time and again teacher unions and associations, and prayed in aid the Local Government Association, but she did not mention children and parents. It is a fine state of affairs when the Conservative spokesperson refers not to children and parents and to raising education standards, but to producer interests. That comes as no surprise. The Government recognise that we must put standards first, but the Opposition have not learnt the lessons of defeat. They are concerned about structures and producer interests, and they have lost the plot in education.

This Bill, coupled with the School Standards and Framework Bill, will raise standards and ensure that we provide children with the quality education that they deserve. We are turning our backs on past discussions about structures and the interests of the few. We are putting our children first and improving standards throughout the education system so that they may have the best possible start in life—good-quality education. We intend to deliver on that commitment, which is why I shall invite the House to reject amendments Nos. 120 and 115, and will push the three Government amendments.

Mrs. May: It is the Government who have lost the plot when it comes to education. They cannot raise standards in our schools if we do not have teachers in the classroom. The Government have failed to address that problem: they barely recognise the crisis in teacher recruitment and supply.

Mr. Vernon Coaker (Gedling): I have some figures regarding teacher recruitment. According to the figures for secondary initial teacher training targets and intake, there was a teacher deficit of 477 in 1993–94. In 1994–95, there was a deficit of 1,090; in 1995–96, the deficit was 1,774; and in 1996–97—the last year of the previous Government—there was a deficit of 2,920. Why did the previous Government fail to address that problem?

Mrs. May: This Government will make the problem worse, because they have done absolutely nothing to improve the situation. The Government are facing a problem with their class size pledge. That was identified by the Coopers and Lybrand report, which was commissioned by the Local Government Association—an organisation that is Labour-controlled, not Conservative-dominated. The report, which was published last week, clearly shows the problems facing the Government in terms of implementing their class size pledge—which they are failing completely to do at present.

One of their problems is that, if they are to reduce class sizes, they will have to increase the number of teachers standing up in front of children. Furthermore, if they are not to force children into schools that their parents do not want them to go to, which would deny parents their choice, they will have to increase the number of classes.

Mr. Byers: The hon. Lady knows that the class size pledge relates to primary school pupils and to infant classes in particular. Can she confirm—perhaps I shall be informing her—that primary initial teacher training targets for this year are over-subscribed, as they are for next year?

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): They have been for years.

Mrs. May: The Minister will have heard the sedentary intervention of hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster), to whom I shall give way.

Mr. Foster: Is the hon. Lady aware that, over approximately the past 10 years, there have always been four times the number of applicants than places at that level? Is she also aware of leaks suggesting that the number of applicants for primary teacher training over the past 12 months is likely to be down by about 15 per cent?

Mrs. May: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for pointing out those figures, and he is absolutely right about the normal over-subscription of such places. I have not seen the leaks, as he describes them, about a reduction in the latest primary school figure, but I look forward to the Minister giving the figure from the Dispatch Box.

Mr. Byers: I shall give the figure now, although it has not yet been published. The 1998–99 courses have been over-subscribed, which means that we are in excess of the targets. In respect of the recruitment of the additional 1,500 teachers for this September to deliver our class size pledge, it might help the hon. Lady if she knew that the 65 authorities have met no problem whatever in recruiting those additional teachers to begin the process of cutting infant class sizes to meet our pledge.

Mrs. May: I suggest that, in future, the Minister listens to the comments made by those on the Conservative Front Bench and on the Liberal Democrat Benches. He referred to the over-subscription of courses but, as the hon. Member for Bath pointed out, that is not the point. The Minister will have to do better when he next comes to the Dispatch Box—but, as we know, he has problems with figures.

We have heard thoughtful speeches from my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley), who apologises for having had to leave the Chamber before the close of debate on the amendments, and from my hon. Friends the Members for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes) and for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady), but it is noticeable that the only contribution from the Government Back Benches was that of the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), who raised a particular issue relating to the position of certain teachers with certain qualifications in Scotland. It was also noticeable that the Minister for Education and Industry, Scottish Office, had been in the Chamber before the hon. Member for Linlithgow made his speech, but was absent during it. He has subsequently returned.

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford): The Minister scuttled off.

Mrs. May: As my hon. Friend says, the Minister scuttled off.

The Minister for Education and Industry, Scottish Office (Mr. Brian Wilson): I assure the hon. Lady that my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), who is my old friend, has access to me at all times. If I had had any idea that he would make a speech, I should have been impelled to stay in the Chamber to hang on his every word.

Mrs. May: I look forward to the hon. Member for Linlithgow receiving an answer to his question.

Despite the number of former teachers on the Labour Benches, we have heard no contribution other than that of the hon. Member for Linlithgow on the nature of the General Teaching Council and its importance in establishing the professional status of the teaching profession. As my hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings said, we must recognise the contribution that teachers make. I am happy to echo the Minister's comment that many teachers in our schools do an excellent job, sometimes in difficult circumstances, but they often think that their contributions are not fully valued. I have mentioned the problem of restoring the image of the teaching profession so that teachers' contributions can be fully recognised and valued. That is what the debate is about, but the Government have missed the opportunity to deal with the issue, which is sad.

4.45 pm

We should be encouraging more people—be they young graduates, young people or older people who have had a career in industry, commerce or business and want to give something back and impart knowledge to young people—to go into schools and into the teaching profession. The Government are doing nothing to encourage that. So far, a working party, chaired by Lord Puttnam, has been set up—it is no surprise that one of its main contributions has been a cinema advertisement. As a student teacher said to me recently, that is not good enough, and it will not bring people into the teaching profession.

We need something more. The General Teaching Council was and still is an opportunity for the Government to ensure that we show teachers that they are truly valued. The Minister referred to the setting up of a single voice for the teaching profession. It is interesting that he emphasised that aspect: what positions does he think that the National Union of Teachers and the National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers will take after the setting up of the GTC, and are all Labour Back Benchers as clear about his intentions for it as they might be? My hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale, West said that the Minister's thinking is no always entirely in line with that of other Labour Members, although, as we see time and again during statements and debates on education, he is generally out of line with his boss, the Secretary of State.

It is important that we value teachers, and for precisely that reason we want a GTC that will be of the profession and for the profession—a truly independent body that will establish standards for teaching and take them forward. The Minister said that we made no reference to standards in the classroom, but standards of teaching relate to standards in the classroom. We want to ensure that every child receives the appropriate education and that the standard of education is high. To achieve that, we must ensure that we have teachers of high calibre standing up in front of our children and delivering quality education.

Our proposals about the different powers of the GTC, especially in amendment No. 120, would have gone a long way to achieving that, although I note the Minister's comments about the Government's legal advice on it. In respect of amendment No. 115, I was sorry to hear him make the same argument on whether the GTC should give general advice. Yet again, he referred purely to individual teachers. We are not suggesting that advice given by the GTC to the Secretary of State would be about individual

[Mrs. May]

teachers, but there is a difference between the GTC being able to provide specific advice and expecting it to provide specific advice.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire compared a college of teachers to the royal colleges in the medical profession, but I prefer to consider the GTC in relation to the royal colleges. The Government's proposals will not allow the body of the profession—the teachers themselves—to decide the professional standing and standards that teachers should use in the classroom in imparting knowledge to children. That is the end of the chain.

Mr. Wilson: Is that the end of the hon. Lady's speech?

Mrs. May: No, it is not quite the end of my speech, but almost. The hon. Gentleman will just have to wait a couple of minutes.

The quality of teachers is paramount in ensuring the quality of education that children in our schools receive. The Government have missed a real opportunity with the General Teaching Council. They could have established a body that played an important part in ensuring the continued professionalism of teachers and in enhancing professional standards. It is with some sadness that we view the Government's proposals but, having heard the Minister's response, I shall not press the amendment to a vote. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 3

REGISTRATION OF TEACHERS

Amendments made: No. 82, in page 4, line 14, at end insert

', or

(d) (subject to such exceptions as may be prescribed by, or determined by the Secretary of State under, regulations) ineligible for registration as a teacher, or disqualified from being a teacher in any school, by virtue of any prescribed provision of the law of Scotland or of Northern Ireland.'.

No. 83, in page 4, line 15, after '(4)' insert

'Except in such circumstances as may be prescribed,'.—*[Mr. Byers.]*

Clause 8

THE GENERAL TEACHING COUNCIL FOR WALES

Mr. Byers: I beg to move amendment No. 10, in page 6, line 38, at end insert—

'(5) Subject to subsection (6), stamp duty shall not be chargeable in respect of any transfer to the General Teaching Council for Wales effected by virtue of subsection (3).

(6) No instrument (other than a statutory instrument) made or executed in pursuance of subsection (3) shall be treated as duly stamped unless—

(a) it is stamped with the duty to which it would, but for this section be liable, or

yy(b) it has, in accordance with the provisions of section 12 of the Stamp Act 1891, been stamped with a particular stamp denoting that it is not chargeable with any duty or that it has been duly stamped.'.

I am tempted to speak for 50 minutes on stamp duty and the Welsh General Teaching Council. However, I shall say only that this is a technical amendment. We intend to establish a General Teaching Council for Wales and a General Teaching Council for England at the same time. The need to do so was a view overwhelmingly expressed in the consultation exercise carried out by the Welsh Office. However, amendment No. 10 is a safety measure in case that does not occur. It will allow an orderly transfer of the responsibilities and duties of a General Teaching Council if such a council needs to be established for Wales and for England. If they are to be separated at a later date, the amendment would allow that to happen as easily as possible.

I hope that, with that brief explanation, the House will agree to Government amendment No. 10.

Amendment agreed to.

Schedule 1

GENERAL TEACHING COUNCIL FOR ENGLAND

Amendment made: No. 11, in page 37, line 7, at end insert—

'(4) The Council may pay to the employer of a person who is a member of the Council (or a member of any of their committees but not a member of the Council) such compensation in respect of the loss of that person's services as the Secretary of State may determine.'.—*[Mr. Byers.]*

New clause 4

SCOTTISH FURTHER EDUCATION FUNDING COUNCIL: "RELEVANT BODY" FOR PURPOSES OF SECTION 19(5) OF THE DISABILITY DISCRIMINATION ACT 1995

'. In section 19(6) of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (meaning of "relevant body" for the purposes of section 19(5)), after paragraph (f) there shall be inserted—

"(ff) the Scottish Further Education Funding Council established by an order under section 7(1) of the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992;".'.—*[Mr. Wilson.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Wilson: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): With this, it will be convenient to discuss Government amendments Nos. 60 and 64.

Mr. Wilson: I trust that my brief cameo appearance will be equally non-controversial. The new clause amends the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and arises from the intention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to establish, with effect from 1 January 1999, a Scottish Further Education Funding Council, as recommended by the Garrick committee, which was the Scottish committee of the Dearing committee.

At present, the 43 incorporated FE colleges in Scotland are exempt from certain anti-discrimination provisions in sections 19 to 21 of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, by virtue of the fact that they are currently funded by my right hon. Friend. Educational institutions funded by a "relevant body" are also exempt. Unless the Scottish Further Education Funding Council is listed in section 19(6) of the 1995 Act as a "relevant body", those colleges will cease to be exempt.

New Clause 4 designates the Scottish Further Education Funding Council as a "relevant body" for the purposes of section 19(5) of the 1995 Act. The existing Further and Higher Education Funding Councils in England and Wales and the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council are listed as relevant bodies in section 19(5), so adding the Scottish Further Education Funding Council to that list will ensure that the Scottish colleges remain exempt and are treated in the same way as other colleges and HE institutes elsewhere.

The amendments to clause 39 and the long title of the Bill are consequential to the insertion of new clause 4. I commend the new clause to the House.

Mrs. May: I do not intend to speak for any length of time on this issue. I note that the new clause would bring the proposed Scottish Further Education Funding Council into line with other similar bodies in the rest of the country. Clause 19(5) is in part III of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. The Government have today announced the timetable for introducing part III of the 1995 Act. That has been a long time coming, and many disability organisations have been concerned about how long it has taken the Government to make that announcement. I welcome the fact that it has finally been made today.

Mr. Wilson: I appreciate the hon. Lady's welcome for what has been done. However, I remind her that the Government have been in office for 13 months. Although she was not in the House previously—otherwise I am sure that all those measures would have been taken—the Tories were in power for 19 years.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New clause 7

UNAUTHORISED USE OF "UNIVERSITY" IN TITLE OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION, ETC.

'.—(1) A relevant institution in England or Wales shall not, when making available (or offering to make available) educational services, do so under a name which includes the word "university" unless the inclusion of that word in that name is—

(a) authorised by or by virtue of any Act or Royal Charter, or

(b) approved by the Privy Council for the purposes of this section.

(2) A person carrying on such an institution shall not, when making available (or offering to make available) educational services through the institution, use with reference either to himself or the institution a name which includes the word "university" unless the inclusion of that word in that name is authorised or approved as mentioned in subsection (1).

(3) Subsection (1) or (2) applies where the educational services are made available, or (as the case may be) the offer to make such services available is made, in any part of the United Kingdom.

(4) For the purposes of subsection (1) or (2) the inclusion of the word "university" in any name shall not be taken to be authorised by or by virtue of a Royal Charter relating to a university by reason of any provision of the Charter with respect to—

(a) the affiliation or association of other institutions to the university, or

(b) the accreditation by the university of educational services provided by other institutions.

(5) In approving the inclusion of the word "university" in any name for the purposes of this section the Privy Council shall have regard to the need to avoid names which are or may be confusing.

(6) The Privy Council's power of approval under subsection (1) or (2) shall not be exercisable in a case where the inclusion of the word "university" in the name in question may be authorised by virtue of any other Act or any Royal Charter.

(7) In this section—

"relevant institution" means an institution within the further education sector or the higher education sector as defined by section 91(3) or (5) of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992;

"university", in the context of the reference in subsection (4) to a Royal Charter relating to a university, has the meaning given by section 90(3) of that Act.'.—*[Dr. Howells.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Dr. Howells: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following: Government new clause 9—*University college, etc., not to be treated as university.*

Government amendments Nos. 74 and 81.

Dr. Howells: The new clauses and amendments implement recommendations of the Dearing report on higher education. The Dearing committee recommended that the names and titles used by higher education institutions should be clear and consistent. At present, too many institutions are using unofficial titles that have not been properly authorised and have no clear meaning, which can be confusing to students and others. There is currently no clear statutory control over such unofficial titles.

The Dearing committee also believed that there was a place for a new category of "university college" for higher education institutions that fall short of full university status but have the power to award their own degrees. The Government accepted that recommendation, but there are some technical obstacles to implementing it under the present legislation in England and Wales.

We have decided to tackle both those problems by the new clauses and amendments. New clause 7 proposes a statutory duty on institutions in the further and higher education sectors in England and Wales not to supply or offer educational services under a name including the word "university" unless that name has been properly authorised. For that purpose, a name can be authorised by, or under, any statute or royal charter. Existing properly authorised names will not be affected.

To cover any cases to which the existing powers of authorisation do not apply, the Privy Council will, under the new clause, have an additional power of approval. For the avoidance of any dispute on that point, a name will not be regarded as authorised by, or under, a royal charter just because the charter allows a university to make

[Dr. Howells]

arrangements for affiliation, association or accreditation of other institutions. In our view, that does not, in itself, entitle a university to authorise other institutions to change the names under which they present themselves to the public to include the word "university".

The amendments create a statutory prohibition but not a criminal offence. Injunction proceedings may be brought in the courts to enforce the prohibition.

New clause 9 deals with a technical obstacle to the approval of the proposed new "university college" title in England and Wales. It does not affect the position of University college, Oxford or University college, London. The provisions cover institutions in England and Wales only, because that is where the problems exist. However, institutions in England and Wales invite applications from students throughout the United Kingdom, so the statutory prohibition of unauthorised names applies to the offer of educational services throughout the UK.

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): I am sure that my hon. Friend is aware that a few institutions in England have been awarding their own degrees and higher degrees without using the title "university" or "university college". I draw to his attention the Bolton institute of higher education, which has been seeking university status since 1991. I understand that a decision will be made in the next few weeks after a long campaign that has been particularly active recently. I remind my hon. Friend that we are looking forward to a positive decision, and if we receive one, the town of Bolton will go wild.

5 pm

Dr. Howells: The thought of Bolton going wild is almost too much. I congratulate my hon. Friend and his colleagues on their sterling work on behalf of the Bolton institute of higher education. They have lobbied long and hard, and with good reason. As my hon. Friend has just told us, the matter is currently under consideration by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, who will inform the institute of his conclusion soon.

We intend that the provisions that facilitate the approval of university college titles will be brought into operation quickly. The statutory prohibition on using unauthorised titles will be brought into operation after a reasonable interval to allow institutions to take it into account.

The new clauses and amendments will provide a clarification of the names and status of higher education institutions which has been needed for some time, and I commend them to the House.

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): I read the new clauses and amendments with interest, particularly the proposal that institutions that use the title "university" without proper authorisation will be outlawed. The university for industry is one of the Government's innovations. How do they propose to get around that—or are we to assume that the university for industry will be no more?

Dr. Howells: The university for industry essentially does not exist, except as a pilot in Sunderland, where some superb work has been done by a combination of partners, including Sunderland university, Gateshead further education college and Sunderland training and enterprise council. They have used that as a working title. The university for industry is under consideration and has a pathfinder prospectus, but it has no legal standing. We shall examine its status in due course, but at the moment it is not a problem.

Mr. Green: The Opposition welcome the move to clear up any confusion in the exact status of our universities, as that could cause great damage both to students who may be misinformed and to reputable institutions. I am delighted that the Government are following the recommendations of the Dearing committee. Would that they had done so in other parts of the Bill.

Mr. Dalyell: Some years ago, I had a constituency case involving a person from Singapore who felt deceived in respect of the quality and standing of a particular educational establishment in Britain. Is the new clause really about fraudulent presentations, or presentations that are not quite what they are made out to be, affecting foreign nationals?

Dr. Howells: The intention is not to give the impression that the sector is run through with fraudulent claims about the quality of courses delivered. There is a great deal of confusion. My hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon) has just mentioned one excellent institute, and there are many others. Since the incorporation of higher education institutions and the intensification of competition for students, there is a great temptation for higher education institutions to assume that they can throw the cloak of a university across their shoulders. There has to be a guarantee of the quality of education offered by those institutions, and that is the primary reason for the new clause. However, where there are fraudulent claims, the Government clearly have a role to investigate them thoroughly and to ensure that justice is done.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New clause 9

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, ETC., NOT TO BE TREATED AS UNIVERSITY

' . At the end of section 77(4) of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 (use of "university" in title of institution), there shall be added ", unless in that name that word is immediately followed by the word "college" or "collegiate"." '.—*[Dr. Howells.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

New clause 10

CHARITABLE STATUS OF FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION CORPORATIONS

'.—(1) After section 125 of the Education Reform Act 1988 there shall be inserted—

"Charitable status of a higher education corporation

125A.—(1) A higher education corporation shall be a charity which is an exempt charity for the purposes of the Charities Act 1993.

(2) So far as it is a charity, any institution which—

(a) is administered by or on behalf of any higher education corporation, and

(b) is established for the general purposes of, or for any special purpose of or in connection with, that corporation,

shall also be an exempt charity for the purposes of the Charities Act 1993.

(3) In this section "charity" and "institution" have the same meaning as in the Charities Act 1993."

(2) After section 22 of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 there shall be inserted—

"Charitable status of a further education corporation

22A.—(1) A further education corporation shall be a charity which is an exempt charity for the purposes of the Charities Act 1993.

(2) So far as it is a charity, any institution which—

(a) is administered by or on behalf of any further education corporation, and

(b) is established for the general purposes of, or for any special purpose of or in connection with, that corporation,

shall also be an exempt charity for the purposes of the Charities Act 1993.

(3) In this section "charity" and "institution" have the same meaning as in the Charities Act 1993." '.—*[Dr. Howells.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Dr. Howells: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Government amendments Nos. 78 to 80.

Dr. Howells: The new clause relates to the charitable status of further and higher education corporations. It confirms that they are exempt charities.

Provision to confer exempt charitable status on higher education corporations was first introduced by the previous Government in the Education Reform Act 1988. The same arrangements were made for further education corporations in the Further and Higher Education Act 1992. The status gives certain financial advantages, for example in respect of rate relief and VAT.

The new clause re-enacts existing provisions about the charitable status of further and higher education corporations on a consistent basis with comparable provisions in the Schools Standards and Framework Bill. It is essentially for avoidance of doubt that further and higher education corporations have exempt charitable status. It does not seek to do other than maintain the status quo, and I commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New clause 11

COMPENSATION OF EMPLOYERS

'.—The Secretary of State may compensate employers for costs arising from the provisions in Part 3 of this Act.'.—*[Mr. Green.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Green: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 106, in clause 29, page 28, line 26, at end insert

'subject to no employee being entitled automatically to more than eight hours of study or training leading to a relevant qualification.'.

No. 101, in page 28, line 30, at end insert

'but regulations made for the purpose of subsection (1)(c) may not provide for a standard of achievement higher than NVQ Level 2'.

Mr. Green: The proposals stand in my name and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts). We have heard much during our debates about the benefits of higher and further education being spread fairly among the individuals who pursue them; the firms that benefit from those individuals' efforts; and society as a whole. The costs, too, should be spread fairly. The purpose of new clause 11 is to achieve such a spread under part III of the Bill, which would otherwise place an onerous and damaging cost on businesses, particularly small businesses.

I should make it clear at the outset that, in moving the new clause and the amendments, we are not in any way being anti-training. We believe strongly that 16 and 17-year-olds should be fully trained to the level of which they are capable, to allow them to take a full place in the work force and play a full part in society, both for their own benefit and for the benefit of society.

The problem in this instance is that the Government's good intentions will have ill effects. In that respect, the proposals differ slightly from others in the Bill, where the Government seem to have started off with malevolent intentions. I do not accuse them of that in this case, but their proposals will have unintended ill consequences.

My text comes from the Minister for School Standards, who is regrettably no longer in his place, speaking at a conference in Germany, snappily entitled "Die Bekämpfung von Arbeitslosigkeit in Zeiten der Globalisierung", which I think means, "The problems of unemployment in times of globalisation". The Minister made several cogent points in that speech, telling his audience, safely many miles away from his colleagues in this country, that we must address the issue of non-wage costs; that the cost of over-regulation can be high; and that, in Germany, as I have often heard my right hon. and hon. Friends say—indeed, I have made the point myself—for every £100 spent on wages, an employer must add £31 in non-wage costs, whereas in Britain things are better, since non-wage costs are only £15. That is all entirely valid stuff.

The Minister went on to say:

"We can no longer bury our head in the sand over this issue. Costs do matter. Over-regulation and high non-wage costs put European firms at a competitive disadvantage, and that costs jobs."

He is absolutely right. I therefore find it rather strange that he is putting his name to a Bill that will achieve precisely the ill effects of which he warns us.

If the Government will not accept our new clause and amendments, the problems that part III will bring about will be particularly acute for small businesses. The costs of the measure are estimated to be £130 million in a full year. Research from the Library shows that between 80,000 and 130,000 businesses could be affected by entitlement for time off for study or training. Of those businesses, 80 per cent. are likely to be employing fewer than 25 people.

[Mr. Green]

Further research has shown that the £130 million, to which hon. Members on both sides of the House have referred as the measure's likely cost, will be incurred if only 50 per cent. of eligible 16 or 17-year-olds decide to take up the opportunities. Therefore, costs could be much higher, and would fall disproportionately on the businesses that are less likely to be able to afford them.

If I may, I shall anticipate the response of the Under-Secretary. I dare say that he will produce a letter from the Confederation of British Industry.

Dr. Howells: I was not going to.

Mr. Green: Oh, well, I shall do the hon. Gentleman a favour, then. The CBI says that it accepts the need for something along the lines of the Government's proposal—indeed, that the cost will certainly be affordable for big businesses. Further down the scale, however, they may not be so.

The unreasonableness of the burden falling on small businesses is the reason for amendments Nos. 106 and 101, which try to inject some certainty into the level of obligation that small businesses will be letting themselves in for. How big a commitment are they meant to make? The Bill uses the potentially weasel word "reasonable" to decide the level of commitment. What may seem reasonable in the calm recesses of the Department for Education and Employment may not seem reasonable to a small firm employing one or two people which is struggling or which wishes to expand to employ more youngsters but which will find it more difficult to do so under the Bill.

The effect on small businesses could be serious; more serious still, however, is the potential effect on the very 16 and 17-year-olds whom part III is meant to help. We must ask ourselves what options a potential employer of 16 and 17-year-olds will have. The first option is to take on a long-term liability—giving employees the chance to take time off to study, which may not be practical in many businesses.

The second option is to reduce wages to make up the costs that the business will incur. That must be unpalatable to the Under-Secretary; he would not want the measure to be used as a weapon to drive down wages for 16 and 17-year-olds, although that could be one of the unintended consequences to which I referred.

The third option is even worse: no jobs will be offered at all to young people, who will find it increasingly difficult to get work. We all know that many new jobs are created in the small business sector, and anything that makes that more difficult seems actively counter-productive.

The real fear about the third option concerns its interaction with the Government's new deal. I pay tribute to Baroness Blackstone for devising an extremely good example to illustrate how interaction between the two policies could be deadly for the employment prospects of many 16 and 17-year-olds. She gives the example of three young people. The first is aged 17, and has five GCSEs and one national vocational qualification at level 2. The second is aged 18 and on the new deal welfare-to-work scheme. The third is aged 17 and has only one GCSE.

The first young person could be employed full time at a cost to the employer merely of a salary. The second comes to the employer with a weekly bounty paid for by the Government of £60, plus £700 up-front costs to cover training. The third—the one who is meant to be helped by the measure—comes to the employer at the cost of a full salary and with the right to have regular time off for education and training at the employer's expense, which could last for more than a year. What is any rational employer likely to do? He will not employ the person whom part III is meant to help. Under the two policies, the Government are effectively saying that it is fine for 18 or 19-year-olds to receive welfare-to-work subsidies, but it is not fine for 17-year-olds to do so. They will be less likely to be employed.

5.15 pm

Dr. Howells: The hon. Gentleman is doing the reputation of small businesses no good. Many small businesses—he will know some of them; I certainly know many of them—are already investing a great deal in their young work force because they understand that, if they are to increase their competitiveness, they must explore that group's potential and quality. We are talking about 115,000 or 120,000 young people who very often go to what I am afraid to describe as dead-end jobs in firms that have no will to train them or help them to improve themselves—and so, indirectly, improve the firms. Surely progress must be made on that. That is what the Government are trying to do. Why does the hon. Gentleman not recognise that?

Mr. Green: I accept what the Government are trying to do; why does the Under-Secretary not recognise that they are failing? They are making it more difficult to employ such youngsters. I refer the Under-Secretary to the words of Baroness Blackstone, who has recognised the difficulty. She, as we know, has one of the finest minds on the Government Front Bench of either House, and has pointed out, with tremendous delicacy,

"a potential issue here concerning the interaction of two important commitments".—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 26 January 1998; Vol. 91, c. 33.]

Translated from the higher Mandarin that Baroness Blackstone is capable of speaking, that means, "There are two flatly contradictory commitments here, boys, but let us hope that nobody notices."

Unfortunately, people have noticed. More seriously, small businesses will notice. Precisely the small businesses to which the Under-Secretary referred, which may want to provide training for their employees, will find it more advantageous to provide such training under the new deal for those aged 18 or over than they will for 16 and 17-year-olds. Given the interaction between the two policies, any rational small business—even one deeply committed to training its work force, for all the good reasons that the Under-Secretary gave—will at best be less inclined than they would have been a year or two ago to take on 16 or 17-year-olds.

I hope that this is an unintended consequence and that the Government are merely guilty of incompetence. Anything worse would be impossible to contemplate. Our new clause tries to rescue the Government; it is generous of us to do so. It attempts to deal with the problems of costs affecting small businesses. It would not necessarily

mean an imposition on public spending because it is permissive—it allows the Secretary of State to spend money if he wishes to alleviate the costs for the businesses affected.

That does not need to be all the costs or at all times. At different phases of the economic cycle, small businesses will be more or less likely to want to take on new employees or be able to bear the costs of their taking time off. During an economic downturn, fewer jobs will be available, and small businesses will be more pressed and therefore less inclined to give young workers time off for training. At the margin, they will be less likely to take them on.

The Bill will make it doubly unlikely that 16 and 17-year-olds will gain access to the labour market during an economic downturn. That would be a tragedy. We all know that young workers tend to be the last in during times of growth and the first out when there is a downturn. The Government's measures would accelerate that undesirable process.

We want a proper spread of the costs among all those who benefit from training. We are not anti-training. We all recognise that it is vital for young people who are not in full-time education to receive training. However, the Bill will do the opposite of what the Government intend, which is why we have tabled the new clause and the amendments.

Mr. Andrew Reed (Loughborough): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green), because I want to dismiss most of what he has said. His speech was a sad reflection on the Conservatives and a slur on the many small companies that play a vital role in training young people. That is particularly disappointing, because training benefits not just the companies concerned, but the country, giving us a better-educated work force.

Companies have spent £10.6 billion on training in the past year, but many small companies do nothing. They are sponging off the others. Why should the taxpayer yet again pick up the tab for the worst companies? We have had the same debate on the minimum wage. The taxpayer always seems to have to subsidise the worst companies—those that do the least training, those that provide the worst health and safety conditions and those that pay the worst wages. That is the spiral of inefficiency of small companies that do not want to invest in their work force. Every 16 and 17-year-old has the right to training.

The hon. Member for Ashford referred to the CBI briefing note. My hon. Friend the Minister has said that he will not refer to it, but I shall. It said that the CBI fully supported the idea of the right to study, and accepted the obligations that that placed on employers. That is right. There is a genuine partnership between the Government, employers and individuals. The Conservatives use words such as "compensation", "onerous", "dangerous" and "liability". Given that we are talking about one of the most positive measures in the Bill, such words are a sad reflection on the Conservative party.

The arguments about a possible conflict with the new deal fly in the face of all the evidence, as some of the training and enterprise council research shows, because the schemes relate to different groups of employees. We are talking about 115,000 or 120,000 young people who leave school and enter the work force with the opportunity to gain experience of work and continue their education. Fewer than half the 16-year-olds who leave school and go into work have GNVQs or level 2 NVQs. For 19-year-olds, the figure is only 70 per cent.

The hon. Member for Ashford attempted to quote in German from a speech made some time ago by my hon. Friend the Minister for School Standards. In Germany, there is a genuine understanding of the need for a firm to work in partnership with the individual and the Government to increase its productivity. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor has spoken at recent seminars and conferences about the decline of British productivity relative to that of our European counterparts.

We need a genuine cultural shift to recognise that training—for young people in particular—is positive for the nation and for the companies concerned. Until we make that change, our productivity and our economy will suffer. Only when we can compete with the Germans and other European countries on the basis of the skills and productivity of the work force will we benefit.

I have worked in employment training on several Anglo-German schemes. On average, our 19-year-olds were at a level equivalent to that of 16 and 17-year-old Germans. We are two to three years behind in skills even at that stage, and we are falling ever further behind by not giving our 16 and 17-year-olds the right training.

I would like to make many other points, but I do not have much time. The measure that we are considering is positive. We want a highly skilled, high-wage, high-tech economy, not one that competes on low skills and low wages. That is one reason why the Conservatives lost the general election. Using words such as "onerous", "dangerous" and "liability" about one of the most positive measures in the Bill is a sad reflection on the Conservative party.

Mrs. Caroline Spelman (Meriden): I am pleased to be able to speak in support of the new clause and amendments. I am frustrated, because we spoke at length in Committee about the impact on business, and put a strong case to the Government, explaining why we wanted to help them to ensure that there were no unintended casualties of the Bill. I remain unconvinced by some of the arguments that I have heard. We are talking about compulsory paid training being imposed on business, which causes difficulties.

We have theorised about the impact of the Government's measures during the debate. The Minister told my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) that the impact of the new deal had not started yet. I am particularly keen to participate in the debate, because one of the pilot schemes for the new deal for 18 to 24-year-olds is being run in my constituency. I have kept in close contact with the private company that has been selected to deliver the new deal in my area. Many hon. Members might think of Solihull as an affluent area, but it has pockets of serious deprivation and high unemployment among young people. Applying the new deal tests some of the theories that we have been discussing.

The impact on business, small or large, is not neutral. If an employee asks an employer to be allowed to go to a local college to obtain qualifications, there is an effect on company productivity. A replacement has to be found. There are recruitment costs and two staff appear, from the point of view of productivity, to be doing a job that was formerly done by one.

[Mrs. Caroline Spelman]

From my conversations with Capita, which is responsible for delivering the new deal for 18 to 24-year-olds in Solihull, it is clear that there will be an impact on 16 and 17-year-olds. Capita is actively going out to local employers marketing the benefits of the new deal—the benefits of taking on the 18-to-24 age group for the job vacancies that arise. The 18 to 24-year-old will come with a £60 a week job subsidy and a £750 training golden handshake.

In contrast, the 16 to 17-year-old school leaver will walk in at the door looking for a job with less maturity and less job experience, if any. So it is not unrealistic for Capita to point out to me, as the local Member of Parliament, that it, too, sees the problem that the 16 to 17-year-olds will lose out.

One can theorise about the impact on 16 to 17-year-olds, but I strongly urge the Minister to examine the areas where the pilot schemes are in place, and find out what their impact is today. Businesses are in business to make money, to be profitable, to invest, to grow and to contribute to the local economy. Is the Bill asking them to pick up the tab for the failures of the education system?

5.30 pm

Subsection (c) of the new section 63A that clause 29 would insert into the Employment Rights Act 1996 mentions the need to provide educational opportunities for someone who

"has not attained such standard"

within the statutory education system. We know that that reflects the facts of life, and that some 16 to 17-year-olds—I have many in my constituency—become disenchanted and under-achieve in the education system. For them, school seems to have lost its meaning.

None the less, are we right, through the Bill, to ask businesses to turn round and pick up the cost for providing training at a basic level of attainment that we would otherwise have expected young people to achieve through the education system? I suggest that we are asking too much of businesses.

I support what my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford said about the economic cycle. The new deal is being launched in relatively good economic times. The new Government have a golden economic legacy, and thus a period in which to launch the initiative, the aims of which we share, to encourage young people off welfare and into work.

However, these are the good times. What will happen to such initiatives in the bad times, when the recessionary cycle bites? In my constituency and the surrounding areas, west midlands manufacturing is already in the bad times. The recession is already biting in manufacturing, making it even less likely that businesses large or small will take on young, relatively inexperienced employees.

It is not unreasonable to suggest compensating business for the impact of our asking it to take on the burden of the failures of the education system. It may surprise Labour Members to hear Conservatives asking for that, but we share—

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): May I try to penetrate the cloud of gloom that the hon. Lady has brought into the Chamber concerning what I regard as an inspiring initiative? Would she care to tell us about some of the benefits for business of the new deal, of employing young people and of giving opportunities to young people who may have been failed by the education system but who thrive in a work environment, given the proper support of a business sector which I would say has a greater commitment to the new deal than the hon. Lady has?

Mrs. Spelman: I believe that the hon. Gentleman has just joined us. We are talking not about the new deal but about its bearing on 16 to 17-year-olds' right to study. The point that we are making is about the impact of the introduction of the new deal on that group. I am not trying to be gloomy; I am trying to be practical.

The fact is that manufacturing is in recession, and it is looking hard at recruitment—

Mr. Reed: When manufacturing came out of recession in the early 1980s and in the early 1990s, was not one of the problems that the sector found a massive skills shortage, because the first thing that companies had done in the recession was to stop training? Is that not evidence of the need to continue training? Other European countries could pick themselves up out of recession more quickly because they continued to train during periods of recession.

Mrs. Spelman: The hon. Gentleman's intervention allows me to return to a point that he touched on in his speech. There are fundamental differences between the practical training available in this country and training in Germany for 16 to 17-year-olds, which he cited. In this country we do not have the equivalent of the Handelschule. Being a student of such matters, the hon. Gentleman will know that that is a clearly designated school of training for applied skills, of which there is no equivalent in the British educational tradition—although perhaps the Minister should consider the idea.

In Germany such schools remain within the education system. We are not looking at the German example and replicating their successful schools of practical training if we ask business to do the job for us. The hon. Gentleman should know that it is important to make a distinction between the British and the German education systems. Otherwise one could go away with the impression that German business was doing all that. As for our competitiveness, I remind the hon. Gentleman to look closely at unemployment rates among our young people and among those in countries such as Germany and France, because they are revealing.

I wholly endorse the new clause, which seeks to compensate business for bearing an unfair burden. Amendment No. 106, reasonably, imposes a time limit. Why should the requirement from business be open-ended? Our amendment comes close to the old concept of "one-day" day release—the idea of eight hours of study, for which the employer pays. For the requirement to be open-ended would be unreasonable.

Mrs. Diana Organ (Forest of Dean): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Spelman: I am just about to finish my speech.

In Committee we tried to help the Government by warning them—people can call it gloomy if they like, but I consider it realistic—that the 16 to 17-year-olds are a group of people in British society whom, probably unwittingly, they would disadvantage under this part of the Bill. The Prime Minister used the term "the *Loaded* generation" to define a group disaffected from statutory education. That is the group that is likely to suffer if the Bill is passed unamended. That is why I support the new clause and the amendments.

Valerie Davey (Bristol, West): Yesterday, concern was expressed from all parts of the House that more young people from low-income families should be entering higher education, so I am disappointed that all those Members are not here this evening to celebrate this part of the Bill.

We are genuinely concerned to ensure that young people aged from 16 to 18 are encouraged into education and training. Rather than relating that subject to the new deal, I encourage Members to read the Select Committee report on further education published last week. If the Government take that on board, more young people will be encouraged and enabled to stay on at school between 16 and 18, and therefore to enter higher education.

However, that will not happen immediately, so young people going into work deserve that level of training, encouraged by the Government—

Mr. Hayes: Does the hon. Lady believe that society has an ethical responsibility to fund that, or should it be funded at random—by businesses and individuals, for example?

Valerie Davey: We certainly recommend that all corners of society should contribute. The hon. Gentleman may say that education is expensive, but I am sure that business and industry, and our community, would agree that lack of education is even more expensive. We need to encourage business to make its contribution, and I think that the Opposition have underestimated the contribution that that sector is already making, and the good will involved.

I shall now talk briefly about the two amendments. The hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) talked about eight hours, but the amendment does not say whether that means eight hours a week, a month or a year. The amendment is sloppily worded and should have been refined before being brought to the House.

Young people who, for whatever reason, do not stay on at school deserve to reach their potential at some level. Initially, we need to encourage those young people who have not reached GNVQ level 2 but, in the longer term, young people who are out of education but who are able to reach higher levels must be encouraged. Otherwise, there will be a discouragement to employing such people.

The amendments need to be rejected out of hand and we should support the original wording of the Bill, which is to be celebrated and not detracted from in any measure by this House.

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus): Throughout the debates on the Bill, I have attacked the Government. This time, I wish to support them, and for exactly the same reason—the value of education. The Conservatives' amendments show that they know the price of everything and the value of nothing. The value of education is crucial if we are to build a modern and prosperous economy.

The problem for small businesses has always been one of time. If a small business employs somebody, it needs that person to do the work. As a former senior lecturer in further education, I know that it was up to the colleges and the providers of education to make sure that provision was there as and when the businesses needed it. Therefore, it is up to the providers of education to fit in with the needs of small businesses and to make sure that their requirements are met. The problems can be easily overcome.

The official Opposition may be worried about the effect on small businesses, but it would be worse to have untrained and unqualified staff. Added value is required to build a prosperous and modern economy, and that must mean the added value of an educated and trained work force. If we want quality and raised standards, they must be paid for and planned.

The Conservatives' amendments offer nothing positive. They seek to lower the time available for study and the qualifications gained. Their aim is negative and off-target. In this case, the Government have got it right, and I certainly support them.

Dr. Howells: The speech by the hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) epitomises the dilemma faced by the Conservative party. The party remains in chronic denial, clinging to a miserable reactionary position—a worm-ridden lifebelt. In 1968, we used to refer to people like the Tories as Poujadists. What a horrible bunch they are when they act like that.

The Conservatives want to deny young people in society the opportunity to take time off from work to enhance their own employability, to acquire new skills and—indirectly—to enable firms to become more profitable, so that their region can become more competitive and the country can benefit. All the Conservatives can do is to defend a miserable minority of reactionaries who always cry "injustice" whenever anybody asks them to put up some money on behalf of their employees and the country.

We will not wear it. There will be a right for young people aged 16 and 17 to take time off to study. It will benefit them, and all of us, and I hope that the hon. Member for Ashford will see fit to withdraw this reactionary nonsense.

Mr. Green: The speeches from Labour Members—epitomised by the that of Minister—combined economic illiteracy and soft-headed good thoughts in about equal measure. The Government are happy to make pious speeches on the importance of training, but they are not happy to put their own assets where their mouth is. As long as somebody else is paying the bill, it does not matter.

The Government are happy to make moral speeches about how important it is to introduce training, but they do not have the guts to do as previous Labour Governments would have done—to increase taxes. They have decided that the way forward is to have hidden taxes on business. In this case, they think that small businesses do not matter, so they can impose the burden on them. To describe the small business sector of this country as "miserable reactionaries"—as the Minister just did—

[Mr. Green]

epitomises what Labour really thinks. Underneath the gloss of new Labour is the hatred of small business and enterprise—

Caroline Flint (Don Valley): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Green: Not at this stage. The Minister's speech epitomised his party's attitude, which has no intellectual—

It being two hours after the commencement of proceedings on consideration of the Bill, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER, *pursuant to the Order [19 May] and the Resolution [8 June], put forthwith the Question already proposed from the Chair.*

Question put and negatived.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *then proceeded to put forthwith the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that hour.*

Clause 34

JOINT EXERCISE OF FUNCTIONS OF FUNDING COUNCILS IN SCOTLAND

Amendments made: No. 55, in page 33, line 3, leave out 'Treasury' and insert

'Minister for the Civil Service'.

No. 56, in page 33, line 4, leave out from first 'as' to 'may' and insert 'he'.

No. 57, in page 33, line 4, leave out from second 'as' to 'may' in line 5 and insert 'he'.—*[Mr. Jamieson.]*

Clause 36

GENERAL INTERPRETATION

Amendments made: No. 73, in page 34, line 8, at end insert—

' "functions" includes powers and duties;

"modifications" includes additions, alterations and omissions, and "modify" shall be construed accordingly;'.

No. 99, in page 34, line 13, at end insert—

'(2) In the following provisions of this Act, namely—

(a) sections 12, 15 and 19, and

(b) Schedule 2,

"employer", in relation to a teacher, includes a local education authority, governing body or other person who engage (or make arrangements for the engagement of) that person to provide his services as a teacher otherwise than under a contract of employment, and "employed", "employment" and any expressions relating to the termination of employment shall be construed accordingly.'.—*[Mr. Jamieson.]*

Clause 38

NORTHERN IRELAND

Amendment made: No. 75, in page 34, line 21, leave out 'to 24' and insert

', *(Transfer or delegation of functions relating to student support)*, *(Supply of information in connection with student loans)*, 23 and 24'.—*[Mr. Jamieson.]*

Clause 39

SHORT TITLE, COMMENCEMENT AND EXTENT

Amendments made: No. 58, in page 35, line 1, after 'Scotland' insert 'only'.

No. 59, in page 35, line 4, leave out '30' and insert

'*(Supply of information in connection with student loans: Scotland)*, except that subsections (3) and (10A) of section 73A, and section 73AA so far as relating to any function exercisable by virtue of those subsections, of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 (which are inserted by section 27) shall also extend to England and Wales and Northern Ireland,'.

No. 60, in page 35, line 5, leave out from '34' to end of line 6 and insert

' and *(Scottish Further Education Funding Council: "relevant body" for purposes of section 19(5) of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995)*'.

No. 61, in page 35, line 6, at end insert—

'(6A) The following provisions also extend to Scotland—

section 22 so far as relating to the making of any provision authorised by subsection (2)(a), (c), (j) or (k), (3)(e) or (5) of that section,

section *(Transfer or delegation of functions relating to student support)* so far as relating to any function exercisable by virtue of any provision so authorised,

sections 29 and 30,

section *(Unauthorised use of "university" in title of educational institution, etc.)*,

section 35, and

this section.'.

No. 68, in page 35, line 7, at end insert—

'section 22 so far as relating to the making of any provision authorised by subsection (2)(a), (c), (j) or (k), (3)(e) or (5) of that section,

section *(Transfer or delegation of functions relating to student support)* so far as relating to any function exercisable by virtue of any provision so authorised,'.

No. 74, in page 35, line 7, at end insert—

'section *(Unauthorised use of "university" in title of educational institution, etc.)*,'.—*[Mr. Jamieson.]*

Schedule 3

MINOR AND CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS

Amendments made: No. 62, in page 42, line 30, leave out '73(1)(f)' and insert '73(f)'.

No. 63, in page 42, line 36, leave out '73(1)(f)' and insert '73(f)'.

No. 78, in page 43, line 3, at end insert—

'Further and Higher Education Act 1992 (c.13)

. In section 17 of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 ("further education corporation" and "operative date"), at the end of subsection (1) add "or which has become a further education corporation by virtue of section 47 of this Act".

. In section 90(3) of that Act (interpretation), after ""university"" insert "(except where the context otherwise requires)".'.

No. 79, in page 43, line 3, at end insert—

'Charities Act 1993 (c.10)

. In section 3 of the Charities Act 1993 (the register of charities), after subsection (5) insert—

"(5A) In subsection (5) above, paragraph (a) shall be read as referring also to—

(a) any higher education corporation within the meaning of the Education Reform Act 1988, and

(b) any further education corporation within the meaning of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992." '.—*[Mr. Jamieson.]*

Schedule 4

REPEALS

Amendment made: No. 80, in page 44, line 18, at end insert—

'1993 c. 10.	Charities Act 1993.	In Schedule 2, paragraphs (h) and (j).'

—[Mr. Jamieson.]

Title

Amendments made: No. 81, in line 6, leave out from 'them' to 'to' in line 9 and insert

'; to make provision with respect to the funding of higher education institutions and certain further education, and other matters relating to further and higher education institutions;'.

No. 64, in line 15, after '1973;' insert

'to provide that the Scottish Further Education Funding Council shall be a relevant body for the purposes of section 19(5) of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995;'.—*[Mr. Jamieson.]*

Order for Third Reading read.

5.45 pm

The Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. David Blunkett): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

With this Bill and the School Standards and Framework Bill, we will enhance the standards of education in our country and ensure that opportunity is opened up. We will modernise the education service through schools and higher education for the 21st century.

We will ensure that the legislative framework exists to enable us to provide a teaching profession that can be proud of its professionalism. The General Teaching Council, which will control entry and exit from the profession, is part of that, ensuring that—for the first time—the profession itself has a body that can speak for, and on behalf of, those who serve in it. I am pleased that we appear to have universal agreement on delivering the GTC, which has bedevilled the debate in the education service for some years.

I am pleased also that we appear to have agreement on the introduction of a proper induction year for teachers. We all recall the failure properly to implement the previous arrangements, and we all know of the real difficulties faced by young teachers in that crucial first year. It is not simply induction that is important; the amount of time made available for preparation is also important. All of us who have been in teaching will never forget the burden of preparation and finding one's feet during the long hours of that first year. Therefore, an induction period with a relaxation of contact time for teachers will make a difference.

In addition, support will be available for teachers, and—linked to the advanced skills teacher post—it will be possible to give the supervision and help that are required. I hope also that the arrangements will reduce the drop-out rate. The number of young people who undertake teacher training but do not take a position or drop out after the first year is extremely worrying. Were we to be able to reverse that trend, many of the recruitment problems, and the gaps in terms of vacancies, would be eased. The measures will help also to lift the morale and status of the profession generally.

Leadership in teaching is one of the most important issues that we can address. The national professional qualification for headship is a vital step toward ensuring that we have that leadership, and proper training for those who are crucial to the development of the standards agenda. Therefore, it is encouraging that the 3,000 people who have gone into NPQH training have found it to be of use and of value. We must monitor what is happening to make sure that it is meeting the needs of heads of the future. We also need to extend the Headlamp scheme to cover those who are already head teachers, so that we can develop the profile of the job and the training that is needed for the future.

We are mindful of the importance of ensuring that initial teacher training is right. As hon. Members know, we have introduced the curriculum for teacher training; the inspection of teacher training institutions is critical if we are to ensure that standards are maintained and that best practice is followed in all our teaching institutions. With the assistance of the Teacher Training Agency, we can not only assess what is happening at the moment, but get it right for the future.

When the guillotine came down, we were debating the right to study. I believe that it is incumbent on this country to prepare its young people for the future. We need to ask whether we really want a high-tech, added-value economy, in which young people can learn the skills that they need to enhance their opportunities and those of the companies for which they work, or whether we are prepared to put up with being an offshore island that ticks along as a branch-plant economy, looking on as the rest of the world—north America, the developing world in south-east Asia and, increasingly, Europe—equips itself for a modern, 21st-century economy.

We have to face a global economy in which we must invest in human capital and create a knowledge-based society. We have a choice: either we invest in those hands-on skills that are crucial to the viability and survival of companies, big or small, or we abandon young people to the vagaries of the labour market and say that it does not really matter. I think that there is consensus among the political parties—with the exception, perhaps, of the Conservative party—about how we can get things right for the future. Giving people the right to study is not much to ask—I benefited from it when I went on day-release courses and, in my own time, to evening classes to obtain the necessary qualifications, both vocational and academic, to get into university.

We are talking about the difference between those who treat people as mere commodities and those who want to invest in them as the economic and social future of our country. I believe that people respond to the way in which they are treated—if they are given rights and they take those rights, they accept the responsibilities that go with them.

The car industry provides good examples of young people being given day release or adequate in-house training—Ford and Rover have shown how in-house training can work. In associated industries and in modern electronics and telecommunications—Unipart and

[Mr. David Blunkett]

Motorola are good examples—considerable steps have been taken, and investment in training is superb. Companies that invest in training gain the rewards—they are at the cutting edge; they are one step ahead and they can compete with the rest of the world—whereas those that do not can expect to tick along for a year or two exploiting human and fixed capital before they go bust, and no one gains from that.

I was dispirited to hear the Conservative party's contribution to the debate. All these matters are linked: high-quality education; the ability to ensure that standards are maintained; leadership; the development of education and training associated with work; the development of education for those who are not in work; and the ability to expand access to the best of education, including higher education, which costs us most, but which rewards us most, and to which, in the new arrangements that we debated last night, we have asked people to contribute.

I do not intend to go through all that again. In fact, I hope that I never have to go through it all again in quite the same way—I did not come into politics to be a masochist. However, in the debates on the Bill, we have been encapsulating the efforts that we are making in education from the early years right the way through to the cutting edge of a knowledge-based economy—higher education is absolutely vital to whether that will be a success.

Mr. Dalyell: As I explained to the House earlier, the fact that there was no Scot on the Standing Committee was not the fault of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, but I ask him to reconsider the position whereby Scottish universities are asked to discriminate financially between students solely on the basis of which part of the United Kingdom they are from. Financial discrimination on the basis of geographical residence cannot be sustained.

I have a constructive suggestion. Will either a Minister or senior officials talk to Stewart Sutherland, the vice-chancellor of Edinburgh university and former vice-chancellor of London university, whom they know well, and to other Scottish principals, to see whether something can be done about a situation that, as long as Scotland is part of the United Kingdom, cannot continue?

Mr. Blunkett: My hon. Friend will realise that I do not intend, on Third Reading, to reopen yesterday's debate. Of course my Scottish Office colleagues and I would be happy to talk to the vice-chancellor of Edinburgh university and to other vice-chancellors to establish how best we can develop the programme for the future and to assess what difficulties, if any, arise from the decisions that have been taken. I gave such an assurance yesterday on the position of mature students, and I am happy to give my hon. Friend a similar assurance today.

We are embarking on a new road, and we need to ensure that assessment clarifies how the new arrangements are working and monitors their success or otherwise—that is common sense. I genuinely want to build a consensus that will provide stability and continuity in investing for the future, in opening up access and in providing real opportunity where it did not exist before.

I thank all my hon. Friends for their work—

Mr. Brady: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Blunkett: I want to say a word of thanks—I shall give way afterwards.

I thank my hon. Friends, especially those who served on the Standing Committee and those who supported the Government through difficult times yesterday—I want to tell them how much that was appreciated, given the difficult task we faced in trying to get these issues right. I also applaud those Opposition Members—especially the Liberal Democrats—who, despite disagreements on some parts of the Bill, supported us on the vast majority of the issues. I also applaud those Conservative Members who, on Second Reading and before, bravely demonstrated their support for the measures that we are taking.

Mr. Brady: I thank the Secretary of State for giving way. May I press him on the point that was raised by the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell)? The Secretary of State properly and generously agreed to reconsider whether the policy was working in practice—I take that to mean whether the number of English students at Scottish universities has fallen or increased—but will he go further and tell the House whether he believes that such discrimination, whereby English students will have to pay more than students from elsewhere in the United Kingdom, is defensible in principle?

Mr. Blunkett: I regret the fact that the hon. Gentleman was not here last night; if he had been, he would have noticed that, at least once, a Labour Member made an inappropriate intervention at a particularly crucial part of my speech—I thought that his intervention was at an equally inappropriate moment.

I shall not reopen that debate on Third Reading; the hon. Gentleman had the opportunity to speak yesterday, but he was not here. We have made it clear that the decision taken by our Scottish Office colleagues is defended and supported both in principle and in practice. As part of the development of future continuity, we are perfectly willing to monitor the measures that we have taken. That is reasonable, and it is certainly the way in which we in this Department would wish to proceed on a range of measures that are considered by the House.

I am proud of what we are doing, both in this Bill and in the School Standards and Framework Bill. I hope that our opponents in the Lords will not prevent that critical measure from reaching the statute book as fast as possible to protect the interests and the opportunities of children and I hope that, from tonight, we can go forward with this Bill to ensure that we open up that equality of opportunity in a way that has not been present in the past.

5.59 pm

Mr. David Willetts (Havant): Debates on the Bill have been most interesting, and the Standing Committee was the most interesting on which I have served since my days as a junior Whip, when the Labour Whip opposite me was the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Ms Morris), now Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment. We worked on the sensible basis that neither of us would try to catch out the other in any way, and managed to steer the Bill through on that basis.

I am afraid that this Bill led to a serious debate in Committee about important educational issues, and the surprisingly downbeat and low-key summary that we have just heard from the Secretary of State does not convey the energy with which a variety of important educational matters have been debated during its passage.

I must pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood (Mr. Dorrell), who led the opposition to the Bill throughout most of our debates on it. As Ministers were kind enough to say, he provided a model of effective, quizzical examination of the Government's proposals. I also appreciated the contributions by other Opposition Members, who made important points. We have since had the pleasure of being joined by my hon. Friends the Members for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) and for Ashford (Mr. Green), who have spoken effectively in the debate today.

The Bill contains measures on four crucial areas. The first is on the General Teaching Council, which we have already debated today and about which I will say only that the model that my right hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood had in mind was that of the General Medical Council, with which he was familiar from his time as Secretary of State for Health. The trouble with the proposal before us is that it is neither one thing nor the other, and it does not have the prospect of growing into the sort of professional body that the GMC is. One of our frustrations with the Bill is that it is so restrictive. It stipulates so precisely what the GTC can do that, although Ministers have tried to placate their critics with many soft warm words about how it could expand and develop its role, it is difficult to see how that is possible.

Secondly, I do not believe that the Secretary of State referred in his rather cautious summary to the measures on head teachers and the professional headship qualification. Again, we are perfectly happy for head teachers to secure professional headship qualifications and, indeed, would encourage them to do so; the question is whether the proposals in the Bill, which require that as a precondition for practising as a head teacher, are the right way forward.

Mr. Blunkett: Yesterday, I had to draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to amendment No. 77 and now I must draw his attention to the fact that I have spoken at some length about the national professional qualification for headship and the development of the Headlamp scheme. I also said that 3,000 had entered it and that we would need to monitor how it was going and how it could be improved. I wanted to point that out in case the hon. Gentleman had slipped out for a moment and missed what I said.

Mr. Willetts: I was happy to subscribe to that amendment, as we tabled it—the Secretary of State appeared to be unaware of that point when we debated it yesterday. However, I accept that he did cover the qualifications for head teachers.

Our concern is that, if it is made a statutory requirement, instead of steady, organic growth for the professional headship qualification, we will see the simple and rigid application of a regulation, which will not meet the objectives that the Government have set out—raising professional standards among head teachers. We will see the development of paper qualifications, which will be a precondition for working as a head teacher, not the longer, harder and ultimately more rewarding process of developing consensus in the teaching profession about what is necessary as a qualification to practise as a head teacher.

Thirdly, the Bill contains proposals on the right to study for 16 and 17-year-olds, on which my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford touched earlier. The point is simple. Ministers cannot celebrate the flexibility of the British economy without thinking about how it is to be earned and preserved. Preserving the gains of flexibility that we secured in the past 18 years involves ensuring that burdens are not imposed on business that will deter it from doing the very things that we all want. We do not think that it is desirable to have a low-paid, unskilled work force, which is the myth that the Labour party tries to propagate. However, we do not believe that the way forward is simply to pass laws about it. The Government do not understand that the way to improve economic performance is not simply by burdening business with ever more regulation.

The most important measures in the Bill are on higher education, and it was perhaps those that the Secretary of State had in mind when he referred to the need to "build a consensus". That might have to begin with the 31 Labour Members who did not appear to be a part of the consensus on the subject last night—it is no wonder that they were not, as they were invited to support measures that clearly contradict undertakings given before the general election campaign. *[Interruption.]*

I see Labour Members shaking their heads. If any Labour Members can explain how the present Prime Minister could have fought the election campaign on the basis of having no plans to introduce tuition fees and then promptly introduced a measure that imposed such fees without clearly being in breach of an election promise, I will be happy to hear from them. The Secretary of State could not carry 31 of his colleagues through the Lobby last night, because what they were invited to vote on was not the prospectus that was put before the electorate at the election. *[Interruption.]*

I hear Labour Members muttering, "Manifesto." They cannot have it both ways on the manifesto—they cannot claim, as we heard last night, that the abolition of the maintenance grant must get through because it was a manifesto pledge, without accepting, on the same line of argument, that the imposition of tuition fees should not get through because it was clearly contrary to pre-election assurances given by the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), now the Prime Minister.

The Government could have seized an historic opportunity. On 1 May 1997, the world of higher education had enormous good will toward the incoming Government. Many people in that world hoped for great things from this Government. They had all been successfully seduced by a variety of Labour spokesmen over the years, and hoped for great things. There was not merely good will for the new Ministers, but the prospect of a serious piece of work arriving on their desks—the Dearing report, which would set out the way forward for them. The Government had the combination of good will and the most serious investigation of higher education for a generation, which provided them with the opportunity to develop a policy agenda for higher education that took us a stage beyond the one that we had reached with the enormous expansion of that sector, in which every Conservative Member can take pride.

[Mr. Willetts]

We recognised that things could not carry on indefinitely as they had been, and that is why we set up the Dearing investigation. Everyone in the higher education world was saying that and we received and understood that message. However, the Government have missed that opportunity. In 13 months, they have alienated just about every serious group within the world of higher education. I do not know whether Ministers visit that world much, but, if they heard what is said about them now compared with what was said a year ago, they would realise that the loss of good will, hope and confidence in this Government in the first 12 months on higher education has been extraordinary. That is because Education Ministers have presided over a catalogue of disasters which are embodied in the Bill.

First, Ministers made the elementary tactical mistake of giving away their hand on higher education finances before they had concluded negotiations with the Treasury on the fundamental spending review. We are getting all the pain, but no gain. We are getting tuition fees, but no assurance that the money will go to higher education. All we had from Ministers in Committee was the accountancy truism that the money would be collected by the universities. We want to know that there will be no offsetting reduction in grants to the universities, and Ministers have not been able to give that assurance.

We are left to rely on the Secretary of State's being able to secure from the fundamental spending review some of the measures that Dearing envisaged. He would have to be even more incompetent than he has been so far if he were not at least to get resource accounting from his discussions with the Treasury. If he cannot get that, he will be in very serious difficulty. It is manifest from the basis on which we introduced resource accounting that loans would have to be differently treated under such a regime than they have been.

It is not only those who run the universities and who are concerned about their finances who are cross with the Government's ministerial team. Students have been double-crossed. Students represented by the National Union of Students and other bodies thought that they had an understanding with the Labour party: if they supported abolition of the maintenance grant, there would be no tuition fees. That was the basis on which the NUS signed up to Labour policy before the general election.

There has been a striking absence of Scottish Labour Members from debate, but there has been a similarly striking absence of those new Labour Members who once served as presidents of the NUS. One was rolled out desperately when the Secretary of State was in serious trouble last night, but those Labour Members have been invisible; they did not serve on the Committee, they did not speak on Second Reading. I suspect that they were all told to take constituency leave in case they were confronted in the Chamber with the pledges that they gave when they served as presidents of the NUS.

Mr. Bill Rammell (Harlow): The hon. Gentleman has made much of tuition fees, but will he confirm that his party favours fees, and also favours top-up fees, which would drive a coach and horses through access to higher education?

Mr. Willetts: The hon. Gentleman did not serve on the Committee. If he had, and had studied our amendments—

Mr. Rammell: With the greatest of respect to the hon. Gentleman, I was on the Committee and was there through every sitting.

Mr. Willetts: The hon. Gentleman did not say anything.

We accept the principle of tuition fees, but tabled an amendment specifying that tuition fees should be 25 per cent. of the cost of a university education, and making it difficult for Ministers to do anything other than raise fees by the rate of the retail prices index. We know of anxiety in the world of higher education that the Government will go down the Australian route, so that what begins as a quarter will gradually be nudged up.

Our position is clear: if we accept Dearing, we must accept the £1,000 tuition fee which it proposed. However, we were trying—the Secretary of State would have had rather less difficulty last night if he had accepted the amendment—to make it clear to everyone in the world of higher education that it would not be possible for the Government to smuggle through real increases in tuition fees on top of that figure.

Mr. Rammell: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Willetts: I have given way twice to the hon. Gentleman; if he wants to seek to speak in the short time available for Third Reading, he is free to do so.

The financial settlement is unsatisfactory. Students have been double-crossed. People in universities will now be micro-managed.

Miss Melanie Johnson (Welwyn Hatfield): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Willetts: I am sorry, but I have already overrun my time and do not wish to take any more interventions.

We have heard from the Secretary of State that he did not wish to preside over a "branch-plant economy". However, that is what he is making of the world of higher education. His taste for regulations and directives means that people who are supposed to be in charge of sophisticated institutions that are not part of the public sector will find themselves micro-managed by his Department. It is no vision for the future of education to believe that an organisation should enter the 21st century having to run to the Department for Education and Employment to get clearance through statutory instruments and regulations for matters that would, in any modern organisation, be within the discretion of a junior manager.

The Secretary of State cannot run higher education, although I think that he believes he can. I think that he thinks that he is the chief executive of the British higher education industry. He is not. If he thinks that he is, the alienation of higher education that we have already seen during the Government's first year will carry on apace

during their remaining years in office. Instead of a settlement for a generation, Ministers will be lucky if the measures in the Bill last until the next general election.

6.15 pm

Mr. Dalyell: I was not on the Standing Committee, but I am unrepentantly one of the 31. It may be much better to have representatives of the awkward squad on, rather than off, the Committee.

I want to ask two questions. First, given the Government's proposals, is it not necessary to take measures to make certain that students at university have some understanding that the money that they are paying will lead to the improvement of their own institution? I am told that there will be great dissent and difficulty in the universities if it cannot be shown that improvements are the direct result of so many of the students paying fees. In what way is it possible to link in the minds of undergraduates and other students the feeling that the money that they will pay will to lead to better libraries, better tuition, more facilities and some gain to them?

My second point explains why some of us were sorry not to be on the Committee, where we could have asked questions. When, 15 or 20 years from now, I am kicking up the daisies and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is in some very distinguished position, he should bear in mind the difficulties that will have accrued by 2010 or 2020 in actually collecting money from the students of the 1990s. One can imagine what a field day it will be for lawyers.

I have read many of the reports of the Committee's debates, but I have seen nothing about the mechanics of collection. I understand that in both Australia and America there have been enormous difficulties and that lawyers have started cases that resemble Jarndyce v. Jarndyce. I predict that a lot of the money that may be earmarked for public funds will never in fact accumulate to the Treasury. What is to be done about the sheer difficulty of collection?

6.18 pm

Mr. Willis: I thank my "team" on the Committee—my hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Mr. Foster). I also thank the Secretary of State and his Ministers for the courteous way in which they dealt with me during my first time dealing with a Bill in Committee and in the House.

The Government should have seen that passing the Bill would not be easy. Even with a huge Commons majority, the range of principles involved was such that debate was likely to be fierce and focused. Some Members—I am one of them—were naive enough to expect that the principles involved in the Bill would be debated on the Floor of the House. When Lord Glenamara said in another place that it was the worst Bill that he had seen in 47 years, I sensed a slight exaggeration from one who had seen some of the worst Bills ever, but his comments have been largely vindicated by the events of the past few months.

The Bill was deeply flawed when it started its passage through the Lords, and it will leave us tonight deeply flawed. My experience is limited, but a Bill that has required eight Government new clauses, a Government new schedule and 98 Government amendments in Committee, and then seven Government new clauses and 83 Government amendments on Report—197 Government changes since its introduction—is by any test a flawed Bill. The question is whether it is a better Bill as a result of the 197 Government-led changes.

My party is pleased about the improvements in the General Teaching Council and disappointed that the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) made light of some of the changes. The council is a significantly different beast from that prepared in the Lords. It started off as a registration document but now has an opportunity to mirror other professional bodies such as the General Medical Council. We are grateful to the Government, and wish the GTC well.

We also welcome the introduction of mandatory qualifications for head teachers and the commitment to continuous professional development. The emphasis on professional development from when students enter teacher training establishments until they complete their induction years is good news for the individual, for schools and their pupils and for the teaching profession.

Notwithstanding the criticisms of the official Opposition, we are pleased that the Government are implementing their manifesto pledge to give 16 and 17-year-olds the right to time off for study. Like others, we were disappointed that the official Opposition's vision of small business is of penny-pinching, mean employers who are not committed to their work forces. That is not how I find them to be in my constituency. Many of them will welcome the new opportunities for 16 and 17-year-olds, some 140,000 of whom do not have qualifications up to NVQ level 2 and who will become a huge drain on society if they are not employed. Giving them skills in employment is a move forward that we support. It is important to recognise that it is unacceptable to allow young people to fail, and it would be wrong to ignore their failure.

We support the proposals to introduce income-contingent loans for students. That has been ignored in much of the debate, but it is a significant move forward from the mortgage-style repayment loans that existed under the previous Government's regime. Had the Bill stopped there, we would have congratulated the Secretary of State, marched into the Lobby with the Government and my hon. Friend the Member for Bath would have opened a bottle of champagne after Third Reading. Sadly, he will not. [HON. MEMBERS: "Ah."] Perhaps a bottle of Bath beer.

Part II is so badly flawed that the Liberal Democrats cannot and will not vote for the Bill. Furthermore, we will urge our noble Friends in another place to amend it again and return it to the House for further scrutiny. Part II has been bulldozed through the House with an arrogant disregard for debate on principled objections in a manner last seen when Baroness Thatcher was singing the praises of the poll tax.

The Government have orchestrated a symphony of abuse of their Back Benchers who have remained wedded to principles of social justice and equality. Few could have been unmoved by the sincerity and decency of the hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) when he spoke about student maintenance last night. Somehow, principled debate has no place with a Government who need Back-Bench adulation like an addict needs drugs.

Mr. Coaker: Will the hon. Gentleman clarify his remarks? I respect what my hon. Friend the hon. Member

[Mr. Coaker]

for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) said and his principled stand. Does the hon. Gentleman accept that those of us who support the Government line also do so from a position of principle, to pursue social justice? There is a difference about the way to pursue it.

Mr. Willis: If the hon. Gentleman says that, I believe him because hon. Members never tell untruths or try to deceive the House. Few Opposition Members witnessed the abuse of rebels who tried to speak up for what they believe without finding it shameful.

Dr. Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): I do not feel that I have been abused in any way.

Mr. Willis: Hon. Members will speak for themselves.

The most significant proposal in the Bill is the introduction of tuition fees for full-time undergraduates, yet hon. Members have been denied an opportunity to discuss that single issue on the Floor of the House and vote on it. For Liberal Democrats, the principle of a state investing in its people is an overriding principle. We fundamentally oppose a tax on learning. We accept that many students in higher and further education already contribute to their fees, but the proposition that because some students are disadvantaged we should disadvantage all students is ridiculous. The Government rightly go to great lengths to emphasise the levelling up of opportunity and the importance of standards in our education system, but in higher education they argue the opposite.

Valerie Davey (Bristol, West): Given the ability of those entering higher education, is not the hon. Gentleman espousing the principle that to those that have shall more be given?

Mr. Willis: No. We believe strongly that the army of part-time students in further and higher education who currently do not get help towards their fees or access to loans are being disregarded, and they are disregarded by the Bill. That is an injustice and inequity that should have been addressed by the Bill, but it has not been.

The Secretary of State says that there is little evidence of fees deterring students from applying to university, but his information is selective. My information is that the number of 18 to 20-year-olds applying to university next year has indeed risen by 1.1 per cent. More telling is the 11.5 per cent. drop in applications from students aged 21 to 24, and the staggering 15.1 per cent. reduction in applications from students aged over 25. That was not mentioned yesterday, but it should be mentioned. It should have been part of the debate on tuition fees. Does the Secretary of State feel that such students have been affected by the introduction of tuition fees?

Dr. Howells: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Willis: Perhaps the Secretary of State—or the Minister, if he wishes to intervene—will say whether they feel that the 15 per cent. reduction in recruitment to teacher training for BEd courses this year is the result of tuition fees. Is the reduction of more than 10 per cent. in the number of postgraduates going into teaching another such result, or is there some other reason?

Dr. Howells: The hon. Gentleman knows that those figures from the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service are not to be released until the end of the week, and were faxed to him in confidence. That is why the Secretary of State did not announce them.

Will he acknowledge that he knows full well that older students always apply later to university? The success of our policy on encouraging people to go to university under the new regime relates to the fact that the easiest potential students to reach are those in sixth forms, further education colleges and sixth-form colleges, while the most difficult to reach are the older students. Where we have managed to get information across, students have agreed that it is a good deal. I assure the hon. Gentleman that, if he stops using those tactics, when we get information through to older students, they too will want to go to university, because it is a good deal for them as well.

Mr. Willis: The Minister's confidence about there being more mature students is welcome, but I have to remind him that in yesterday's debate he and his colleagues made points about students going to Scottish institutions as a direct result of the UCAS figures being given to them, so it is perfectly reasonable for me to use the same figures in support of my arguments.

Mr. Willetts: We have just heard some extraordinary charges being levelled; can we have some clarification? Is it true that, yesterday, when the House debated the proposals in the Bill regarding access to higher education, both Ministers and the Liberal Democrat spokesmen had in their possession the latest UCAS figures on university applications, but neither Ministers nor the Liberal Democrats felt that those figures were relevant to yesterday's debate?

Mr. Willis: The Government had the figures yesterday—they were made available to them and were used in yesterday's debate, in particular in respect of the Scottish question. We did not have access to the figures, but, as a result of the figures being given in yesterday's debate, I sought out the figures today because they are pertinent to today's debate, just as they were to yesterday's debate.

Sir Ronald Dearing proposed charging students tuition fees because, in the absence of additional Government resources, he saw student fees as the only way to increase funding for universities. Neither Dearing nor vice-chancellors supported the introduction of tuition fees as an alternative to increased Government funding, yet that is precisely how the Government envisage their use.

The Dearing committee of inquiry made clear that universities need £365 million this year to avoid disastrous cuts, yet they were given only £165 million. Dearing also said that universities need £550 million next year, but, so far, they have been promised absolutely nothing. Dearing said that, by 2000, universities would need £1 billion in extra income.

Fees would produce £400 million, if universities were allowed to retain the additional income, but there is no commitment to ring-fence tuition fees as additional

income, and no commitment to meet from the Exchequer the additional requirements that Dearing identified. That is why, both here and in another place, the Government have steadfastly refused to accept amendments from the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) and the Liberal Democrats to ring-fence or hypothecate fees from students for universities.

How can any hon. Member support a proposal to tax student learning without there being a guarantee of some advantage? That is what we being asked to do. The Bill is not about helping students or universities, nor is it about a vision for higher education and funding; it is a Bill that will be remembered as short-changing both universities and students. That is why we shall vote against it tonight.

6.32 pm

Caroline Flint: I have only two points to make. On the issue of access to training for 16 and 17-year-olds in work, I was disappointed by the comments of Opposition Members. In the past year, I have spoken to many small business people in Don Valley, and their remarks on training have been interesting. They are active through the Barnsley and Doncaster TEC and through the Dearne Valley partnership, and they tell me that many young people they take on at 16 are those with whom they have been working through the trident scheme in schools. They are investing in those young people's education, and they are disappointed in those of their colleagues in the small business sector who refuse to make that sort of investment but later try to poach those young people from firms that have invested in them.

The small business people to whom I spoke want a level playing field that encourages opportunity for young people. They feel strongly about it because many small business people, unlike some larger firms, have stakes in their local community that go back generations. They see their sons and daughters leaving schools in areas where employment prospects are difficult. They want investment in the community, not only in jobs, but in law and order and in tackling other social problems that are created by lack of work, training and education.

My second point is about access to higher education. Last night, many hon. Members spoke about how they had benefited from access to higher education through maintenance grants. I, too, was one of those people. I finished my higher education 1983. Many hon. Members finished theirs well before then, but one feeling that my generation and previous generations in higher education share is that we were exceptions to the rule. Nothing has changed since then in terms of increasing opportunities for people from low-income, low-skill backgrounds who might be the first members of their family to enter higher education.

The Bill gives us a chance for radical change—not to increase access in single figure percentage terms, but dramatically to expand the opportunities for our young people in higher education and, as important, in further education. That is why I shall support the Bill tonight.

6.35 pm

Mrs. Spelman: I would not want the debate to end without trying to reinforce some of the warnings that we have given in a spirit of constructive opposition. There are some unsatisfactory outcomes from the Bill which, to our regret, have not been addressed. We have tried to warn the Government about the impact of the abolition of the maintenance grant on poorer communities.

I am a member of the Science and Technology Committee, which carefully reviewed the Dearing report's aim to provide more finance for higher education, in recognition of the success—extraordinarily denied by the hon. Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint)—in enabling many more people to gain access to higher education. The proportion has increased from one in eight of the population when I was in higher education to one in three today, and it was achieved under a system of means-tested grants.

Caroline Flint: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Spelman: In view of the time, it is fair for me to continue.

Dearing warned against the option that the Government have chosen and said that it

"would produce unacceptable burdens on graduates and on families of modest means."

It is extraordinary that a Labour Government have chosen to do that and ignore our warnings.

On the Scottish anomaly, I concur entirely with the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell). If only there had been a Scottish Member on the Standing Committee. That was an option open to the Government; the mistake could have been avoided. Last night, we heard extraordinary rationalisations of the anomaly, ranging from relativism—it is not the worst anomaly—to an argument that the arrangement would make more room for domestic applications from Scotland. The point is ignored that some higher education courses need to be of different lengths and the system should be sufficiently flexible to take account of that; also ignored is the long-term impact on Scottish universities.

Today, we have debated the burden imposed on business. I am disappointed by the Government's failure to heed our warning that 16 and 17-year-olds will be disadvantaged in relation to other Government initiatives by the amendment that gives them the right to study, financed by business. Not only have the Government ignored our warning, but they have not heeded Baroness Blackstone's carefully calculated assessment of the impact of the advantage for the 18-to-24 age group versus the disadvantage for 16 and 17-year-olds.

Those shortcomings have been wrapped up in pious language and a high moral tone that overlooks our efforts constructively to oppose and to encourage the Government to improve their own legislation. How ours can be described as a reactionary stance defeats me.

6.39 pm

Mr. Rammell: I am conscious of the time, but I want to pursue a crucial issue in response to the answer that I received from the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts). I refer to the Conservative party's stance on top-up fees. I, with the Government, oppose the principle of top-up fees, because there will be no exemption for the poorest students and no loans for them: we run the risk of creating a two-tier ivy league syndrome from which thousands of our young people will be excluded.

[Mr. Rammell]

It was clear from what the right hon. Member for Charnwood (Mr. Dorrell) said in Committee that the Conservative party favours top-up fees. Specifically, he said that they were not ruled out and, in line with Dearing, he would support the principle of top-up fees. However, the hon. Member for Havant this evening denied that, dodged the question and spoke about the uprating mechanism. Before the debate ends, I should like a clear and principled answer from the Opposition. Do they support top-up fees, or not? Hundreds of thousands of students want an answer to that question.

6.40 pm

Mr. Green: It is appropriate to treat the Bill with a judicious mixture of sorrow and anger. My hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) said that the Secretary of State was uncharacteristically downbeat in his moving Third Reading. I assume that he has been chastened by the events of last night, when Labour Members who stuck to their principles voted against him. He said that he wanted to build consensus about the Bill, but he has failed to build a consensus even in his own party.

I found some of the speech of the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) extraordinary. He praised the courage and principle of those who came into the Lobby with us to vote against the abolition of maintenance grants, but led his party to vote with the Government whom he purported to criticise today. His stance is incomprehensible.

The Bill has many bad features. The General Teaching Council is a great opportunity missed. The Government have been too prescriptive, and left the council unable to expand. On head teachers, they have again been too interfering and prescriptive. They are in danger of setting up a paper qualification that will leave no room for the naturals, who have made so many of the great head teachers from whom many of us have benefited.

On the right to study, Labour Members have been full of piety, with no back-up. They will destroy some of the flexibility that the previous Government introduced into the British economy, and will pile costs on small business.

The central flaw in the Bill is its treatment of higher education. Having torn up the Dearing report on the day they received it, and having refused to implement one of its central recommendations, the Government have been in chaos ever since about how to cope with the funding of higher education. They are damaging the right to study, especially for those from less well-off homes. Their decision to abolish the maintenance grant, against the specific recommendation of Dearing, is an act of vandalism for which they will suffer.

The Government have betrayed a clear election pledge from the Prime Minister that they would not introduce tuition fees. On top of that, they cannot guarantee that the money that they will raise from tuition fees will go back into higher education—and they have decided to treat students going to Scottish universities as second-class citizens.

This is a bad Bill. We will vote against it, and I invite hon. Members who care about the future of higher education and who want it to be properly funded and available to all to join us in the Lobby.

6.42 pm

Mr. Blunkett: Utter cant. Even the former shadow Secretary of State had to leave during the speech of the current shadow Secretary of State.

During the night, the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) might reflect on the fact that he criticised us for tabling too many amendments, and then praised us for accepting the amendments that he tabled. He cannot have it both ways.

UCAS faxed the latest figures across at 4.30 pm this afternoon and, for reasons of its own, also faxed them to the Liberal Democrats. The figures used yesterday were from 15 May.

The Bill looks to the future. We ask all Labour Members to vote for the Bill's Third Reading, because it is the only option for Britain in the 21st century.

Question put, That the Bill be now read the Third time:—

The House divided: Ayes 307, Noes 174.

Division No. 297] **[6.43 pm**

AYES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Banks, Tony
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Stephen
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corston, Ms Jean
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna

Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Fyfe, Maria
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Grant, Bernie
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stott, Roger
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Jamieson and Mr. David Clelland.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Arbuthnot, James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Ballard, Jackie
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Dafis, Cynog
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Day, Stephen
Donaldson, Jeffrey
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Goodlad, Rt Hon Sir Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorrie, Donald
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick

Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, J 'hn
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith,
Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Livsey, Richard
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soames, Nicholas
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swinney, John
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Wallace, James
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Welsh, Andrew
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Sir David Madel and
Mrs. Caroline Spelman.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed, with amendments.

European Communities (Amendment) Bill [Allocation of Time]

6.59 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Doug Henderson): I beg to move,

That the Order of the House of 17th December 1997 be supplemented as follows:

Lords Amendment

1.—(1) Proceedings on Consideration of the Lords Amendment shall be completed at this day's sitting and, if not previously concluded, shall be brought to a conclusion three hours after the commencement of proceedings on this Order.

(2) For the purpose of bringing proceedings to a conclusion the Speaker shall put forthwith the Question already proposed from the Chair (and any other Question necessary to dispose of the proceedings).

Stages subsequent to first Consideration of Lords Amendment

2.—(1) The Speaker shall put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown for the consideration forthwith of any further Message from the Lords on the Bill.

(2) The proceedings on any further Message from the Lords shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement.

(3) For the purpose of bringing those proceedings to a conclusion the Speaker shall put forthwith any Question necessary to dispose of the proceedings.

Reasons Committee

3.—(1) The Speaker shall put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown for the appointment, nomination and quorum of a Committee to draw up Reasons and the appointment of its Chairman.

(2) A Committee appointed to draw up Reasons shall report before the conclusion of the sitting at which it is appointed.

Miscellaneous

4.—(1) In the case of proceedings on Consideration of the Lords Amendment, on any further Message from the Lords or on a Motion relating to a Committee to draw up Reasons—

(a) Standing Order No. 15(1) (Exempted business) shall apply,

(b) the proceedings shall not be interrupted under any Standing Order relating to the sittings of the House,

(c) no dilatory Motion with respect to, or in the course of, the proceedings shall be made except by a Minister of the Crown (in which case the Question on the Motion shall be put forthwith),

(d) if the proceedings are interrupted by a Motion for the Adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 24 (Adjournment on specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration) a period equal to the duration of the proceedings on the Motion shall be added to the period allowed for the interrupted proceedings, and

(e) if the House is adjourned, or the sitting is suspended, before the proceedings are concluded, no notice shall be required of a Motion made by a Minister of the Crown for varying or supplementing the provisions of this Order.

Today we shall, I hope, conclude the House's consideration of the treaty of Amsterdam. The European Communities (Amendment) Bill has had detailed scrutiny here and in another place. We have had a grand total of 15 days' debate on those issues, not to mention the numerous other instances of reports and ministerial appearances before Select Committees of both Houses. On the Floor of the House, 31 hours, over six days, have been spent debating the Amsterdam treaty. In another place, some 53 hours and 44 minutes were spent in detailed scrutiny of the Amsterdam treaty, over a full nine days.

Throughout our debates, the overwhelming support for the Bill both here and in another place has become apparent: majorities in favour of the Bill in this House of 230 and 225, on Second Reading and Third Reading respectively, and a clear majority supporting the Bill in another place.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Henderson: Not at the moment.

The Bill has been subjected to exhaustive consideration, and has won support from all quarters. So great was the all-party support for the Bill that all but one of the Opposition's attempts to amend it failed—almost all, but not all, for today we have before us an amendment from another place, which seeks to delay the passage of a Bill that commands the support of both Houses. Without the votes of 76 Tory hereditary peers, that amendment would have been stopped in its tracks by a Government majority of 12.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): I am listening sympathetically to what the Minister is saying about the support for the Bill. Is he in a position to say how many referendums concerning the treaty have been held in other member states? Of those, in how many did the people vote in favour of the treaty?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. We are in danger of straying into the next business. The motion before us is the allocation of time motion, so we should discuss only the allocation of time at this stage. When we discuss the next business, it will be perfectly in order to widen the matter before us.

Mr. Henderson: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Perhaps I can help my hon. Friend on the subject of timing by mentioning that, in both Denmark and Ireland, time was found in their political scrutiny systems to allow a referendum, which, in both cases, was carried overwhelmingly.

I return to the business of our Parliament. It is important that, in due course, we examine the specifics of the amendment. I believe that the proposed allocation for this stage of the Bill will allow the House the necessary time to discuss the specific issue before us. I say that to the House in the knowledge and in the context that the substance of the issue has been discussed in other forums in the House.

The Government have sought to limit the debate to the specific issue before us, and to allow the necessary time for that issue to be debated. Tonight is not the time to re-run the arguments, which the Opposition have fought and lost, on the Bill in general. We shall discuss a specific issue, and I look forward to debating it with colleagues in the House when we move from the timetable motion, which I hope that the House will accept.

7.3 pm

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): This lamentable Bill is ending its life in Parliament under a squalid guillotine. Unjustifiably, the Government introduced a guillotine very early in its proceedings—a classic example of their contempt for Parliament. However, in view of the large number of hon. Members on both sides of the House who wish to take part in the debate, I do not wish, in debating the guillotine, to take further time out of the time that should be available to them. Let us get on to the substance of the matter.

Question put and agreed to.

European Communities (Amendment) Bill

Lords amendment considered.

New clause

Lords amendment: after clause 1, to insert the following new clause—*Quota-hopping*—

(". This Act shall come into force only when each House of Parliament has come to a resolution on a motion tabled by a Minister of the Crown considering the legal protection for British fishermen afforded by the Treaty of Amsterdam on the issue of quota-hopping.")

7.4 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Doug Henderson): I beg to move, That this House doth disagree with the Lords in the said amendment.

The amendment would prevent the United Kingdom from ratifying the treaty of Amsterdam until such time as both Houses of Parliament had come to a resolution on a motion concerning the Amsterdam treaty and quota hopping. The Government cannot accept that amendment.

The House will recognise that, if the amendment were passed, it would delay ratification of the treaty of Amsterdam by the United Kingdom. Indeed, in the light of the Opposition's apparent willingness to rely on the voting rights of hereditary peers, it might delay it much longer than the House might initially suppose.

The House will also recognise that such delay would prevent British citizens from getting the benefits of the Amsterdam treaty provisions. It would prevent confirmation of the distinctive United Kingdom arrangements for border controls, now included in the treaty. It would prevent the important new provisions on foreign and defence policy from coming into being, which are highly advantageous to the United Kingdom; we believe that international co-operation on foreign policy is important, founded on a North Atlantic Treaty Organisation defence capability. It would prevent important progress on environmental protection. It would prevent important progress on tackling unemployment through the European Union. Even if the amendment were passed, it would do nothing to help us to find a solution to the problems of the fishing industry.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that, in fact, the House of Lords has been extremely temperate—in my view, far too temperate—in its treatment of the Bill? It is a little on the thin side for us to have only one amendment as a result of all the consideration of the Bill in the House of Lords. Had the accusations that have been made against the House of Lords been justified, I should have expected—I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will agree—many more amendments. I regret the fact that there are not more.

Mr. Henderson: The hon. Gentleman is free to regret what he wishes in the House, and if he wishes to regret the inactivity of another place, that is up to him. I do not think that there has been inactivity. I think that the Members of another place have considered the issues surrounding the Bill and, in most cases, have reached a considered view, which would be acceptable to the vast majority of Members of this House and of the people of the United Kingdom. One must commend them on that. There is a difference of view on whether a deal on quota hopping should be a reason to delay the Bill; we can now debate that. In general, however, the other place has dealt with these matters in a reasonable way.

Mr. John Gummer (Suffolk, Coastal): The hon. Gentleman knows that I am not antagonistic to the European Union, so I do not think it unreasonable to ask him the following question. Is it not true that most of the problem concerning the amendment arises because of the direct promises made by the Prime Minister on what he was going to gain in the discussions that led to the Amsterdam treaty? This is not something that should divide pro-Europeans and anti-Europeans; it is a fact that the Prime Minister promised that he would deliver something, and he has not delivered it. The amendment suggests only that, until he delivers what he promised, we should not deliver what he said he would not sign up to until he had delivered it. That is the issue before the House; the recital of stuff about the environment has nothing to do with it.

Mr. Henderson: The Prime Minister committed the British Government to tackling the important and serious problem of quota hopping, and he has done so in a practical and realistic way. I shall return specifically to the points that the right hon. Gentleman raised. If I happen to omit some of them, I know that he can intervene again.

The Government share the genuine concerns of the fishing industry in relation to the issue of quota hopping. That, I believe, will be demonstrated in the comments that I am about to make.

The difference between this Government and the previous Government is that, rather than talk and harangue about the fishing industry, we have been prepared to act firmly in defence of British fishing interests. The Conservatives claim that they would not have signed the Amsterdam treaty unless they had secured a deal on the quota hopping protocol, which they tabled. They have made much of that protocol—in fact, its signing increasingly became the centrepiece of the Conservative position on the European Union in the build-up to the general election.

The protocol was tabled in autumn 1996. If the previous Government considered the protocol to be so important and so central to their approach to the European Union—and particularly the treaty of Amsterdam—why did the German Government not know about it? When my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and I visited Germany about a week after the general election, we raised the matter with Klaus Kinkel, the German Foreign Minister. He was unaware not only of the contents of the protocol but of its existence. If the Conservative Government of the day had had any hope of progressing the matter, they would have needed the support and understanding of the German Foreign Minister.

The Conservatives were winding up their efforts in the spring of 1997, but the problems with quota hopping did not begin then—as every fisherman in the United Kingdom knows. On 2 April 1985, during the debate on

the accession of Spain and Portugal to the European Union, the then Prime Minister, Mrs. Thatcher, told the House:

"There will be no detriment to our fishing industry, no reductions in the important quotas available to British fishermen and no new access for Spanish fishing boats to the North Sea fishing grounds."—[*Official Report*, 2 April 1985; Vol. 76, c. 1061.]

The Government of the day believed that they had secured sufficient protection for the British fishing industry, and that quota hopping would not be a problem. However, the European courts told the Conservative Government in 1991 that there was a problem. Why did they wait another six years—until 1997—before beginning to tackle the issue seriously? In the absence of any cogent argument in support of the delay, it appears that the Conservative position was an empty gesture—a panic attack by a demoralised and directionless Government—and was not deliverable. I put it to the Opposition that they knew 12 months ago that the protocol was not deliverable.

We have faced the issue realistically and put a firm and practical case for the British fishing industry and British fishing communities.

Mr. John Townend (East Yorkshire): How much extra fish will be produced for British fishing boats as a result of the Government's negotiations at Amsterdam?

Mr. Henderson: That is an interesting speculation, and it would be dishonest of me to say that I know the answer. We are in the process of concluding the agreement, which must obviously be tested before any fisherman in Britain can say whether the deal has had a beneficial result. I encourage the hon. Gentleman to ask more serious questions in future.

7.15 pm

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): My hon. Friend referred to the incompetence of the then Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, in her dealings with European Union member states on the fishing industry issue. I remind him that her predecessor used the United Kingdom fishing industry as a bargaining counter in his negotiations with the then European Economic Community. That is where the root of the problem lies: in his desperate efforts to get into Europe, he sacrificed our fishing communities to the demands of the utterly disgraceful common fisheries policy.

Mr. Henderson: I am aware of my hon. Friend's keen interest in and knowledge of the fishing industry, and I am guided by him on the history of the issue. I assure him that the Government are determined to negotiate seriously and competently, to secure a good deal for the British fishing industry.

We began the process last June with an exchange of letters between the Prime Minister and the President of the Commission, setting out the practical way forward. The exchange records the Commission's interpretation of how a member state may, within the rules of the single market, require an economic link between fishing activity and fishing communities. Since Amsterdam, we have taken that process forward systematically. We issued a consultation document last July, and, on 4 July, Government officials met representatives of the United Kingdom industry to discuss implementation. Following that meeting, fishermen's organisations submitted detailed written comments on the discussion paper. The National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations and other fishermen's organisations have been fully involved throughout the process of preparing the economic link licence conditions.

After several other meetings between officials and industry representatives, we submitted draft proposals to the European Commission incorporating contributions from the United Kingdom fishing industry. Those draft proposals were copied to all United Kingdom industry representatives. Following revision of the draft proposals, a new version of the United Kingdom proposals was submitted to the Commission in April. A copy of the proposals was placed in the Library on 12 May 1998 and sent to all United Kingdom industry representatives.

The proposals require all vessels to comply with one of the following criteria. First, vessels must land 50 per cent. of their catch of quota species in the United Kingdom; secondly, 50 per cent. of the crew must be resident in United Kingdom coastal areas; thirdly, there must be a certain level of operational expenditure in United Kingdom coastal areas; or, fourthly, they must demonstrate that other measures will provide sufficient economic benefit to populations in the United Kingdom that are dependent on fishing and related industries. The last condition implies a mixture of the first three.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): How many quota hoppers have been removed from the British register?

Mr. Henderson: The hon. Lady will understand that there are continual changes. However, changes have not been made to this agreement, because it is not yet concluded. I tried to explain to the House that, following the issue of draft proposals, there was extensive consultation with fishing interests, particularly fishermen. Therefore, the Government were well aware of the perceived implications of the proposals for the fishing industry, and fishermen had the opportunity to put their comments to Commission officials. It is not possible now to see how effective the proposals have been, because they are not yet in place.

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon): What does the Minister mean by the phrase "a certain level of operational expenditure"? What has happened to the visiting condition?

Mr. Henderson: There are many ways of classifying operational expenditure. They are included in the consultative document that was given to the fishing interests, which have responded in great detail. Refitting boats and dealing with equipment, which is one way of demonstrating an economic link to British fishing communities, is covered. The industry was satisfied that that was effective. It is not content, however, with everything that is being said, and there is still a certain amount of to-ing and fro-ing, but it is behind the mandate that the British Government now have and on which we are negotiating with Commission officials. This substantial package of measures will be effective and compatible with the treaty.

[Mr. Henderson]

The process of putting substance into the exchange of letters between ourselves and the Commission is important. Apart from meetings with the fishing industry, many meetings have been held with Commission officials. Since last June, Government officials and officials from Brussels have held formal consultations with the Commission on seven occasions. Only last week, my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food discussed progress with Commissioner Bonino. The Commission has said that it will soon be in a position to respond.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Henderson: I have been very generous in giving way, but I am tempted yet again.

Mr. Nicholls: The Minister may regret that, but we shall see.

The Minister mentioned the Government's proposals, which are being considered by the Commission. If a deal is done, and another exchange of correspondence takes place, can he guarantee—I stress that word—that they will not be successfully challenged before the European Court?

Mr. Henderson: I am glad that I gave way, because I can remind the hon. Gentleman that I have already said that we believe that our proposals will be practical and effective, which means that they will be consistent with European law. That is how real progress can be achieved.

Those measures will ensure that real economic links exist between the United Kingdom's fishing fleet and our coastal communities, that there is a significant improvement on the current situation, when many vessels bring little or no benefit to the United Kingdom, and that vessels that fail to maintain an economic link with the United Kingdom will be unable to fish United Kingdom quota species until they are able to demonstrate that satisfactory economic links have been established.

We shall continue to press the case for our fishing industry and our fishing communities, until a fair and acceptable agreement is reached. That is how real progress can be made, which is why we ask the House to reject the Lords amendment.

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): The debate affords hon. Members their only opportunity to reconsider the Bill giving effect to the treaty of Amsterdam. The fact that there will be only one such opportunity speaks volumes for the restraint shown by the other place in its consideration of the Bill, as my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) said.

Furthermore, the fact that the only such opportunity relates to quota hopping—with which the Government failed to deal at Amsterdam—reflects, first, the importance that we attach to the fishing industry and the contribution that it makes to our national life, and, secondly, the damage done to the industry by the Government's failure to defend it at Amsterdam and the extent to which that failure represents a breach of promises made by Ministers, from the Prime Minister down, before the election. On that subject, as on so many others, the gap between pre-election promises and post-election performance amounts to a large fracture of the trust to which the Prime Minister used to refer so frequently.

Mr. Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): Given the right hon. and learned Gentleman's remarks about trust, does he still advocate a referendum on the Amsterdam treaty?

Mr. Howard: As we have consistently made clear, the problem of the referendum is for the Government, not for the Opposition. The Government have offered referendums on everything under the sun—a mayor for London, devolution for Wales and for Scotland and regional bodies in England. If the Government are to offer referendums on those things, they certainly should do so on the treaty.

To keep my speech within manageable proportions, I promise not refer to a single promise made by a Labour party spokesman more than a year before the election. I begin with promises made to a Standing Committee by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. I am astonished that he is not present but, on reflection and given the extent to which he went on the record before the election and the extremity of the embarrassment he would suffer if he were in the Chamber, perhaps his absence is not such a surprise.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill), who is, of course, in his place, mentioned those promises in the fishing debate of 9 July 1997, so they should not be unfamiliar to Labour Members, even though the Parliamentary Secretary is too embarrassed to attend th debate because he might be reminded of them. Referring to the common resource aspect of the common fisheries policy, the Parliamentary Secretary said:

"We must deal with that issue and remove that term from the CFP . . . We believe that the CFP should be radically reformed to allow us far greater autonomy and national control of fishing waters within our country's limits."—[*Official Report, European Standing Committee A*, 23 July 1996; c. 24-25.]

Those words were uttered less than a year before he assumed his responsibilities for making good those pledges, and less than a year before the intergovernmental conference which provided the opportunity for making them good—yet, as we know, nothing was done.

The Parliamentary Secretary was by no means the only offender. The Foreign Secretary referred specifically to quota hopping at a meeting that he held with fishing interests in Inverness in March 1997, only weeks before the election and the IGC. His remarks were quoted in *Fishing News* and drawn to the House's attention in the July fishing debate by the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond), so they, too, will be familiar to Ministers.

The Foreign Secretary said:

"A Labour Government would have more chance of getting the treaty changes at the intergovernmental conference to end quota hopping than would the present Government, because it has a better relationship with the European Union and fewer disputes to resolve."

That may represent one of the first examples of the fantasies to which the Foreign Secretary has since become increasingly prone, but we were never able to discover

what chance the Government had of getting those treaty changes, because, despite the brave and bold words of the Prime Minister, they never even tried.

The Prime Minister said:

"We certainly have not ruled out holding up IGC business in order to get the right changes to fishing policy in the British interest . . . where Britain's interests are at stake, we are perfectly prepared to be isolated. Of course we are."

That was days before the election, yet, far from holding up IGC business to get the right changes, he made no effort whatever to get them. Why? In his own words,

"there was not a single member state that supported the . . . treaty protocol".—[*Official Report*, 18 June 1997; Vol. 296, c. 320.]

That treaty protocol was proposed by the previous Government.

Mr. Gummer: Whatever side one may be on in those discussions, is it not a remarkable failure of the Prime Minister to claim that he could do that, but then not even attempt to do it? Many of us suspected that he could not have done it in the first place. Before the election, he was going to do it, but he has not even tried after the election.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. The right hon. Gentleman has an awful habit of making a meal of it when he intervenes. He cannot do that.

Mr. Howard: I am sure that you will agree, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that it is a very appetising meal.

I agree with my right hon. Friend: it is remarkable for the Prime Minister to make those promises and then do nothing to fulfil them, but that is entirely characteristic of him. Like so many other promises that the Prime Minister made before the election, it was a promise for the voting, not for the keeping. The loser from the Prime Minister's attitude has been Britain's fishing industry.

The common fisheries policy was expressly designed to ensure that national fishing fleets would be given fair access to Europe's fish stocks. Quota hopping, which now accounts for more than 20 per cent. of the tonnage of Britain's offshore fleet, is clearly frustrating that purpose. The previous Government were committed to a successful future for the British fishing fleet, and were determined to address this issue at the intergovernmental conference.

Dr. George Turner (North-West Norfolk): I have listened with interest, because I was not in the House during the previous Parliament. What improvements were made between 1991 and 1997? As I understand it, the problem was clearly identified in 1991. What progress was made in those six years that can be contrasted with that made in the past 13 months?

7.30 pm

Mr. Howard: I shall tell the hon. Gentleman exactly what happened. The problem was apparent much earlier than 1991: it became apparent in the 1980s. The Government of the time passed the Merchant Shipping Act 1988, which was specifically and expressly designed to deal with the problem. In 1991, the European Court of Justice ruled in the Factortame judgment that the 1988 Act was inconsistent with the treaty. The then Government did what any sensible Government would do: they put the matter on the agenda of the next intergovernmental conference. To put right that judgment of the European Court of Justice, it was necessary to raise the matter at the intergovernmental conference and to change the treaty.

It is no good Labour Members suggesting that we should not have done that. Just before the election, they were saying that they supported the previous Government's view in their press release and their proposals to the IGC. They even said that they would have made those proposals somewhat stronger. It does not lie in the mouth of the hon. Member for North-West Norfolk (Dr. Turner) or other Labour Members to criticise the actions of the previous Government. They would have gone even further in the proposals to the IGC.

Mr. Doug Henderson: It is strange that the right hon. and learned Gentleman is not even able to say, in response to that point, that, at all the various Council meetings between 1991 and 1997, the Conservative Government were not able to raise the issue of quota hopping. Why did they not introduce a decommissioning scheme during those six years as an alternative way for fishing owners in difficulty to deal with the issue, rather than selling their quota to foreign owners?

Mr. Howard: I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman is in some difficulty, deserted as he is by the Minister responsible for fisheries. It is not surprising that he puts such questions to me. The answer is simple: we did introduce a decommissioning scheme. We spent £53 million on a decommissioning scheme. I do not blame the hon. Gentleman for not knowing that: he should not have been left alone by the Minister to deal with these questions. There it is: he has my sympathy, although it may not be enough on this occasion.

In July 1996, we tabled a protocol—*[Interruption.]* Ah, relief is at hand. A hasty telephone call from the Whip, and the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture arrives. I fear that it is too late for me to remind him of all those embarrassing remarks and promises that he made before the election, but perhaps some of my right hon. and hon. Friends will make good that deficiency as we proceed.

Dr. Godman: As an Opposition MP at the time, I supported the Merchant Shipping Bill as it went through the House, even though I predicted that it was highly probable that it would be challenged at the European Court of Justice. Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman concede that the Conservative Government who were put out of office in May 1997 were bedevilled for years by their failure to meet the requirements of the European Union's multi-annual guidance programme?

Mr. Howard: Any difficulties that may have arisen on that programme were not specifically to do with that Government. Any British Government in power at that time would have had to deal with those difficulties. The solution to those problems and to the difficulties that we have previously discussed—this is, after all, a debate about quota hopping—was to be found in the 10-point package that the previous Government proposed. Quota hopping was only part of the package, the aims of which were: to insist that the six and 12-mile limits were not negotiable; to give fishermen more say in policy; to give a further £12 million to decommissioning—the issue that the Minister so ill-advisedly raised—to exempt small

[Mr. Howard]

vessels from regulations; to press technical conservation measures; to give agency status to MAFF fisheries laboratories; and to reject the idea of a single European fleet managed and policed from Brussels.

The previous Government were clear about the priority that we attached to those issues, in particular to the quota-hopping protocol. My right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) said:

"The IGC won't come to a successful conclusion until we are satisfied that among our other objectives the problem of quota hopping is resolved satisfactorily."

That was our approach. By contrast, the present Government did not even try. Instead of a treaty amendment, the Prime Minister settled for a letter that has no binding legal effect whatever. The Prime Minister must have known that it has no legal effect. Indeed, it does not claim to do more than clarify the existing legal position.

The Spanish Government have made it clear—this is an interesting point in view of the intervention from the hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Dr. Godman)—that, if they feel that their rights are being weakened in any way by action based on that letter, they will turn again to the European Court of Justice. One year on from this celebrated exchange of correspondence, it has yet to lead to any result. What we saw on this issue at Amsterdam was nothing short of surrender.

The Prime Minister broke his promises, tossed aside his pledges and failed to fight for Britain's fishermen. That is why I invite the House to reject the Government motion and to agree with the Lords in their amendment to the Bill.

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): That was an interesting exercise in exculpation from the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard)—an apologia for a Government who, for 18 years, did little for fishing except stand by and watch it be restructured by bankruptcy and liquidation. To hear an ex-Minister say that, if the previous Government had not got what they wanted in Amsterdam they would have wrecked the entire conference—

Mr. Howard: No.

Mr. Mitchell: That was the implication to be drawn from what was said.

Mr. Howard: We are not producing a new statement. The then Prime Minister made it absolutely clear before the intergovernmental conference. This is not a new invention: it is consistent with what we were saying at the time.

Mr. Mitchell: It is a fairy story to suggest that the Conservative Government, had they been lucky enough to retain office after the election, would have gone to such lengths as wrecking the conference to get anything done about quota hopping. It is fantasy, and we all know it. The right hon. and learned Gentleman insults the intelligence of the House by bleating on about that.

Mr. Howard: If it is fantasy, why did the present Prime Minister say, just days before the election, that he intended to do precisely the same thing?

Mr. Mitchell: He did not say that. The statement came from the former Prime Minister, who had always gone to European Councils bleating on about what he and his Government were going to do, how they were going to fight for Britain—

Mr. Howard *rose—*

Mr. Mitchell: The right hon. and learned Gentleman should let me finish my sentence before he interrupts.

The Conservative Government bleated about what they were going to do, but they came back with their tail between their legs because they had done nothing.

Mr. Howard: I am reluctant to interrupt the hon. Gentleman's stream of invective, but he must get his facts right. Just days before the election, the present Prime Minister said:

"We certainly have not ruled out holding up IGC business in order to get the right changes to fishing policy in the British interests . . . Where Britain's interests are at stake, we are perfectly prepared to be isolated. Of course we are."

The present Prime Minister said that just before the election, when he was trying to persuade people to vote for him, and that there was absolutely no difference whatever between his party's position on the issue and that of the then Government.

Mr. Mitchell: "We have not ruled it out" does not mean "We have ruled it in". There was no unequivocal statement from Labour at that stage to the effect that we would wreck the conference in the way that the then Prime Minister argued he would. Those are the facts, and it is no use arguing about it now. The right hon. and learned Gentleman and I both know what happened.

Later in my speech I shall deal with the position in which we ended up. We were let down by the conference and, in my view, we were not firm enough, but there was no commitment, of the kind that the right hon. and learned Gentleman implies, to wreck the conference—and it would have had to be that way for us to get anywhere on this issue. That apologia for 18 years of Tory failure in fishing policy will not hold water. It is simply incredible, even in relation to the arguments about the Merchant Shipping Act 1988, which came eight years too late.

For eight years, Members representing fishing constituencies had been warning that there was a growing problem—that quota hoppers were taking over the British fleet. Owners of British vessels who were going bankrupt and unable to make a return were being forced to sell their licences, and the Europeans were buying them. The Government did nothing while the cancer grew on the fishing industry until it became ineradicable. To say now that the previous Government tried to do something about it is just another of the incredible claims in the right hon. and learned Gentleman's speech.

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): We have just listened to a panoply of excuses as to why the Government, now they have the power to do so, are not prepared to cut out the cancer. The hon. Gentleman should be asking the Government why they now suffer from inertia.

Mr. Mitchell: The hon. Lady and I rarely disagree, and I take no pleasure in disagreeing with her now, but nothing can be done about the problem until we can close

the door. We cannot close the door without changing the treaty of Rome and the condition that businesses can be established in any European country. Until something is done about that, it will be impossible to tackle the basic issue.

I agree that the measures that we are proposing are not adequate. I agree that they are fig leaves, and I shall continue to say so in the course of my speech—although I would rather do so on my terms than on the hon. Lady's. However, that does not affect the basic issue. We could not have made that basic change without putting a spanner in the works of the conference, which no new incoming Government would do. Indeed, the outgoing Government would not have done so, either.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Mitchell: No. I must move on.

The British fishing industry has suffered for years from the exchange of party political point scoring, which has done nothing for it. Each side of the House has said, "We are tougher than you are on Europe," and has then given way to Europe. Each side has done nothing for the fishing industry and has let it decline, always sacrificing it to other interests and issues that are considered more important at the time. Fishing Ministers have been pathetic. It is not their fault, but that of the Government, who always have other priorities and do not regard fishing as important. That is the real problem.

The Lords amendment states:

"This Act shall come into force only when . . . the legal protection of British fishermen afforded by the Treaty of Amsterdam on the issue of quota-hopping"

is considered. That is easily dealt with. There is no legal protection against quota hopping in the treaty of Amsterdam. It is a half-baked amendment. It was the only one that the Lords could get through, and, frankly, it is useless. What is the use of asking us to consider the protection offered by a treaty against quota hopping, when the treaty makes no mention of quota hopping or any protection? There was an exchange of letters and that was all. Frankly, it is a pathetic amendment, and we are wasting the time of the House discussing it.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): Whether the previous Government were useless or the present Government are useless—I am not experienced enough to judge that—does the hon. Gentleman not agree that the only effective way of achieving anything on this vital issue is to say that the treaty does not go through until something is done? Although it is not mentioned in the treaty, the hon. Gentleman knows that that can be achieved in other Councils. Does he agree that, if he wants to get something done—as he clearly does—no matter which Government are in power, the right thing to do is to follow the course of action preferred by the Lords and say that the treaty cannot come into force until something is done about fishing?

7.45 pm

Mr. Mitchell: I wish that we had the power to say that. It is a footling, pointless treaty, and it was the outcome of a footling, pointless summit that achieved no agreement. Brave hopes were held out as to what it would achieve, and in the end they came to nothing except a half-baked compromise. It is a pathetic, lame, limping treaty, but we have passed it. I did not vote for it and I do not support it, but it has been passed and the Government will accept it whatever we say. Theoretically, the hon. Gentleman is perfectly correct, but for practical purposes he is wrong, and that is about all I can say.

The amendment raises two issues. The first is the effect of the treaty, and of other treaties—I tried to include them in the debate by tabling an amendment—on the common fisheries policy. The common fisheries policy is based on the principle of equal access to a common resource in which we have national quotas, but only as an interim measure.

The treaty of Corfu, which we also have to take into account, says, in relation to the accession of Finland and Sweden:

"the arrangements for access laid down . . . shall apply only during a transitional period, the end of which shall be marked by the date of implementation of the Community fishing permit system".

In other words, the treaty of Corfu presupposes the end of the common fisheries policy and the advent of what must be a European fleet—a Community fishing permit system. It is there in the treaty.

My understanding is that the Spanish managed to secure a comparatively small wording change to the treaty that was not noticed by the Foreign Office. We are committed by that treaty to a scheme which I have never heard of and know nothing about but which is due to come in from 2003, providing for a Community fishing permit system. The former Minister, the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr. Davis), said:

"The Finnish and Swedish accessions do not in any way prejudice the outcome of the eventual revision of the CFP basic regulation."

However, that is not what the Corfu treaty says.

I want to know from my hon. Friend the Minister who is right on the issue. What are we to make of the treaty of Corfu? What does it mean? My hon. Friend has written to me and I am grateful for his explanation, as I find the issues difficult to follow. He is a good friend, and in a sense a good educator, on these matters, which are extremely complex. In his letter to *Fishing News* on 1 May 1998, my hon. Friend writes:

"There is no proposal to create a single European fishing fleet administered from Brussels. If there were to be one, this Government would oppose it."

He is absolutely right; so would I.

The letter continues:

"The system of quotas on relative stability will be reviewed by the end of 2002. But it does not expire then and will continue unaltered unless the Council decides otherwise."

However, the treaty of Corfu says not, so who is correct? Can the derogations that we have be superior to a treaty that we have also signed saying that there will be a fishing permit system? That is the nature of the question.

I am therefore asking my hon. Friend what will happen on the issue. I hope that he will turn his attention to it in his reply. The question hanging over fishing, on which my he may leap to his feet to put me right, has been much discussed in *Fishing News*, which is a major part of my reading. I do not like *The Guardian* very much any more, so I compensate by reading *Fishing News* obsessively—and very educational and good reading it is, too. I need the alternative view to be put.

[Mr. Mitchell]

I turn, finally, to the problem of quota hoppers and access. The principle of equal access to a common resource was, as my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Dr. Godman) said, given away by the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath), when he was Prime Minister, with no regard to the interests of British fishing industry. It is practically impossible to push the Sisyphean stone back up the hill, because we are tied by that principle. We cannot manage or control our own fishery grounds, because everyone has equal access to a common resource. Even Luxembourg and Austria can set up their own fishing fleets and have equal access to a common resource.

The problem is that of stopping quota hoppers. If we cannot—if there is no power legally to do so—we will not be able to close the door to any more. The British fishing industry is encountering more difficulty. English fishing particularly is very difficult. English fishermen are not making adequate returns; prices have not risen to support increased costs; and fishermen are handicapped by small quotas and the weight of restriction that is growing around their necks. That means that they will be in financial difficulty, that there will be more temptation to sell, and that quota hoppers will play an increasing part in most ports.

The industry will be wondering what it can do, and will perhaps conclude that it should keep the quota hoppers because at least they bring some economic activity to the ports. It will say that, since there are no Grimsby or Lowestoft vessels, it will have to have quota hoppers. If we can close the door, we can do something about the problem. If we cannot, we will be cutting off our nose to spite our face.

The Amsterdam exchange of letters did not achieve very much. It was just a fairly typical Euro-con. Proposals that had been hanging around and discussed for many months were taken up. They sounded as though they would achieve something, and were given to a new Prime Minister—who I think was not well briefed by the Foreign Office, since it does not have any expertise on such issues and lets us down perpetually. Neither side of the argument would have disrupted the conference—certainly not an incoming Government—to get their way on quota hopping, so the Prime Minister seized on the proposals as a way out. He arrived at Northolt airport holding a piece of paper, which said something like "No quota hoppers in our time"—and nothing happened.

That is a fairly typical Euro-con: a paper is presented, giving hope, but nothing happens and the issue is forgotten. Lord Whitty, Labour's Front-Bench spokesman on the issue in another place, gave a very honest view when he said that not much was achieved, that we could not achieve very much, that the situation was impossible, and that the Prime Minister was offered a deal that was rehashed from an earlier scheme.

The situation is a mess, but it is no use trying to deal with it by tabling an amendment such as that before us. That is pathetic. Nor is it adequate to try to deal with it through the restrictions that we are introducing. I am sympathetic to what my hon. Friend the Minister is trying to do, which is to require 50 per cent. of the landings in UK ports or 50 per cent. of crews to be of British origin. I notice that advertisements are already appearing in the newspapers—certainly in Lowestoft—so that Dutch-owned vessels can have a 50 per cent. British crew and be exempt from the regulations. Other factors have been mentioned, such as operational spending in UK coastal areas and benefits to areas dependent on fishing.

We must decide—I know that my hon. Friend will consult the industry closely on the matter, because he has to—whether it is worth pursuing such measures, or whether they will create more difficulties for the remaining British vessels than they will for the quota hoppers whom they are meant to threaten. Life may be made marginally more difficult for quota hoppers at the expense of making life very much more difficult for British vessels.

There are certainly worries in Grimsby. Vessels from there are accustomed to landing where prices are high. It is a matter of routine to land in places such as Holland and Denmark. If such vessels are to be restricted, and their activities shackled, perhaps the game is not worth the candle. I hope that my hon. Friend will consider that very seriously.

One cannot talk to all fishermen. A Member of Parliament is like a cushion: he bears the impression of whoever last sat on him. Fishermen are accustomed to putting their case in strong language. They have said to me, "It's over. We have fought the fight; we have not got anywhere. We have done our best. We required something more basic than we have been able to achieve. Let's give up, gi'over and stop trying to close the stable door after the horse has bolted." That is perhaps a typical British approach to the European Union. We always play the game, and we always lose. It is a question of inevitability.

The only way out is to withdraw from the common fisheries policy altogether. It has been a disaster; it has done the country no good; it has been ruinous for the industry. If the Government say that we cannot do that because we must be nice to Europe and cannot rock the boat because it would harm our relationship with the EU, it is incumbent on them to do more for fishing. Fishing cannot be the sacrificial victim to any Government's superior loyalty to Europe.

I do not want the fishing industry to be in such a position. It is incumbent on the Government to stop the imposition of charges that is being considered; to stop the petty harassment; and to stop deluging the industry with new policies and new requirements with which it cannot keep up. The fishing industry is now a small-boat industry, run by people who are at sea and who do not have the professional backing and support in order to cope.

The producers' organisations should be given the finance and the power to buy and manage their own quotas, and we should ensure that the measures imposed are applied in Europe as well as to British vessels. A level playing field—perhaps a level fishing ground is a more appropriate expression—would be acceptable. Requirements cannot be imposed unilaterally on the British fleet. Catches cannot be vigorously inspected, and efforts to deal with black fish cannot be made in this country if nothing happens in Europe.

A skipper landing in Boulogne, for instance, said that he had great difficulty finding anyone to accept his log sheets. In Britain, they grab them from him and rush away

to check them with a view to initiating a prosecution if any dereliction of duty is discovered. In France and Holland, nobody is interested; controls are not enforced. Until there is equal enforcement, the fishing industry cannot and will not put up with the mass of requirements.

I know that my hon. Friend will fight for fishing and for the national management regime that the National Federation of Fishermens Organisations and the Scottish Fishermens Federation have put to him. But he must fight for, help and support the industry more vigorously if fishing will otherwise be sacrificed to the Government's overall European aspirations.

Mr. Gummer: I declare an interest as the voluntary chairman of the Marine Stewardship Council and as the Member for a constituency with 74 miles of coastline and a large number of fishermen.

I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell), not least because, when I was at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, I spent a great deal of time trying to persuade him to fight against the dock labour scheme, which was one of the two great factors destroying the port of Grimsby. He complains about the previous Government not standing up for anything and mewling and puking, but he let his fishermen down every day because he never broke the party line on the dock labour scheme. He could have made a huge difference to the fishing industry when he was given the challenge. I find it difficult to accept his complaints about the current Government or the previous one when I remember how hard I tried to get him on my side to help to bring about a change that really mattered.

Mr. Mitchell *rose—*

8 pm

Mr. Gummer: I shall be pleased to give way to the hon. Gentleman, but I want to finish my point so that he can be even ruder to me.

There was a chance of securing a joint operation to exempt the fishing ports from the dock labour scheme before the system was abolished, but I never received any support from the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Mitchell: That is wishful thinking, not an accurate representation of the facts. The ending of the dock labour scheme was not proposed while the right hon. Gentleman was at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. The proposal came out of the blue. I am subject to his correction, but I do not remember him even mentioning it to me as a cause of Grimsby's problems.

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman may read *Fishing News*, but he has not read the statements that I made in his constituency about the need to change the dock labour scheme, even if only for the fishing industry. The hon. Gentleman is an assiduous constituency Member and I know why he made no comment on the issue—he knew that his general management committee and the Labour party would not have supported him. I find his comments about how tough he would be difficult to take.

The debate is not about our views on the fishing industry or our attitude to the European Union; it is about what the Government promised and what they delivered. I hope that my hon. Friends will keep the battle on that issue. It does not matter what industry we are talking about—it could be the baking industry or the leather industry. The fishing industry was led to believe one thing before the election and got a wholly different policy after the election.

The Prime Minister was particularly keen on talking about trust. Trust is about not just not saying the wrong thing, but not giving the wrong impression. In a famous interview and subsequently, he made it clear in the most charming and reassuring way that he would be tougher in the intergovernmental conference than my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major). The argument went on and on. When he got there, he was not even as tough as my right hon. Friend. He did not raise the matter as he had said he would. The problem was not that he raised the matter and failed; he did not raise it. Regardless of whether we are pro or anti-Europe, keen on fishing or not, that was a betrayal of a clear promise.

We are talking not about a Euro-con, but a Prime Minister con—a Blair con. I notice that Ministers are being very quiet, because they know that what I am saying is true. It was a con in two ways: first in what the Prime Minister and other current Ministers said before the election, given what happened afterwards; and, secondly, in the Prime Minister's suggestion of what the letter meant.

We all know about letters in such circumstances. I am not as rude about them as some of my right hon. and hon. Friends. Often, the Commission can make it easier to sort out a difficult point. However, the fisheries problem could not be sorted out in that way. It is an issue of considerable difficulty, because there is a conflict between the basic principles of the common fisheries policy, which shared out the fishing opportunities by countries, and the basic principle of the treaty of Rome, which talks about common resources, which are not shared out in that way—and rightly so, because we need a single market, which the Conservatives, particularly my right hon. and noble Friend Lady Thatcher, so strongly promoted. That means that we cannot have a protectionist system that gives particular access to certain nationalities.

That conflict cannot be removed in the Council of Ministers; it has to be dealt with at an IGC. The Minister who opened the debate asked why the previous Government did not raise such matters in Council meetings. That shows that he has not got the point. We could have raised the issue in Council meetings until we were blue in the face and had all 15 member states on our side, but the problem lies at the heart of the treaties to which we have all adhered, and is difficult to solve. It cannot be solved outside an IGC. The Government were wrong to say before the general election that they would solve it at the IGC, then tamely going along after the election with a piece of paper.

Dr. George Turner: I am listening to the right hon. Gentleman carefully, and would like to understand. I appreciate that an event may happen only once every six years or so, but presumably the preparation starts much earlier. A Government arrive at the conference knowing that they have a task in hand, with a certain number of countries backing them and others still to persuade. How many countries were going to support the previous Government at the IGC?

Mr. Gummer: As a former Prime Minister said, even when one is on one's own, one fights for that which is in

[Mr. Gummer]

Britain's interests. The present Prime Minister said that he would do the same. We can bandy words about who should say this, who did that and whether we or the current Government could have done more, but the fundamental issue of the amendment is that the Government promised to do something that they have not done. That is wrong and should be highlighted. That is why I disagree with my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Mr. Cash), who said that the amendment was of no use. It is of considerable use, because it has enabled us to discuss this key issue in the House. The Government promised to do something. Not only did they not deliver that, but they pretended that they had delivered it, hoping that people would be conned. The hon. Member for Great Grimsby knows that calling the issue a Euro-con merely diverts attention from the terminological inexactitude of his Prime Minister.

Mr. Cash: My right hon. Friend will know that I never object to strictures—certainly not from right hon. Gentlemen; we have got used to those. I do not disagree with his fundamental point that the Prime Minister has let down the fishing industry and his party by failing to carry out his promises. My concern was that the amendment was insubstantial and that, given its majority, the House of Lords could have passed many other amendments on other issues.

Mr. Gummer: I am glad my hon. Friend and I agree on at least one interpretation of the matter, which is that it gives us the opportunity to have this discussion. We ought to concentrate it on the area in which we have an important point, because we are asked to complete the agreement on the Amsterdam treaty.

As hon. Members will know, I am in favour of the treaty. I am happy with it. It is a good treaty. I do not object to it in any way—

Mr. Cash: Why did you vote against it, then?

Mr. Gummer: Because we were given to understand that the treaty would have more in it, and I can tell my hon. Friend what those two things were.

First, the treaty was supposed to provide the basis for the adhesion of new countries to the European Union. In fact, it did not face up to any of those issues. It made none of the decisions that it was supposed to make. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) has made that point again and again.

Secondly, the treaty did nothing about the fisheries problem, although the Government had promised that it would. The hon. Member for Great Grimsby suggests that the Government knew all along that they could do nothing about that, and in doing so he is telling us what we always believed—that, before the election, people were prepared to promise anything, even that which they knew they could not carry through.

It is the hon. Member for Great Grimsby who is making the really deep attack on his own Prime Minister. He is saying that, when the question was put to him, the Prime Minister should not have said:

"We certainly have not ruled out holding up IGC business in order to get the right changes to fishing policy in the British interest",

as he did on "The World at One" on 14 April 1997. Instead, the right hon. Gentleman should have said, "We know there is no point holding that out as a hope to the fishing industry, because we have no intention of doing it." He must have known that he had no intention of doing it, because immediately after the election he did not do it.

Not only did the Prime Minister not try to do that, but he gave no sign of having mastered the brief or understood what it really meant. Therefore, the first reason why I want the House to pass the amendment is that I want it to stand as a permanent memorial to the fact that the Prime Minister says what is convenient to him at the time, rather than what is true.

From a Prime Minister who claimed to believe in trust, that was one of the first examples of what has now become a regular activity—giving the impression of one thing while meaning precisely the opposite. As my mother always said, to give such an impression is the same as telling a lie. Just because someone has left an impression, without actually saying the word that he can be caught out on, that does not mean that he is any less guilty, especially if he claims to be a man in whom trust may properly be reposed.

The second issue that the amendment brings forward is the problem of the fishing industry as a whole. As the voluntary chairman of the Marine Stewardship Council, I can say that the real problem about quota hopping, or any other argument about fish stocks and the like, is that we do not have enough fish.

If we read accounts from the 19th century, we realise that there was a huge harvest of fish out there then. A good example is to be found in the autobiography of a man who became an archbishop, who had earlier sailed as a cabin boy on a big boat that went to the Baltic. Apparently the boat had to stay in port for three days there, because so thick were the shoals of fish that it could not get out.

That was common in a world in which the fishermen had none of the modern techniques. They had no directional finders to tell them exactly where the boat was, nor did they have the kind of radar that showed them where the fish were. Fishing was a much more haphazard activity then. Nowadays, we often know so much that the fish do not have a hope.

That is true of all the fishing industries in Europe—and not only there. To those of my hon. Friends who do not want to me talk about Europe, I can say that it applies elsewhere in the world, too. All over the world, from the South China seas to the Falkland Islands, we are in severe danger of losing all our fish stocks.

8.15 pm

Sir Crispin Tickell is the chairman of the Government panel on sustainable development, and in his first report to the previous Government, among other things that one would expect him to put in a list of priorities, he put a surprising item. He pointed out that the most imminent ecological disaster is the loss of our fish stocks. That applies not only to Europe but to the whole world.

One of the problems is that every fisherman is concerned to get his share, irrespective of other people's share. One understands that; every fisherman needs his own future, and is sometimes less concerned about the future of his children and grandchildren. Overfishing is a real problem, to which we need to find an answer not only in Europe but throughout the world.

It seems to me that we do not solve that problem by constantly suggesting "solutions" such as those put forward by the hon. Member for Great Grimsby. The truth is that we have too few fish and too many fishermen after them, both in Europe and in the rest of the world. We need to return to a more sustainable fishing system, and in Europe that has to be done through the Community and the Council of Ministers. However, it cannot be done there effectively unless changes have first been made to create an atmosphere in which it can be done. The Government's failure to do that means that they are very much in error.

The third issue is that of quota hoppers. I have always thought that "quota hopping" is a rather nice phrase. Using it is rather like using the word "foetus" instead of the word "baby". If we want people to believe that it is all right to destroy babies, we can call them foetuses and get rid of them. That is how that sort of terminology operates. Similarly, using the term "quota hoppers" seems to suggest that nobody bought the quotas.

People put forward all sorts of arguments about why the quotas were sold, but one of our big problems is the fact that quotas—in large part, if not entirely—were bought by somebody. To say that quota hoppers can easily be stopped is to make the whole issue much less complicated than it really is.

Fishermen sold their quotas and received money for them. Those who paid for them—rightly in terms of the law, but wrongly in terms of the share-out that we had expected to take place—expect to be able to carry them through. I hope that, when we talk about quota hopping, we realise that the issue is more complicated than it seems.

That is why the only place in which it can be dealt with is the intergovernmental conference. The present Government should not have misled this country if they had no intention of doing what they said they would. The hon. Member for Great Grimsby said that the former Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon, would not have held up the IGC. My reply is simply that I cannot point to one occasion during his period as Prime Minister when my right hon. Friend promised to do something and did not carry it out; yet, in one year of the present Prime Minister, hardly a week has passed without something happening that is the exact opposite of what was promised.

Mr. Mitchell: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gummer: I ought to be coming to an end.

It is necessary to have a common fisheries policy. The complaint about the fisheries policy is that the policy is wrong, not that it is common. Fisheries policy has always been common; even the 12-mile limit was shared with some of our neighbours over a long period. Fish do not come along with flags on their fins. Fish and fisheries have to be organised on a common basis. Where that has not happened, stocks are fished out because people think, "If I don't get the fish, my neighbour will." The system must be common. The common fisheries policy is wrong because the policy is wrong, but the commonality is right.

I always remember that, when I was a Minister responsible for fisheries, the fishermen used to tell me, "Don't ever renegotiate the common fisheries policy," because my late lamented right hon. Friend, the Scottish Minister Alick Buchanan-Smith, had negotiated not only the fair sharing out of the fish stocks, but an extra amount for us because we were no longer allowed to fish off Iceland. It was heralded at the time as a great deal. Every time we were negotiating, the one thing the fisheries industry said was that we should not renegotiate the deal because we would never get the same proportion again.

If we are to solve the problems, we must first be honest with the fishing industry. That means that we must find a way of restricting effort across Europe until fishing stocks recover. We must become more sustainable. We must realise that the policy must be a common fisheries policy, but we must recognise also that the present policy does not work. It must be revised fundamentally without reducing the shares—not least our share in the UK.

Some of us are in favour of the EU, enthusiastic about the concept of solving the problems on a common basis, and—above all—concerned about the environment. We have come here to debate the amendment—useless as my hon. Friend the Member for Stone thinks it to be—because, without question, it puts its finger on the fact that the Government, the Minister with responsibility for fisheries and the Prime Minister appear to have fundamentally changed their position since before the election.

When it was a question of getting votes, Labour Members said that they would stand up for change at the IGC and would hold it up. Today, we are asked to pass the results of the IGC, and to hope for the best on fishing. That is not what the Government promised, and they know it. That is why the Minister they put up to argue the case has no record or form on the issue, and why the Minister responsible for fisheries did not move the motion. If he had done so, he would have had to explain why his position before the election was much tougher than now. If the Minister is to wind up, he might explain his rudeness to the House in not being here when my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe started his speech and made some good comments. It would be good for the House to know why the Minister was not here.

The Government are running away from the fact that they told us before the general election something that they changed entirely afterwards—once they had the fishing votes in their pockets.

Dr. Godman: It is always a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer). He is a fair-minded fellow, so I am sure that he will forgive me if I remind the House that, when he was Fisheries Minister, he presided over a massive cock-up over the decommissioning scheme for which the Public Accounts Committee criticised his Department—using more elegant language. Fishermen from the smaller fishing communities say that the Humberside trawler companies ripped off the scheme that the right hon. Gentleman so badly managed with his inept colleagues and officials.

I share the anger and cynicism of my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell). I have been around the industry all my life. I was born and raised in a fishing community. My brother Leslie is the skipper of a freezer trawler which is fishing up in the Arctic at this very moment. My mother was a fishergirl and my father was a fisherman, so I know something of the industry.

[Dr. Godman]

The Government of which the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal was a member betrayed the fishing communities, so much so that the Scottish secessionists—who, characteristically, are absent from such an important debate—are now telling fishing communities in Scotland that the way forward is an independent Scotland and a renegotiation of the common fisheries policy for Scotland. They are leading the fishing communities up a blind alley—we know that—but they are not here to defend themselves against these charges. In their way, what they say is characterised by the same smugness and hypocrisy that we have heard from the Conservatives today.

During my life in and around the industry, successive Administrations have betrayed the interests of our fishing industry. One or two hon. Members in the Chamber at present know that. The United Kingdom-Icelandic fisheries dispute—popularly known as the cod wars—is an example. In the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, Conservative Governments and Labour Governments betrayed our fishermen. I recall the negotiations offered to us by the Icelandic Government. A Labour Foreign Minister—now the noble Lord Hattersley—did not do our fishermen any good in the negotiations. In that regard, he was as inept as negotiators representing Tory Governments and the Ministry.

A Tory Prime Minister used our fishing communities as a bargaining counter—a pawn—to gain access to the then European Economic Community. On the basis of what happened to my brother, cousins, uncles and others, I can say that the industry was betrayed by the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal. I am trying to be fair-minded, and Labour Governments do not have a much better record.

Let us have honesty from both sides of the House. We are talking about the treatment of the industry and our communities—whether it is Hull, Grimsby, Lowestoft, Yarmouth or any of the communities closer to my constituency. I am the honorary chairman of the Clyde Fishermen's Association, a small fishing vessel owners' association. Those people are struggling to make a living.

As the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal said, quota hopping is a complicated problem. He was right to say that there are too many fishermen chasing too few fish, and he was right also to say that we cannot leave the management of fishing to the fishermen. It is a disaster to leave it to the bureaucrats in Brussels.

My hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby is right to say that the kernel of the serious problem bedevilling our fishing industry and communities is the common fisheries policy. How do we change that? Do we go down the secessionist road in Scotland and kid people that we can renegotiate the CFP on the basis of an independent Scotland? That is rubbish.

We must ensure that, from now on, we negotiate in a tough-minded way on behalf of our communities. I say to Ministers—I have said this to my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food—that there can be no enlargement of the EU without reform of the common agricultural policy and the common fisheries policy. Some of the applicant nations are maritime nations. If there is no reform of the CFP, they will be allowed to fish in our waters.

My hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby described the fish as a common resource. I would say that a reformed CFP must take cognisance of the interests of local fishermen, and privilege must be given to locally based fishermen against the interests of the big boys—the nomadic fishermen from Holland, Spain or, dare I say it, the north-east of Scotland. We recently argued that we should not allow the purse seine trawlers and others to fish off the west coast of Scotland with their twin prawn trawls. We must protect local communities. The common fisheries policy must be radically reformed before enlargement can take place.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): May I say how much I support what the hon. Gentleman has said about the fate of the smaller fishing vessels, in particular those based in village fishing communities, of which there are a number in my constituency? Whatever happens, the pressure is finally taken out on those at the bottom of the chain of effort. As he rightly said, something must be done to protect those communities, many of which have no economic basis other than fishing.

8.30 pm

Dr. Godman: The hon. and learned Gentleman is absolutely right. We have only to think of Anstruther—I think that it is known locally as Anster—Pittenweem and St. Monans. We are talking not only about fishermen and their families, but about fishing boat builders, who have largely disappeared from the hon. and learned Gentleman's constituency. They were superb builders of wooden fishing boats—I speak as a shipwright, so I know what I am talking about. Millers of St. Monans has gone, for example. Like the fishermen, those engaged in the ancillary activities are also deprived of a decent livelihood because of the rotten common fisheries policy.

It is one thing to talk about equality of access, but we have to start to talk in terms of regional preference and regional—not necessarily national—management schemes, to take account of the needs of the more remote communities where there are few economic alternatives, such as the communities in Shetland, Orkney, on the west coast of Scotland and, indeed, in the south-west and other areas of England. Ministers have to do much better than their predecessors, both Labour and Conservative, whose record left a lot to be desired.

How will the measures that were outlined be policed? How can we ensure that 50 per cent. of the catch of so-called quota hoppers will be landed in Scarborough, Hull, Grimsby, Lowestoft or Aberdeen?

Mr. Menzies Campbell: Or Anstruther.

Dr. Godman: The quota hoppers would not get into Anstruther; unfortunately, they are too big.

The Minister talks about expenditure, but are we to expect from what he says that some of the vessels will undergo annual refits in our shipyards rather than in shipyards in their own countries? Somehow I doubt that they will, although I would love to see it. Refits are an essential and integral element of the annual expenditure incurred by trawler owners.

The key question is the power of the fisheries policemen—I should say policewomen, too. Again, our record is not great. We could learn from the Norwegians,

for example, who police their fisheries very powerfully—it is a reckless skipper who sails to Norway from Scotland or England without having all his papers in order. My hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby talks about the toughness of our inspectors, but he should take a trip on a British vessel fishing in Norwegian waters—people dare not break the law there, because, if they are caught, they are never allowed back into those waters. That is the toughness I want.

Tough policing will be needed if the Minister is to convince our deeply disillusioned fishing communities that, unlike previous Administrations, the Government mean business and will both protect and promote the interests of our sadly neglected fishing communities. Nothing less will do.

Mr. Townend: In these debates, I respect hon. Members on both sides of the House who speak for the fishing industry and their constituents. I agree with much of what the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) said. He was right to say that the common fisheries policy has been a disaster, particularly for British fishermen, including those in my constituency. I tell my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) that, if the common fisheries policy had worked, there would not be a shortage of fish. The whole purpose of quotas was to conserve fish so that each year the stocks, and therefore the quotas, would increase.

Britain has done particularly badly. I agree with the hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Dr. Godman) that my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) was responsible for that, but responsibility also lay with the late Lord Wilson, who missed a great opportunity—when he renegotiated Britain's terms of membership of the European Community after the referendum, he ignored fishing. The fishing industry has not been well treated by any Government. I will not be popular among my hon. Friends for saying that, but we should be honest.

Britain suffered particularly because our waters provide 60 per cent. of the European Union's fish—the industry sometimes says 80 per cent.—yet the common fisheries policy gives us a quota of only 31 per cent. Even that deal, which in no circumstances could be considered good for this country, is being extensively undermined by quota hopping. If no action is taken, the national quota will, each year, diminish progressively as more and more foreigners buy our boats.

By 1997—the most up-to-date figures I could get—46 per cent. of hake, 44 per cent. of plaice, 29 per cent. of monkfish and 20 per cent. of sole was taken by quota hoppers. That is a significant amount of fish. Quota hopping is undermining the principle of relative stability that was established in 1983, when the intention was that quotas were for the fishermen of the individual countries.

Some of the criticism of the previous Government has been unfair. Baroness Thatcher introduced the Merchant Shipping Act 1988, which some Labour Members supported, to protect the British fishing industry. The House passed that Act but, regrettably, the will of the House was overruled by the European Court. That decision stopped the House passing legislation to protect our fishermen, which, more than anything else, made me realise how much independence we had surrendered to Brussels and how, if we did not start to pull power back, the House would become nothing more than a glorified county council or provincial assembly.

The previous Government realised that, because of the court's decision, the industry could not be protected without a treaty change. The former Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major), made a commitment before and at the general election last year that he would refrain from signing the Amsterdam treaty unless a change was incorporated to deal with the problem of quota hopping.

At the election, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal said, the current Prime Minister followed whatever the Conservatives said—on spending, tax, a referendum for Europe, or fishing. He was so frightened that he would not win that he followed us in all things—we have heard this evening what he said at the time. However, not only the Prime Minister but Labour candidates throughout the country, including those in fishing constituencies, said, "You will be safe with Labour. Labour will protect your interests. We won't accept the Amsterdam treaty without looking after you." As a result, the Conservatives lost nearly every major fishing port, apart from Brixham and Bridlington, which is in my constituency.

Sir Richard Body (Boston and Skegness): And Boston.

Mr. Townend: I do not want to argue with my hon. Friend about the definition of "major".

When it came to decision time, what did the Government do? They forgot all about the comments made by Fisheries Ministers and the Prime Minister, and signed the Amsterdam treaty without achieving anything concrete for our fishermen. As is usual in Europe, it was fudge and weasel words, and nothing was delivered. After one year in power, new Labour has betrayed British fishermen.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Elliot Morley): Don't be daft.

Mr. Townend: I asked the hon. Gentleman how much fish we will get if he is successful in the negotiations. He said that he did not know, but read out the various options. None of them would give an extra tonne of fish to British fishing boats. That proves another thing. Before the election, Labour Members were keen to say that, if they were elected they would be able to get a better deal out of Europe. They said: "We're more pro-European. We'll cosy up to them and get satisfaction through co-operation." What did all that cosying up, co-operation, giving in and signing the Amsterdam treaty without any conditions achieve for British fishermen? Nothing.

The only way in which any Government will get satisfaction on quota hoppers is at a treaty negotiation. The only way they will get it is to play it like the French do. Not only have the Government got to threaten to use the veto; if necessary, they have got to use it where an overwhelmingly important national interest is at stake.

I have represented Bridlington for many years, and I believe that fishing is an overwhelming national interest. I also believe that, when my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon, the former Prime Minister, said that he would veto Amsterdam if he had to, he would have been

[Mr. Townend]

prepared to do so. Once the other states knew that he was prepared to use it, they would have been prepared to do a deal.

We have only to look at the way in which the French work. It was 13 to one over the appointment of the governor of the new European central bank, but the French exercised their veto and got an agreement that after four years their man would be in. Whether our Government are Conservative or Labour, they should be prepared to fight just as strongly and just as fiercely for British interests and for the interests of British fishermen.

Mr. Morley: It is difficult to criticise the hon. Gentleman when he is being so honest about the failings of past Conservative Governments, but he knows as well as I do that the Conservative Government could have used their veto on the accession of Finland, Austria and Sweden when the Spanish threatened to use their veto and, indeed, got accelerated full fishing access to Community waters through doing so. Will he remind the House what that Government did at that time?

Mr. Townend: We get this time and again. I agree that we could have vetoed many things, but the simple fact is that that is not the question. My right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal is right—you are the Government and you are responsible for the fishing industry today. It does not matter what we should have done or might have done: you have failed in the past year.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. The hon. Gentleman must remember that he is speaking through the Chair—and I have no responsibility for these matters.

Mr. Townend: I beg your pardon, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Minister and the Labour Government are responsible, but time after time and in Question Time after Question Time as we hold the Executive to account, they never answer our questions. They seem to think that they can refuse to be held to account by harking back to what happened under the previous Government. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal said, this debate is about the commitment that the present Minister and Prime Minister gave at the election.

Most people do not realise the extent of quota hopping—I sometimes wonder whether the Minister realises, although he must. I understand that 26 per cent. of fishing tonnage on the United Kingdom register is now owned by quota hoppers, and that £100 million of fish landings are being lost every year. By and large, quota hoppers do not take advantage of the decommissioning schemes, so the proportion of our fish taken by quota hoppers is increasing all the time.

I listened with interest to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby—I nearly called him my hon. Friend because I agree with him so much as a neighbouring fishing Member—and, like him, I am afraid that I am pessimistic. Unless the Government change their attitude, the outlook for British fishing is very bleak, as I think the hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde would agree.

In the early years of the next century there will be no British fishing industry; it will be a European industry with permits issued from Brussels and boats fishing up to the beaches. What a terrible end that will be to tradition in a maritime country—in our islands, surrounded by sea—whose history and prosperity have been linked with the sea; what a terrible end it will be given the faith that we and the British people have had in the men who go to sea in small boats to fish. It is a terrible prospect, and the Government should start thinking about their responsibilities to the fishing industry. They should forget what has gone on before and think about their responsibilities to ensure that in 2003 and 2004 we still have a viable, large British fishing industry.

8.45 pm

Dr. George Turner: I have been told that, in time, hon. Members become like their constituents. Listening to the passion with which those who represent fishing communities speak in the House, I recognise the fisherman I have had to deal with more recently in King's Lynn. Fishing is an industry and an occupation that has suffered much in past decades.

I ask the House to look a little more dispassionately at what is on our agenda. As one who has come into contact with Members of the other place in Joint Committees, I looked with interest to see why the amendment was before us. The role of the other House is under question, so I assumed that the amendment was the result of the more learned Members of that place discovering something about the consequences of Amsterdam of which this House has been ignorant for some months.

My inquiries and the information provided in the debate tonight seem to show that there is no such reason, and that we are discussing what was reported to the House as the outcome of the Amsterdam discussions several months ago. I conclude that Members of the other place have been airing their party political prejudices rather than their learnedness about the treaty. It is regrettable that the unelected Members of the other House are behaving in what way, particularly at a rather sensitive time in their history.

As a new Member, I am always sensitive to whether I am defending the party manifesto on which I was elected. I have, however, become accustomed to the fact that, when the Opposition cannot find us at fault because of our manifesto, they selectively quote what might or might not have been said in whatever time period they want to go back to. Of course, if parties do not adjust their positions as they approach the electorate and make clear promises, something is wrong with our political process.

There would be something wrong indeed if, by quoting selectively, it were not possible to show some inconsistencies. Parties have to develop policies. I see the role of opposition as we study Bills, and I see Opposition parties shifting their role even within the time that it takes a Bill to go through a Standing Committee.

Sir Teddy Taylor: In view of the confusion, I accept absolutely the important points that the hon. Gentleman makes. Can he give us some indication of the impression that fishermen in his constituency had of our likely position on the issue in Amsterdam? While he and I may not have understood, what did his fishermen think? I think that he knows pretty well.

Dr. Turner: I was coming to that very point. My hon. Friend the Minister visited my constituency when he was

still in opposition and got what was described to me as a warm reception because he would not promise the fishermen what they wanted. However, his reputation since the election is that he has done more in his period in office than the last Government did in a decade. Fishermen are not satisfied—I do not believe that they ever will be, given what has happened to them over the past decade—but that is what has occurred in my constituency.

I should be interested to know whether I should be reading our manifesto to ensure that no commitment has been broken, but the words that have been cited seem at the very least ambiguous. Apparently we said that we had not ruled something out. That is an interesting pledge to be accused of breaking. We said that we were prepared to be tough at international discussions. Conservative Members have told us that the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major), would have been really tough, but when I was a member of the public rather than a Member of the House, I saw that Prime Minister barely in control of his Cabinet and certainly not in control of his party; yet he is the man who would have been the tough man of Europe at the intergovernmental conference. Frankly, I do not believe a word of it.

Mr. Blunt: The hon. Gentleman's predecessor and I worked in the Foreign Office for, respectively, the former Foreign Secretary and my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major). The language used about the intergovernmental conference and the need for a deal on quota hopping was absolute. It left no room for manoeuvre. On the issue of qualified majority voting, for example, Sir Malcolm Rifkind made it quite clear that he would not prejudice the entire treaty if QMV was extended in one area, although he could not foresee that happening. That was a bolt hole. There was no such bolt hole for the Government's position on quota hopping. The treaty would not have happened without a deal on quota hopping under a Conservative Government.

Dr. Turner: I wonder which Conservative Government that would have been, Deputy Speaker. Two Conservative parties fought the last election, and it is not clear which of them would have been in control if the electorate had unfortunately re-elected the Conservatives.

There is a long-standing tradition when it comes to international debate or defending the country internationally; Opposition parties support the Government wherever possible. The Prime Minister's words—he did not rule things out, and he was prepared to defend what the former Prime Minister said in the interests of our fishing industry—were rather carefully chosen and entirely appropriate to that circumstance.

Earlier, in interventions, Deputy Speaker, I asked exactly what preparation had been made. I have had to take over negotiations from others, both in my own job and in union matters. Before taking on a job, people do not sell themselves out or say even before they have arrived that they will give in. They have to assess the hand they have been given, just as any Prime Minister—or a Cabinet Minister assessing his Department—must realistically assess the hand that he has been given with which to negotiate with an IGC that has been waiting for the best part of a decade to raise the issue.

This evening, however, Deputy Speaker, what have I been told about that hand?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman, and I do not want to be pernickety, but the form of address for which he is searching is "Mr. Deputy Speaker".

Dr. Turner: I am sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The hand that the Government inherited meant that no other member state was prepared to vote with us or support us. Clearly, the national interest should predominate. I understand why people talk emotionally about the overwhelming national interest or the importance to their constituency, but the quota issue is biological. Fish do not come with national labels on them. We cannot look to national interest alone to solve an international problem. International agreement was desirable.

In considering what the Prime Minister brought back for the House to debate, I thought that there was much to be gained if the arrangements he described were brought into force. There would be economic gain for the fishing communities under the economic licensing conditions of options A, B, C and D, which have been referred to and which I shall not repeat. In the modest time I have been here, I have found myself regularly frustrated about the time it takes to develop matters.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): Realising that the common fisheries policy is collective might help the hon. Gentleman to understand the difficulties of agreeing anything practical in the European Community. It contrasts with the experience of, shall we say, Norway, which determines its own fishing policy, or of the south Atlantic, in which the Government of the Falkland Islands determine their own policy. Both are extremely successful fisheries, and they are in sharp contrast with what happens with the collective, which cannot reach a proper decision.

Dr. Turner: I read a Library research paper on the history of this matter with considerable interest. I gained the clear impression that we need to proceed with an element of agreement, rather than by assuming that we can simply assert national or constituency interest. Strong economic links were of benefit. I understand that fishermen are disappointed, but that is because of what happened before the Government were elected. I have read that paper, and I have looked back to the failure in the 1980s of the then Government to enact a law that stood the test of European law. The catalogue of disasters falls nowhere short of failure and neglect. The Opposition came naked into the Chamber this evening to try to bury their past neglect, raise false accusations and pretend that life is simple when it is not.

Local fishermen have asked me how long the process will take. I have been told that quota hopping accounts for 25 per cent. of tonnage. I should like clarification on that point, because I have also been told that it accounts for only 10 per cent. of the catch. Other figures have been used. What is the figure, and what is happening about it? When will we get a conclusion to what have been described as fairly protracted discussions?

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): It is a privilege to speak after so many hon. Members with

[Mr. David Heath]

greater knowledge of the fishing industry than I have. I was particularly taken by the contributions of the hon. Members for Greenock and Inverclyde (Dr. Godman) and for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell). Neither is now here. Presumably they have gone for a fish-and-chip supper, but no doubt they will appear later.

The hon. Member for Great Grimsby properly exposed the great paradox of the debate. The problems of the fishing industry and quota hopping are real issues that should detain the House, and are proper matters for debate. However, this debate is on the pretext of an entirely bogus Lords amendment. It is bogus because of its implications for the Amsterdam Bill. It has been bogus in respect of the positions of the Government and of the official Opposition.

The amendment cannot achieve the changes to the common fisheries policy that many of us would like, if for no other reason than the fact that the Amsterdam treaty does not deal with fishing policy. It is outside the scope of the treaty signed in Amsterdam. Perhaps it should not have been, but it was. To their credit, hon. Members have not attempted to talk to the Lords amendment but have given their views about the CFP and what happened in the negotiations. The only effect of accepting the amendment would be to delay ratification of the Amsterdam treaty.

9 pm

There have been arguments about the Amsterdam treaty. We have had endless discussions about what the Amsterdam Bill might imply for our country. Most suggestions from both sides of the argument rather overstated the case. It is a modest Bill that achieves modest results, but what it does achieve is largely benign, in my view and in that of the majority of the House, as has been tested. To delay ratification by spurious argument about what can be achieved is bogus.

Mr. Gummer: I understand the hon. Gentleman's argument and am not at all antagonistic to the Amsterdam treaty. It is not that we are seeking to hold up the treaty, but that the Prime Minister said that he would not sign it unless he had at least tried—

Mr. Morley: He did not say that.

Mr. Gummer: If the Minister means that the Prime Minister was going to sign it without even trying, he has made an even more fundamental attack on the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister gave the country the impression that he would fight for the fishermen at the time of the treaty. He did not. How else can we bring that home to him?

Mr. Heath: The right hon. Gentleman makes the point that I was trying to make in my own way. There needs to be an argument about the CFP and the Government's negotiating position, but the Lords amendment does not achieve that objective except through the process of having this debate. I think that that is what the right hon. Gentleman is saying. If so, he is in agreement with my point that the amendment will not secure the changes that we seek in the CFP, but is an opportunity for the House to debate the matter once more. We are taking advantage of that.

The problem with the Government's position largely concerns the position that they adopted on return from Amsterdam. They claimed a great victory and said that they had solved all the world's problems at a stroke. They overplayed the roles played by the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary.

Mr. Howard: It was an overblown hoo-hah.

Mr. Heath: The right hon. and learned Gentleman suggests that a bit of hoo-hah was involved. There was an awful lot of hoo-hah. Hoo-hah, overblown, tarantara, call it what one will, that is what we got on the return from Amsterdam.

In fact, there was nothing like that sort of success—it was a modest negotiation with modest results. On fishing, all the Prime Minister brought back was a piece of paper—a fig leaf to cover his embarrassment about his lack of progress on an important negotiating issue.

Mr. Cash: Does the hon. Gentleman remember that part of the tarantara and the hoo-hah was the Foreign Secretary having to come to the House and admit that the Government had been completely outflanked in the negotiations by the Spanish, which led to a leader in *The Times* and a great deal of adverse comment from hon. Members on both sides of the House?

Mr. Heath: The hon. Gentleman will remember, from the hours of debate that we shared, several areas in which the Government's performance was less impressive than the advance publicity had suggested—Gibraltar comes to mind as an example.

However, the Government brought back the piece of paper. I do not believe that it has any legally binding consequences. Although it might have elucidated the legal position to an extent, it will be of value only if it is not successfully challenged by the Spanish or by any other nation's fishing fleet. If that is true, we want to know what the Government have done over the past 12 months and what they are doing now to put into practice the principles encompassed by that piece of paper.

I see little sign of progress, but perhaps the Minister will be able to advise me of the progress that has been made over the past 12 months. Many of us who have examined the proposals see advantages in the scheme promoted, but we also see that it is full of loopholes; it is capable of considerable abuse, and might not be successful in achieving its objectives.

The question is: will the so-called economic linkage mean anything in practice? I do not represent a fishing constituency—my constituents catch nothing larger than elvers—but I am not remotely surprised that those who do represent fishing communities and who know what fishermen think of the proposals are extremely disappointed with the results of the negotiations. It is characteristic of the Government to over-hype and over-spin their achievements, which might be why, a couple of weeks ago, the European Parliament was not prepared to congratulate the Government on their exercise of the European Union presidency—MEPs recognise when they are being sold a pup in terms of media spin.

Hyperbole is not the sole province of the Government—the Conservative position is equally suspect. We heard the Conservatives' pre-election claims

for what they were going to do in the intergovernmental conference; they were equally extravagant, yet there was no real preparation other than the preparation of the protocol, and there was no assembling of the essential coalition needed to achieve anything. The previous Government's sole negotiating position was apparently that they would walk away if they did not get their way. We had seen that many times before—a swing from puerile petulance to supine acquiescence when they did not get their own way. No hill was ever reached by the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) that he did not march his army halfway up and then march it down again.

If we want to see the results of the previous Government's policy in action, we need only look at the progress on the lifting of the beef ban. Nothing was achieved, simply because their only tactic was a spoiling tactic of not negotiating, but making things difficult for the people whose support we actually required. There is nothing more struthious in character than the Conservatives facing a problem in Europe—their position is to hide their heads in the sand and hope that the problem will go away; but it will not go away. What is needed is negotiation, which requires active engagement.

Sensible Conservative Members know that some of the demands expressed before the election were impossible. We heard the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) virtually admit that he had not expected any better a result from the IGC than that which was achieved by the current Government.

The previous Government failed the fishing industry in every possible way for many years, and the present Government are perhaps doing marginally better, but that is to damn with faint praise. No wonder that fishermen despair of all politicians who promised them a new deal for the fishing industry. All Governments since the late 1960s or early 1970s have failed the industry.

We return to the proposition before us and the possibility of delaying or wrecking the Amsterdam treaty. I believe that the treaty is a modest enough vehicle. We have rehearsed the arguments time and again. The treaty makes little progress on the key areas of reform needed in the European Union—on the common agricultural policy, the common fisheries policy, the structural funds and so on. It edges us marginally in the right direction on subsidiarity, openness, transparency and accountability.

Those are modest but necessary objectives. It would be foolish for the House to reject that modest progress by accepting the Lords amendment. The tragedy is that, if the amendment were accepted, it would not bring about the fundamental reform of the common fisheries policy that we believe is necessary. By 2002, we must be able to renegotiate not just the terms of the intergovernmental conference, but the treaties on which the common fisheries policy is based and move towards a system of regional management that will benefit the fishermen in Scotland, Cornwall and East Anglia. If we do not do that, we shall have signally failed the fishing industry yet again.

We shall not achieve our objectives by making things difficult for others who are trying to achieve the same reforms in the EU. We must have constructive engagement with our partner nations in the EU. I therefore urge the House to reject the Lords amendment and to proceed with ratification of the Amsterdam treaty at the earliest opportunity.

Sir Richard Body: If that was the official speech of the Liberal Democrat party, I hope that copies of it will be made available to every fisherman. I know what fishermen will then think of the Liberal Democrat party.

The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) used the word "bogus" four times with reference to the debate and the Opposition. There is nothing bogus about our views. Does he not realise that British fishermen are deeply disillusioned? In this debate, we speak on their behalf and articulate their fears about the future. It is important that we should highlight how appallingly they have been let down by the Amsterdam treaty. I have good reason to know that my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major), the former Prime Minister, decided to insert the condition that, if there were no changes in relation to quota hopping, he would veto the treaty. That is what he promised me, my colleagues, the fishing industry and the country.

We know that that undertaking was outbid by the present Prime Minister, and that nothing has been achieved. The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome should know that fishermen's disillusionment is extremely serious, and that the fishing industry is a fraction of the size that it was 20 years ago.

Mr. David Heath: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Richard Body: I shall give way if the hon. Gentleman wishes, but I am trying to be brief.

The industry passes from father to son. Every one of the fishermen in my constituency has a son who is a fisherman and most of them have grandsons and great-grandsons who are fishermen, but fishermen's sons are not coming into the industry now. They feel that there is no hope for it. That is a great tragedy, because, once we lose their expertise, the industry will disappear, quite apart from the fish.

Mr. Heath: There was nothing whatever in what I said that could be construed in any way other than expressing disappointment that the fishing industry finds itself in the parlous state it does and stating the need for change, to give people in the industry a future.

Sir Richard Body: We do not want to deal too much with the Liberal Democrat view on the matter. At any time, including at the general election, Liberal Democrats have been the worst offenders—they have been the strongest defenders of the common fisheries policy.

Mr. Heath: No, never.

Sir Richard Body: Yes, they have. They are not among those of us who believe that the common fisheries policy is so fundamentally flawed that we should dispense with it altogether. If the hon. Gentleman believes that a communal policy is necessary, he should talk to the fishermen of Iceland or Norway. If he spoke to Norwegian fishermen, he would be assured that fishing was one of the reasons why every one of them voted in the referendum against entry into the European Union.

9.15 pm

As the hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Dr. Godman) pointed out, if any ship from any part of the European Union fishes in the waters of Norway, it never dares to do so again because of what happens to it. That is the only policy that will replenish our fishing stocks, which are falling day by day.

One purpose—although calling it a purpose is pushing things a little too far—of the debate is to urge the Government to take action at the next intergovernmental conference, which may not be very far ahead because we must make constitutional changes to enable the Community to be enlarged. When the Community is enlarged, there will be more fishing fleets. Fleets from the Baltic states will have the same rights to come into our waters as those from Spain, which will be untenable.

We have every good reason now to press for a fundamental change in the common fisheries policy—if not to end it, which may be asking too much, then certainly to end the principle of equal access. It may be difficult for the Government to make that change, because, after all, it was an earlier Labour Administration who gave way on equal access in 1976. However, that is history, and I shall not go into that. We must now consider the future, which for our fishing industry will be nil unless there is a fundamental change to the common fisheries policy. The fishermen of this country expect the Government to do something about that policy and to redeem the promises that they so dismally failed to keep a year ago.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): I have always considered myself to be a fisherman's friend, so I support the Lords amendment. I consider it a major defect of the treaty of Amsterdam that quota hopping was not addressed, and that alone is a reason to delay the treaty taking effect until the provisions in the amendment have been fulfilled.

The problem before us is that, while British fishermen have felt that it is in their economic interests to sell their quota, quota hopping works against British fishing interests. The problem of quota hopping can be resolved only by an amendment to the original treaty of Rome, and I understand that some countries achieved that through the treaty of Maastricht. In the run-up to the general election last year, the Prime Minister promised to consider

"holding up the IGC business in order to get the right changes to fishing policy in the British interest."

He failed to fulfil that promise and stand up for British fishing interests.

I do not want to appear presumptuous, but perhaps I could give Ministers friendly advice on how to negotiate a fisheries protocol and how to win friends and influence people in the European Union. The British presidency this year and Britain's negotiations in the IGC last year have been marked by a failure to stand up for British interests.

I give just two examples. By signing the social chapter, the Government have damaged our flexible labour market, to the specific detriment of small and medium businesses in this country. By failing to negotiate the fisheries protocol to protect our vital national fishing interests, they have let down one of the country's strategic industries.

I emphasise that, in my view, withdrawal from the common fisheries policy is not an option. We need a common European fisheries policy. Fish are a vital commodity and resource but, regrettably, do not swim around wearing a Union Jack. They cross frontiers—they do not respect national boundaries—so we need a common fisheries policy.

However, we need a fisheries policy that is better enforced in other member states. If anything, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in this country is over-enthusiastic in enforcing the common fisheries policy. I ask the Government tonight: is that true of other member states? Until recently, Spain did not even have fisheries inspectors to inspect catches. I shall not mention the issue of under-sized catches being landed in Spain and other countries.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) said, we need a sustainable, properly policed fisheries policy, and to protect future fish stocks there should be no over-fishing anywhere in the European Union.

In negotiations, we should take a leaf out of the Spanish book. Spain would not rely on an exchange of letters between its Prime Minister and the President of the Commission, Jacques Santer. I seek an assurance from Ministers that the deal that the Minister of State described, which is set out in an exchange of letters, amounts to a legal agreement which would stand up to scrutiny before the European Court of Justice in Luxembourg. In my view, it does not. The provisions set out in that exchange of letters relate to percentages, and in my view a link with nationality would be open to legal challenge before the European Court of Justice, exactly as the Merchant Shipping Act 1988 was. In other words, it would be open to legal challenge on grounds of non-discrimination on grounds of nationality, under article 6 of the treaty; on the right of establishment, under article 52 of the treaty; and on the right to participate in companies, under article 221 of the treaty.

In any event, the so-called deal does nothing to prevent overseas fishermen from buying British quota, and it does not remove the quota hoppers from the United Kingdom register. In my view, British fishermen cannot rely on it.

In conclusion, I reject the negotiating tactic employed by the present Government, and I commend the Lords amendment to the House.

Mr. Gill: The Minister who opened the debate said that the Prime Minister was committed to the Government tackling the problems of quota hopping, and that they had faced up to those problems in a positive way. The Conservative case tonight is that the Prime Minister did not tackle that problem; more to the point, he squandered the only practical opportunity to do so that has been available to the Westminster Parliament for a long time.

Mr. Morley *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Gill: The Minister is nodding—

Mr. Morley: I am shaking my head.

Mr. Gill: I beg the hon. Gentleman's pardon. Shortly, I shall make some remarks about some of the things that he has said.

The Prime Minister missed that opportunity, and those of us who study the machinations of the European Community appreciate that only in limited windows of

opportunity can one get any satisfaction on such major issues. As some hon. Members have been at pains to point out, sometimes very strong-arm tactics must be used—indeed, have been used by other countries—to get satisfaction on issues that concern us. Conservative Members' complaint tonight is that the Prime Minister has failed to use any form of strength.

It was rather galling to hear the Minister say that the Conservative solutions to the quota hopping problem were not deliverable. We have no means of knowing whether the Government's proposals—if they had any—were deliverable, because they did not press them. In another place, the noble Lord Whitty said:

"This is a record of failure to tell the truth to the fishing communities and the public . . . It is time we stopped posturing on this and told the truth to the fishing communities."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 14 May 1998; Vol. 589, c. 1189.]

I agree entirely with that message. I agree whole-heartedly with Lord Whitty when he says that we should tell the truth. The hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Dr. Godman), who has just re-entered the Chamber, also appealed for honesty.

I departed from Lord Whitty's comments when he ascribed all the ills of the British fishing industry to the previous Administration. In truth, the problems have not arisen simply in the past 18 years: they have existed ever since we joined the European Community. To this day, Ministers refuse to acknowledge that the basic tenet of the common fisheries policy is equal access to the common resource without discrimination. By dint of the accession treaties signed in Corfu, that is now part of the acquis communautaire.

How did the Fisheries Minister respond? In a letter to *Fishing News* on 1 May 1998, the Minister said:

"The present restrictions on access within the six and 12 mile limits expire on 31 December 2002."

I must give credit where it is due: we have managed to convert the Minister to that view and he is correct in that belief. He goes on to say:

"We are confident of their renewal".

Perhaps the Minister will tell us by what token he believes that that derogation will be renewed. The same letter to *Fishing News* records:

"The system of quotas and relative stability will be reviewed by the end of 2002. But it does not expire then and will continue unaltered unless the Council decides otherwise."

There is clearly great confusion in the minds of Ministers if they do not understand that derogations run out in 2002—of that there is no doubt.

To demonstrate conclusively that the Minister does not understand that point, I remind him of an answer that he gave me at Question Time earlier in the year, when he said:

"the principle of relative stability takes precedence over the issue of common access."—[*Official Report*, 30 April 1993; Vol. 311, c. 440.]

How can that be? Will the Minister explain tonight why he believes that a derogation is superior to a treaty commitment? Who has advised the Minister that that is the case? What motive lies behind the Minister's interpretation? More to the point, what evidence can he produce to substantiate his claim? Right hon. and hon. Members are entitled to know the answer to that question, and British fishermen will also be very interested in that answer.

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset): My hon. Friend displays great perceptiveness and his usual intimate knowledge of the subject. Does not the House need to know what trades the Minister is prepared to make in order to extend the derogation?

Mr. Gill: My hon. Friend asks a very pertinent question. In the world of horse trading—that is what goes on in Brussels—something must be given in order to obtain a benefit. That is another question that the Minister might answer when he sums up this evening. What will he trade to ensure that the six and 12-mile limit derogation is extended, and to ensure the continuation of relative stability?

Mr. Nicholls: We have had an interesting and, in some ways, sombre debate. There have been 11 speeches, nine from Back Benchers: most were extremely impressive; some—especially that of the hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Dr. Godman), which I shall not for a moment try to match—were made from the basis of knowledge of the fishing industry; one, to which I shall refer in a moment, was positively odd, but even a serious debate deserves its lighter moments.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) was right to say that the key point is not how we feel about Europe—on one level, it is not even how we feel about fish. The key point is how people feel about their politicians and would-be leaders who say one thing—unequivocally, unambiguously and straightforwardly—and then do not simply fail in their objectives, which is a common lot of politicians in a fallen world, but do not even attempt to deliver.

9.30 pm

This is a sorry business, and wholly typical of the Prime Minister. He believes that he discharges the functions of his office by smiling his way around the capitals of Europe, and that such a performance amounts to statesmanship. He is aided and abetted by the Foreign Secretary, a man who is so lamentably unfit for his job that the only task that he performs for the Government is to make the Prime Minister look good by comparison. When people with that attitude are in charge of the nation's destiny, it is necessary to hold a debate such as this.

We have heard the usual criticism that the amendment may not be particularly well drafted. That does not matter. The amendment is perfectly straightforward: it has enabled the House to shine the harshest possible light on what the Prime Minister did, and to have this debate. People who take an interest in those matters can look at *Hansard* next week, next year and in perpetuity and understand what has been done. The amendment has performed a most valuable function, because, as I shall show in a moment, the way in which the Prime Minister handled the negotiations and set out his stall violated all the norms of intellectual honesty. There are other ways of describing that sort of behaviour outside the House, but that will do for my purposes this evening.

We have heard much about the common fisheries policy, and hon. Members will have their views about what an ideal CFP would be. Where nations share the seas, there has to be a fisheries policy. A working title might be the CFP, but it is not our job to debate what the contents of an ideal CFP might be. It is sufficient for our purposes to say that, over the years, the CFP has not done

[Mr. Nicholls]

British fishermen any good. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal said, it has not done much good for the fish, either.

If time permitted, we could debate the CFP, but that is not the point. The one thing that should be common ground between hon. Members is that quota hopping cannot possibly be right, whatever our views on Europe, fish or the CFP. Foreign-owned and foreign-crewed ships take catches out of the United Kingdom allocation and land them abroad—behaving in that way is simply untenable. It was noticeable that hon. Members on both sides of the House have not said a good word about the Government in practice, but one can say that quota hopping is simply unacceptable.

What are the facts? They are clear, and profoundly uncomfortable for Labour. Any Government can be accused retrospectively of not spotting difficulties, but that is too easy. People do not expect a Government to spot every devious turn of events that could bring about a certain situation, but they expect them to react properly when a problem is perceived. The idea that the previous Government did not react properly, quickly and decisively to quota hopping is completely at variance with the facts. The facts are that we said that we would act, and we did. The Labour Opposition said that they would act, and they did not. They did not fail—which is what we would have expected—because they did not even try.

The previous Government's record on quota hopping was honourable. First, we tried to impose on owners licence conditions on the loading and crewing of their ships. Secondly, through the Merchant Shipping Act 1988, we tried to limit the ownership of vessels to British nationals and British companies. That was the right thing to do, and my recollection is that it was so obviously the right thing to do that the House did not even divide on Second Reading. Labour Members have suggested that it was a dreadful Act: not a bit of it. The House was not even divided.

In due course, we had the indignity of legislation passed by this sovereign House of Parliament being struck down by the foreign European court. That is what happened in the Factortame judgment, and the indignity did not end there. In 1996, a further judgment of the European Court of Justice required United Kingdom domestic courts to assess the compensation that must be paid to Spanish fishermen for the money that they were done out of by not being able to pillage our fishing grounds when the 1988 Act was in force.

That is the measure of the problem. Faced with the Act being struck down, there is nothing to suggest that the previous Government did not react properly. They tried to see what could be negotiated, and they came to the conclusion pretty quickly that, if anything were to be done, it would have to be by an alteration to the treaty. That was our position throughout, and why we acted as we did.

The suggestion by the Minister of State that our European friends and partners did not realise that we wanted the treaty to be altered is lamentable and laughable. We made it clear throughout: my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) could not have made it more clear. He said:

"The IGC won't come to a successful conclusion until we are satisfied that among our other objectives the problem of quota hopping is resolved satisfactorily."

The previous year, Lady Trumpington said in the other place:

"we have notified the IGC, the Commission and other member states that we shall be tabling proposals to deal with the problem of quota hopping . . . they will take the form of a protocol to the treaty".—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 17 June 1996; Vol. 573, c. 82.]

We went ahead and tabled those proposals. The Minister of State thinks that it backs up his argument to say that a German Minister may not have done his homework properly. At least he can smile: I give him credit for that.

Mr. Doug Henderson: The hon. Gentleman does not seem to realise that the starting point of a negotiation is that the other side understands what one is trying to do. How could the previous Government get an agreement with Klaus Kinkel if he had not heard of the protocol and did not know what they wanted to negotiate in the first place?

Mr. Nicholls: The hon. Gentleman repeats the point that was put to him because it was thought to be a relatively simple one that he could wrestle with on the Floor of the House. The idea that we sprung this protocol on our partners at the last minute and that they did not know what was afoot is quite frankly wrong.

The Minister also argued that it was not feasible for us to put our foot down at Amsterdam and say, "We shall not shift until this matter is dealt with." Was that really not feasible? It was not only the Conservative Government who thought that it was feasible: the Opposition also thought so.

I accept that this confusion is not the fault of the Fisheries Minister: he is merely a Parliamentary Secretary, and he does not lay down policy. He does what he is told and, if he forgets what he is told, it appears on his messenger. He has previously said that my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry)—who was in charge of negotiations at that time—had said that quota hopping would be "pursued vigorously" at the IGC, and that Labour supported that approach. The then Leader of the Opposition thought that it was feasible. He said:

"we certainly have not ruled out holding up IGC business in order to get the right changes to fishing policy in the British interest . . . where Britain's interests are at stake, we are perfectly prepared to be isolated. Of course we are."

That is what the Prime Minister said.

Every debate should have some light relief, and the hon. Member for North-West Norfolk (Dr. Turner) said that the Prime Minister did not really mean what he said and that in fact he meant the precise opposite, but he wanted to be nice to the Prime Minister of the day. That is a fair precis of the position. The then Leader of the Opposition said emphatically, "We will back the Government on this. It is a feasible policy and if we go to Amsterdam, let there be no doubt. We will be every bit as tough."

So what did tough-talking Tony manage to achieve when he got there? Did he put his foot down and say, "No. I am sorry. I said it, and my word is my bond"? When the Prime Minister offers that, one should always take his bond.

What actually happened was that there was an exchange of correspondence. In the new, friendly, communautaire arrangements, a "Dear Tony" and "Dear Jacques" exchange of correspondence was produced triumphantly in June last

year, although the Prime Minister had made it absolutely clear that there would be a seamless thread between his desire and that of the Conservative party to stand up for British interests. Basically, that exchange of correspondence does no more than state what people already understood the position to be.

Just in case there should be any doubt that it should be legally binding—this is the answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh) and the substance of my question to the Minister of State—and just to make sure that the Prime Minister's humiliation was complete, Jacques Santer pointed out in the exchange of correspondence that it was not binding. He said that he agreed with the proposition about the economic link, adding, however:

"On the other hand, any requirement of an economic link which exceeds those limits cannot be justified by the system of national quotas."

He went on to make that point, too. Even at that time, flaccid, useless and impotent though that exchange of correspondence was, the Spanish were still serving notice that, if anything were done to build on that agreement, it would be open to challenge.

Where are we now? We have been told that some new proposals have been worked out, so where are they? Aficionados of such matters will have to find an obscure parliamentary question of 12 May saying in effect, "These things are in the pipeline. We are waiting for Europe to tell us whether we can do what we want."

The Spaniards have already said what they think about that. They have raised "grave reservations and doubts" about the revised version of the United Kingdom proposals. They are concerned that visits to ports have been dropped from the range of options for providing an economic link with a fishing area. They have criticised the "disproportionate" way in which landings and residency have been set out, and in a host of other ways they have made it abundantly clear that there is not the slightest doubt that, when they are in a position to do so, they will refer the matter to the European Court of Justice.

One does not have to be a very good lawyer—which is why even the Prime Minister should realise it—to know that anything that safeguards the British position must be to the detriment of somebody else, and the only way in which that detriment or fairness to British interests—whichever way one looks at it—can be enshrined in a way that ensures that it cannot be subject to legal challenge is through a protocol to the treaty.

So where are we tonight? The Prime Minister set out a position clearly and unequivocally, and he has gone back on it. The only point we need to know—I accept that it is of academic interest only—is whether the Prime Minister always intended to break his word or whether it was an idea that he had afterwards. Was it that, in the end, he simply did not have the courage to go to Europe and be a little Britainer? Was it that, despite everything he said, he simply could not contemplate the idea of having to walk across a European stage safe in the knowledge that the only people who were on his side were his own fishermen and the people in his own country? In other words, did he always intend to break his word, or was it something that he decided to do because he thought that the fishermen simply were not worth the candle?

Tonight, we are witnessing a depressing display from the Government, who have taken one position and are now saying something entirely different. We are about to see the Minister—whom I like and get on with—stand at the Dispatch Box and disown his own words or distinguish them in such a way that will make him look knavish or foolish or both. My hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) pointed out that we have not even begun to address what will happen in 2002 when the derogations come to an end. What we have seen tonight and what we shall hear from the Government is shabby and squalid—and they should be ashamed of themselves.

9.45 pm

Mr. Morley: First, may I apologise to the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard)? I assure him and the House that I meant no discourtesy in not being present to hear his opening comments. I was involved in interviews for the chairs of the new Regional Development Agencies in order to ensure a rural dimension to the appointments. I was very grateful to be asked by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Regions, Regeneration and Planning to participate in that exercise. I had hoped to be present for the beginning of the debate, and I apologise for the fact that my timing was slightly wrong.

In this debate, we have heard nothing but a rewrite of the history of the fishing industry and a verbal airbrushing of what has happened. This Government inherited a complete and utter shambles of a fishing industry after 18 years of the Conservative party's stewardship. Claims that the protocol proposed by the previous Government would have solved the issue of quota hopping have been nothing but ludicrous. To suggest in any way that Labour in opposition made false claims is both fatuous and insulting. I shall deal with those points in due course.

I turn to some of the excellent speeches in the debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell), who has more experience of fishing than many in the House, spoke with great authority on the subject.

Mr. Mitchell: Hear, hear.

Mr. Morley: I am pleased to have my hon. Friend's support on that if on nothing else.

My hon. Friend was absolutely right to say that the amendment is meaningless and totally pointless. He asked questions on several points. As an avid reader of *Fishing News*, he will know that I have set out some of the answers in correspondence. I should like to reassure him on the Corfu agreement and European Union fishing permits. EU fishing permits already exist in some fisheries; there is nothing new about that. I assure him that fishing permits would not replace member states' roles in licensing their national fishing fleets. That would occur only if a majority voted to introduce a permit scheme.

There is no proposal to introduce such a permit scheme, and the United Kingdom Government would not support any such proposal. I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend that equal enforcement and control is essential in the European Union. He will know that, under our presidency, we brought forward a paper on enforcement and control, which was unanimously supported as a basis for improving enforcement and control across all European member states. That is going ahead.

The right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) was very imaginative in finding a new reason for the previous Government's failures in the

[Mr. Morley]

fishing industry. It appears that all the fishing industry's problems were due to the dock labour scheme—a most interesting concept.

I certainly agree with the right hon. Gentleman's points about sustainability. He made very serious points, particularly given his role on the Marine Stewardship Council. None the less, he is not in a position to lecture this Government on sustainability when the Government of whom he was a member failed to make any progress whatever in reducing fleet over-capacity against targets set by the EU.

The right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal said that there was not one example of the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major), the former Prime Minister, making a promise and not delivering on it. I thought that that was a quite incredible statement. The right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal seems to have forgotten that his Administration promised that their policy of non-co-operation with the EU would bring about an end to the beef ban. The right hon. Member for Huntingdon told the House that the period of non-co-operation had been a huge success, a great victory, and that the beef ban would be lifted in November 1996. Given their success in the campaign of non-co-operation, what on earth makes Conservative Members think that they would have been more successful in a campaign to try to amend the agreement reached at the intergovernmental conference, which would have required the support of all member states, as each had a veto in that negotiation?

My hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Dr. Godman) also has great knowledge and experience of the fishing industry. He humiliated the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal by pointing out his mishandling of the decommissioning scheme. That money should have helped the whole industry to restructure, but instead it went to a small number of trawler companies. I accept his case for common fisheries policy reform when the European Union is enlarged. No new member state that does not have quota or an historical track record of fishing in our waters will get access to any of our quota-controlled stocks. I also accept his point about the need for the regional dimension to be strengthened.

Dr. Godman: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his compliment. The fishing industries of the Irish republic and the United Kingdom are still suffering terribly from the disgraceful conduct of Spanish trawler owners and skippers, who sweep the seas clean and will try any kind of fiddle to dodge their obligations.

Mr. Morley: I assure my hon. Friend that we shall not tolerate the rules being broken. We have made that clear several times. We recently conducted prosecutions in the cases of 14 Spanish-owned UK vessels, which resulted in fines totalling £1 million for transgressions.

The hon. Member for East Yorkshire (Mr. Townend) was honest in his comments about the failures of previous Conservative Administrations. I know of his long-standing interest in fisheries. My hon. Friend the Member for North-West Norfolk (Dr. Turner) is a new Member, but he already has a proud record of standing up for his fishing communities. I noted the support that his inshore fishermen gave him in the recent debate about razor clams. He was right about quota hoppers. I assure him that we are in the final stages of producing a document about quota hopping and economic links. I shall say more about that in a moment.

The only issue on which I agree with the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) is that the amendment is bogus. The hon. Member for Boston and Skegness (Sir R. Body) spoke about his inshore fleet. He knows of my support for the inshore industry and his fishermen. He is wrong to say that the amendment is not bogus.

The hon. Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh)—a Conservative Member—gave advice on how the Government could win friends and influence the European Union, which I found incredible. The rift between Tory Members of the European Parliament and the rest of the Conservative party must be even greater than I had thought.

The hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) is a regular contributor to these debates. I cannot go into detail about all his points in the time available. As another avid reader of *Fishing News*, he will know that I have spelt out the Government's position on six and 12-mile limits and relative stability, and that the Commission has supported that and written letters making the same points as I have made.

I welcome the hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) in his first Front-Bench outing in a debate, but I was disappointed by his attempt to cover his lack of knowledge of the fishing industry with personal abuse of the Prime Minister. The House deserves better than that.

The Conservatives were slow to react in government in the early 1980s to the emergence of quota hopping, with foreign-owned vessels registering in the UK and fishing our quota. They introduced an amendment to the Merchant Shipping Act 1988, but Labour Members pointed out that the amendment was contrary to the Single European Act that the Conservatives had introduced. Indeed, in the Factortame case the European Court overruled it.

The Conservatives had several opportunities to deal with quota hopping. They could have dealt with it during the negotiations on Spanish and Portuguese accession in 1985, but the then Government did not even mention it at that time. They could also have raised it on the occasion of Swedish, Finnish and Austrian accession—but again, while Spain threatened to use its veto to get advantages for its fishing industry, the Conservatives did nothing, apart from agreeing to the Spanish demands as they were made.

After 18 years, the Conservatives' answer was to introduce a protocol at the IGC. Everyone who had followed the debate, whether inside or outside the fishing industry, knew that that was an utterly bogus suggestion. First, even if the protocol had been carried, it would not have removed one quota hopper from the list; it would not have made the slightest difference. Secondly, not one of the 14 other member states supported the then Government's position, and every one of those 14 had a veto. Yet the Conservatives seem to think that they could have made progress on that basis.

It is true that at that time, in opposition, we were following the debate about the IGC and the protocol, and we made it clear that we did not rule out a future Labour Government's withholding their support at the IGC if we felt that we could make progress on that basis. However, in government it did not take us long to realise that that route was a complete dead end, and that there was no point in wasting time on something that could not be achieved.

Mr. Howard: If that was such an obvious dead end, why did the Prime Minister say, days before the election: "we are perfectly prepared to be isolated. Of course we are"?

Mr. Morley: I have made it clear that that was said in opposition. It would have been wrong then to rule out any option. I repeat that when, in government, we had a chance to see what the situation was, it was clear that there was no possibility of achieving support for the protocol. In the letter, we promised that the Labour Government would deal with quota hopping as a high priority. We have delivered on that promise—so much so that France and Belgium are already modelling an economic link for licence conditions based on our proposals. The matter is in its final stage, and we shall make the details public in the near future.

The Tory Administration were a failure in their attempts to deal with those issues. They failed in their original fisheries policy, and they failed to modify it when they had the opportunity, with Spanish and Portuguese accession. They failed to ensure that the economic circumstances of the United Kingdom fishing industry made it profitable and secure for our fishermen to hold on to their quotas.

It was the Conservative Government who encouraged fishermen to sell their licences, because no decommissioning scheme was available. They also ignored repeated requests by Labour Members to introduce one. The Conservatives—not the Labour Government and not the Labour party—must take responsibility for the fact that there are quota hoppers on the register now.

The Conservatives also failed to recognise that the United Kingdom regulations would be challenged before the European Court of Justice. They left government with a potential 30 per cent. cut across the board in prospect for every fishing boat in this country. We have managed to resolve that situation and bring some stability to the fishing industry, as the previous Government failed to do. The last word on the Tory Government's record is the fact that the fishing industry voted out just about every Tory Member who represented a fishing port—and their record is no better now than it was then.

Question put, That this House doth disagree with the Lords in the said amendment:—

The House divided: Ayes 330, Noes 134.

Division No. 298] **[9.58 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Jackie
Banks, Tony
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Stephen
Cable, Dr Vincent
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Canavan, Dennis
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Corbett, Robin
Cotter, Brian
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davies, Rt Hon Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Fyfe, Maria
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Gorrie, Donald
Grant, Bernie
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harris, Dr Evan
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie

(Welwyn Hatfield)
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCartney, Robert *(N Down)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Norris, Dan
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rendel, David
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stott, Roger
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swinney, John
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Wallace, James
Walley, Ms Joan
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Jim Dowd and
Mr. Kevin Hughes.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Beggs, Roy
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles

Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Sir David Madel and
Mrs. Caroline Spelman.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment disagreed to.

Committee appointed to draw up Reasons to be assigned to the Lords for disagreeing to their amendment to the Bill: Mr. Doug Henderson, Mr. Denis MacShane, Sir David Madel, Mr. Patrick Nicholls and Mr. Greg Pope; Mr. Doug Henderson to be Chairman of the Committee; and Three to be the quorum of the Committee.—[*Jane Kennedy.*]

To withdraw immediately.

Reasons for disagreeing to the Lords amendment reported, and agreed to; to be communicated to the Lords.

PRIVATE HIRE VEHICLES (LONDON) BILL

The Order of the House to resolve itself into a Committee on the Private Hire Vehicles (London) Bill on Friday 3 July having been read and discharged—

Ordered,

That the Bill be committed to a Standing Committee.—[*Jane Kennedy.*]

Gas Industry

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn —[*Jane Kennedy.*]

10.13 pm

Mr. Barry Gardiner (Brent, North): It would be a foolish Member of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, who presumed to test your patience by standing here at the end of a long parliamentary day in a vain attempt to suggest that the fate of the gas connections industry is a matter of vexation to most of his or her constituents. The gas connections industry is simply not a sexy topic. At the risk of testing not your patience, but perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister's sense of humour, I venture to suggest that gas connection is no Dounreay. Be that as it may, bullying and lies, discrimination and overcharging will, I trust, never fail to be of interest to the House, and it is on that basis that I beg leave to detain hon. Members this evening.

The Gas Act 1995 introduced competition to the business of connecting premises to the mains gas network. Previously, the market had been under the monopoly control of British Gas Transco. In January 1997, my constituent, Mr. Andrew Duffield, who had been a senior manager at Transco, left to set up a specialist gas connection company—Exoteric Gas Solutions—to compete against Transco. EGS not only increased choice, but brought considerable savings to customers.

I am here not to praise EGS, however, but to expose Transco. As with any former monopoly, Transco enjoys a pre-eminent market position, but it is also charged with custodianship of the existing network. All competing connection companies are compelled to apply to Transco for certain information and services relating to the existing network. Final connection to the mains can be performed only by Transco itself, and competitors such as EGS must obtain a quotation from Transco for that final aspect of any new pipe laying scheme before they can submit an accurate quotation for the whole scheme to their customers.

Transco has a statutory duty to provide such information and services to my constituent's company and other competitors. Transco is licensed by the Office of Gas Supply under the 1995 Act, and is required to treat all participants in the connections market without discrimination. It cannot gain an unfair advantage by delaying a quotation for final connection to its competitor so that its own connections team can provide a more timely quotation. By the same token, it cannot quote an exaggerated cost for such work by a competitor in order to raise the cost of the competitor's quote to the end customer.

I have no intention of misleading the House. I have said that Transco cannot do those things; I should have said that, under the legislation, it may not do so. Evidence in my possession suggests not only that Transco can operate in an illegitimate and anti-competitive manner, but that it does so repeatedly and systematically. I spoke in my introduction not only of discrimination and overcharging, but of bullying and lies. Those are serious allegations, and I must justify them.

In March and April 1997, EGS was competing against Transco and other connection companies for a contract to design and build the new mains and services required

[Mr. Barry Gardiner]

to supply an additional gas load at Chilterns crematorium in Amersham. On 3 April, my constituent received the following faxed letter:

"Dear Mr. Duffield

A formal complaint has been received from Ofgas about the activities of Exoteric Gas Solutions. The basis of the complaint is that you have been seeking to exploit commercially confidential information gained during the course of your employment with Transco.

The matter specifically referred to is Chilterns Crematorium, Whielden Lane, Amersham.

As you can imagine, Transco takes this complaint very seriously indeed.

Accordingly, I should be obliged if you would let me have your observations on this matter as soon as possible. I would wish to have these before taking any further steps.

Ofgas have specifically requested that the client, in the case referred to, does not wish to have any further involvement. I would ask you to respect that request."

That letter was signed by Transco's legal services manager.

Mr. Duffield immediately contacted Ofgas to ask whether any such complaint had been received about EGS, and whether Ofgas had requested that EGS should have no further involvement with any client. He received a quite astonishing answer on 8 April. It read:

"Dear Mr. Duffield

CHILTERNS CREMATORIUM, WHIELDEN LANE, AMERSHAM

Further to both our telephone conversation and your fax of 7 April to the Director General, I am writing in order to clarify the situation regarding the above site.

I would first of all like to reiterate that the complaint did not concern the activities of Exoteric Gas Solutions. It related to an alleged breach of Transco's licence conditions. As a result of the complaint, Ofgas has asked the Head of Compliance at BG plc to ascertain whether or not such a breach in fact occurred.

May I also point out that the complaint did not come from Ofgas. Ofgas has simply requested that the Compliance Officer look into a complaint that was made *to* Ofgas.

Moreover, Ofgas has at no stage requested that Exoteric Gas Solutions have no further contact with its clients.

I appreciate the concern that you have about this matter and trust you feel reassured that it is the conduct of Transco that is being investigated, not that of Exoteric Gas Solutions."

It was signed "Yours sincerely" by the regulation and business affairs manager.

That is pretty conclusive, not to say a damaging reflection on the interpretation of events provided by Ofgas's legal services manager in his original letter to EGS. None the less, it could have been an end of the matter but for the fact that rumours began to circulate in the industry to the effect that EGS was the subject of an official investigation by Ofgas and that perhaps one should not do business with it.

At this point, Ofgas, EGS and Transco were in possession of the facts. EGS could have little reason to spread such a rumour against itself. Ofgas wrote to it again on 9 July, stating:

"We are concerned that rumours detrimental to your company would seem to be circulating and we intend to discuss with BG plc how this issue has been handled."

BG plc is of course the parent company of Transco.

For its part, BG plc's general counsel responded as follows in a letter to EGS dated 25 June 1997:

"I can only reiterate that I have no knowledge of allegations of a formal complaint being spread throughout the Gas Industry."

I have a copy of a memo dated 27 March 1997. It is an internal memo headed "BG plc Transco Memorandum from the Area Directors to all the Managers of District Operations". It specifically notes:

"To be circulated to other Level 3s."

I contend that it illegally denies EGS the statutory rights owed to it by Transco under the Gas Act. I will read it in full. It states:

"E.G.S.

We are dealing with a high level complaint concerning this company and the alleged misuse of Transco information. Could you ensure that you and your staff have no dealings with this company or with its principal (Andrew Duffield) until further notice."

Not three months later, the chief legal officer of BG plc could state in a letter dated 25 June 1997 that he had

"no knowledge of allegations of a formal complaint being spread through the Gas Industry."

It is said that the difference between a lawyer and a supermarket trolley is that one can get more food into a lawyer, but that it is more difficult to keep the lawyer going in a straight line. However, the charge that I must level tonight does not remain focused on the legal officers of Transco, be they ever so exalted.

On 27 March, when the memo was circulated, it was circulated from the "area directors". The area director of the east area was Mr. Phil Nolan. He is now the managing director of Transco as a whole. On 1 September 1997, he wrote to Mr. Duffield specifically to confirm whether he had ever issued information to Transco's employees not to deal with EGS. He responded:

"I can confirm that I have issued no such instruction and there are no such instructions to that effect in place."

If Mr. Nolan has lied, it is the duty of Ofgas to examine whether he is a fit and proper person to hold the position of managing director of the country's largest gas transportation company.

In November last year, I met representatives of Ofgas, and the question of its powers as regulator was discussed. In particular, it transpired that, where there has been a breach of section 42 of the Gas Act, it is open to it to take action under section 28. Such action may include the imposition of a financial penalty, and may extend to the recommendation of compensation to any adversely affected third party.

I believe that there may be a loophole in the Act, such that, where a company in violation of its statutory obligations has put in place revised procedures that make future violations less likely and has done so at the behest of Ofgas, and where a further breach is subsequently discovered to have taken place before that procedure was rectified, that breach is no longer subject to remedy by Ofgas under section 28 action. I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to examine that problem to see whether any amendments need to be made to the legislation.

I have spent much time elaborating on this matter because the charges that I have made are extremely serious in their own right—I trust that my hon. Friend will ensure that they are fully investigated. More than that, I have dwelt on the matter because it provides important

background for understanding the other issues of discrimination and overcharging that I mentioned at the beginning of my speech and to which I now turn.

Last year, on 22 December, I was grateful to the Minister for agreeing to meet Mr. Duffield and me. At that meeting, we left with my hon. Friend an extensive dossier detailing cases in which Transco had acted in what we considered was an anti-competitive manner, in spite of its statutory duty to treat all participants in the connections market without discrimination. After that meeting, the Minister communicated his own concerns about those matters to Ofgas—indeed, it appeared that, after his prompting, Ofgas had pursued its investigation with renewed vigour and that a resolution might be possible. Unfortunately, I have to report that that hope proved unduly optimistic.

My hon. Friend will recall the case of Saxon business park, where Transco quoted EGS a figure of £5,650.97 for a final connection to the Transco main, only to reduce it to £800 after the quotation was persistently challenged. I am able to provide many further cases where Transco has acted in a discriminatory manner by quoting an unreasonably high cost to EGS. For Brook Street business park, on 13 February 1998, a final connection was originally quoted by Transco at £1,133; after challenge, it was reduced to £578.25—it had been a 100 per cent. overcharge. The list is growing by the day. A quote of £44,328 was made for a connection which, had it complied with condition 5 of Transco's own public gas transporter's licence, would have cost no more than £14,000—an overcharge of almost 300 per cent. At St. Andrew's school in Watford, a quote of £1,137 was made which, when properly calculated, amounts to £440.25.

The House will appreciate that such wildly inaccurate initial quotations by Transco discriminate against EGS, not only on the basis of cost, but by delaying EGS's ability to provide a prompt and accurate quotation to its own end customers. It is impossible for a small company such as EGS to compete effectively in its chosen markets when faced with such behaviour from the dominant player—the monopoly as was, Transco. I urge my hon. Friend to make full investigations into these matters. I am happy to provide him with further information, and I trust that he will be in correspondence with Ofgas to pursue the matter with all due vigour.

10.27 pm

The Minister for Science, Energy and Industry (Mr. John Battle): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) for the terms in which he has presented his case tonight. He is fast earning a reputation in the House as a most conscientious champion of his constituents. The assiduous detail with which he has backed up his strong assertions has resulted in a strong case. Strong words have been used, and the case demands detailed investigation. I shall try to respond in general to my hon. Friend's points. I shall also say a few words about the Government's overall approach to the regulation of the gas industry.

Let me say from the outset that I am well aware of the subject of the complaint made to Ofgas by a company—Exoteric Gas Solutions—based in my hon. Friend's constituency about certain aspects of the arrangements for new connections. As my hon. Friend said, we met on 22 December last year, but the matter has still not been sorted out. Since then, Ofgas has received certain allegations—I stress that they are allegations—from other companies, as well as from my hon. Friend's constituent, that Transco is acting in an anti-competitive way in relation to the provision of connections and systems extensions.

Under the regulatory framework, the duty to investigate such complaints lies not with the Department of Trade and Industry, but with Ofgas. Section 31 of the Gas Act 1986 states:

"It shall be the duty of the Director"—

the Director General of Gas Supply—

"to investigate any matter . . . which . . . is the subject of a representation (other than one appearing to the Director to be frivolous) made to the Director by . . . a person appearing to the Director to have an interest in that matter".

My hon. Friend referred to previous Gas Acts. The Gas Act 1986 provided for the privatisation of British Gas and competition in supplies to certain large contract customers. It also set up the office of the Director General of Gas Supply as the independent regulator of the gas industry. Since then, there have been a number of Monopolies and Mergers Commission inquiries into the gas market, as well as a review by the Office of Fair Trading, which have brought significant changes to the industry and its structure.

The 1993 Monopolies and Mergers Commission inquiry led to British Gas separating its trading and transportation functions and the Administration of the day's decision to introduce competition for domestic consumers. The way for that was prepared by the Gas Act 1995, which amended the 1986 Act to provide for the introduction of competition to all gas consumers.

The 1995 Act introduced significant changes into the structure of the industry, and brought to an end the supply and transportation of gas by a single integrated company. It introduced the concept of three separate licensed entities: the gas supplier, the gas shipper and the public gas transporter, all of which are subject to a licensing system operated and policed by the Director General of Gas Supply. That separation is important, and I shall return in a moment to the role of the public gas transporter.

As I have emphasised, the regulator has statutory responsibility for the licensing of transportation, shipping and supply of gas in Great Britain, and other duties in relation to gas metering and the investigation of complaints. The Director General of Gas Supply is under a general duty to secure that, so far as it is economical to meet them, all reasonable demands in Great Britain for gas conveyed through pipes are met; to ensure that licence holders are able to finance their licensed activities; to secure effective competition in the shipping and supply of gas; and to protect the interests of consumers in respect of prices, continuity and quality of supply, and rights of entry to their premises.

The Director General of Gas Supply has various other duties governing the exercise of those functions. I stress in particular the duty to protect the public from dangers arising from the conveyance of gas through pipes and from the use of gas conveyed through pipes, and the duty to secure effective competition in relation to the conveyance of gas through pipes to pipeline systems and to areas to which gas has not previously been conveyed. That relates to the point raised by my hon. Friend.

[Mr. John Battle]

An essential feature of the regulatory framework is the division of function between the Government and the Director General of Gas Supply as the sectoral regulator. Broadly, the Government set the framework and the director general is responsible for regulating the industry within the framework set out by Ministers. I emphasise that distinction.

At the heart of the gas industry is the national transmission system—the national gas grid—which was set up as a result of connecting the North sea terminals. It comprises some 160,000 miles of mains pipeline and is owned and operated by Transco, one of the old British Gas's two successor companies, which is required to have a public gas transporter's licence.

The national transmission system is a natural monopoly. It is hardly conceivable that competitors should construct their own pipeline grid. The regulation of the monopoly is therefore crucial. Although the national transmission system is a monopoly asset, there is scope for competition in connections and systems extensions—in connecting new premises and extending the gas network to areas that previously have not been supplied with gas. That was spelled out when competition was opened up.

Competition in those areas arises in two ways: through the scope for other public gas transporters directly to compete with Transco in providing connections and system extensions, and through the scope for self-laying, where consumers purchase and lay the pipes. In addition to Transco, there are now six licensed public gas transporters to which consumers can turn.

As I said, the director general has a duty to exercise her relevant functions in relation to public gas transporter licences to secure effective competition in the conveyance of gas through pipeline systems and in the supplying and laying of service pipes. Each public gas transporter has a duty under the Gas Acts in relation to each of its authorised areas to develop and maintain an efficient and economical pipeline system for the conveyance of gas and, in so far as it is economical to do so, to comply with any reasonable request to connect that system and use it to convey gas. Under the Gas (Connection Charges) Regulations 1986, a public gas transporter is entitled to recover the full costs of any mains extension project.

Against that background, it is important to emphasise that, if competition is not to be thwarted, the dominant player's charges for connections and system extensions should not be above or below cost, with hidden cross-subsidies from other parts of its business. In short, it is important that there should be cost-reflectivity and that Transco should not discriminate in the prices or service standards it provides to competitors.

Ofgas has recently been addressing that issue through public consultation documents. In August 1996, it published a document entitled "British Gas TransCo: connection and system extensions—regulating for competition". Responses to that document were published in February last year.

Ofgas set up the Ofgas connections steering group, which is considering how best to promote competition in gas connections and pipe laying throughout Great Britain. As a direct result of that work, Transco has made proposals to eliminate what might be seen as discriminatory behaviour on its part. Transco has been developing arrangements for unbundling charges for connections and system extensions, and that process is continuing. Meanwhile, Ofgas has been investigating potential barriers to competition.

I have discussed Exoteric Gas Solutions with the Director General of Gas Supply. I make it absolutely plain to my hon. Friend that we and Ofgas take his complaints very seriously. Ofgas recognises the importance of the matter to my hon. Friend's constituents and the business concerned, which is a start-up business. The size of Transco compared with that of the business makes this a serious matter. Ofgas continues to investigate the allegations.

I understand that Ofgas wrote in March to the independent public gas transporters and the self-lay companies that it was able to identify to ask them for historical information about Transco's performance in providing connections and services since 1 April 1997. Ofgas gave 12 examples of the sort of dispute that it regards as relevant to the allegations that it had received and on which it was seeking comments. Some companies have responded. Ofgas acts only on the basis of information provided to it, but I am assured that the director general is using her powers to explore and investigate the matter thoroughly, and will ensure that, if allegations are substantiated, enforcement action will be taken to eliminate anti-competitive behaviour.

If my hon. Friend thinks that it would be useful, I would be more than willing to meet him again, perhaps in my office at the Department, with the Director General of Gas Supply or her senior representatives, so that we can go over the ground more fully and in more detail in the light of the information that my hon. Friend has brought to the House. I thank him for raising the matter and for the way in which he has done so. He has made strong allegations, but he has backed them up with solid research that ought to be precisely the purpose of Adjournment debates. The matter will not lie at the Dispatch Box—I shall take it further.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-one minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 10 June 1998

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Leasehold Reform

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Dowd.]*

9.34 am

Mr. Jim Fitzpatrick (Poplar and Canning Town): I am grateful for the opportunity to open this debate. Before I begin, I should like to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) on being instrumental in the establishment—and subsequently being elected chair—of the all-party parliamentary group on leasehold reform.

The existence of the group demonstrates that many hon. Members recognise that the law is flawed—there is considerable agreement on the urgent need for reform. I should mention that I am a vice-chair of the group and that the Minister addressed its first business meeting—his presence was very welcome, as were his comments. I am sure that his response to this debate will be equally well received.

I have received a number of messages from parliamentary colleagues—such as my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch (Jacqui Smith)—who would have contributed to the discussion but cannot be here because of previously arranged constituency business; I am sure that they will be keen to read the Minister's comments.

The timing of the debate is appropriate, as the Minister plans to issue a consultation paper on leasehold reform later this year, which will be a welcome development for the million or so leaseholders in England and Wales. The law is different in my native Scotland, so I do not intend to touch on issues north of the border—in any event, I think that most Scots will have other things on their mind today.

I do not want the discussion to develop into a party political squabble. Conservative Members may be tired of Labour Members holding them responsible for all the evils that resulted from 18 years of Conservative rule, but it is widely recognised that the previous Government failed to appreciate the scale and nature of the problems that their legislation caused. The negative effects of the poorly drafted, dogma-driven leaseholder legislation were compounded by the Tory Government's failure to address the very real problems that they created through the Housing Acts 1980 and 1985.

There are two distinct elements of leaseholding: leaseholders who have bought their lease from private freeholders, and the ex-council tenants who exercised their right to buy, first under the 1980 Act and subsequently under the 1985 Act. Leaseholders' problems arose partly because of the gap between the desire for home ownership and the reality of leaseholding. People may have invested considerable sums in their property; they understandably count themselves as owner-occupiers, although, in law, they are regarded as tenants. Many did not take account of the implications of the leases that they signed. They were trying to better themselves and to build for the future, for themselves and for their families, but now feel that things have not worked out that way.

There are serious problems with leasehold law as it applies to private leaseholders. The law is firmly weighted on the side of the freeholder, whereas the burden of the cost lies with the leaseholder. There is usually little that leaseholders can do, short of costly and often unsuccessful litigation. In Poplar and Canning Town, I have met constituents who live in a luxury development, which looks fabulous from the outside, but which is, for the leaseholders, a living nightmare—the landlord seems to regard the service charges as a type of income, and my constituents have complained that they feel bullied, intimidated and harassed by their freeholder, who controls security, the concierge system, car parking and all the other services.

I know that other hon. Members want to deal in more detail with the concerns of private leaseholders, but I shall concentrate on the right-to-buy leaseholders—people who bought their flats and houses from their local authorities. Problems are generally, but by no means exclusively, concentrated in London—where the bulk of the right-to-buy leaseholders are situated—particularly in high-rise blocks, which require substantial repairs.

I believe that Tower Hamlets has the second highest number of leaseholders in London, and the Tower Hamlets leaseholders association is the largest organised group of leaseholders in any borough in the country. Andrew Coles, the chair of the association, and his colleagues have done much to highlight the problems that right-to-buy leaseholders have experienced, bringing them to the attention of me and my hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Ms King). We have done what we can to assist them.

Many problems arise from poorly drafted legislation. Others, however, are of a more ordinary political nature. Our political problems partly arise from the disastrous neighbourhood system devised by the Liberal Democrats in Tower Hamlets between 1986 and 1990. Different parts of the borough issued radically different leases, and there appear to have been some cases in which neighbourhoods mis-sold properties in the knowledge that buildings had structural faults. That has made the borough's task more difficult than that of other boroughs.

Leaseholders in my constituency justifiably feel frustrated at the manner in which they have been dealt with. Perhaps Tower Hamlets has not committed enough resources fully to grasp the nettle of sorting out what politicians and leaseholders alike acknowledge to be a mess. Of course, the reduction of local authority finances by the previous Government made service delivery more difficult, but Tower Hamlets must know that more resources need to be devoted to dealing with the problems.

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk): On that point, was the hon. Gentleman satisfied with the revenue support grant

[Mr. Tim Yeo]

decision for Tower Hamlets last year? Did he vote in favour of it, and what will he do if it is not increased this year?

Mr. Fitzpatrick: The settlement that Tower Hamlets received from the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions last year was the most generous in 20 years. It was very welcome, and I voted for it. We are making representations to ensure that areas of deprivation such as Tower Hamlets receive the support that they should from central Government. That support should be based on need, and I am confident that the Government will continue to address our difficulties.

In 1995, the Department of the Environment study, "Leaseholders and service charges in former local authority flats" found that more than half of right-to-buy leaseholders had complained about the level of charges and the standard of service that they were receiving. Many of my constituents thought that they were investing in their future, but they have found their savings being eaten away by high service charges. The previous Government's measures to limit right-to-buy leaseholders' liability were welcome as far as they went, but they were of limited value. We have reached the point at which a number of my constituents are prepared to give up their leases and return to renting from the council for fear of losing the roof over their heads. Leaseholders in my constituency want to hear the Minister's views on buy-back options and reinstatement to tenancies, as they feel that there is no coherent strategy at present.

I want to mention the plight of leaseholders who fall under estate renewal challenge fund schemes. Tower Hamlets is to be congratulated on the amount of money it has secured for regeneration purposes, and I commend the schemes. The most recent, and most ambitious to date, is a series of stand-alone housing companies—the housing and regeneration community action schemes, commonly known as HARCAs. Their pioneering work may become a model which will be widely copied across the United Kingdom.

However, the fact that those schemes are the first of their kind has led to unforeseen problems and real difficulties for leaseholders, who are denied a vote in the transfer process. Provision was made for an indicative ballot, but the results can be ignored. It may be useful to revisit sections 32 and 43 of the 1985 Act, which deal with disposal of land and the form of consent required for large-scale voluntary transfer. Leaseholders certainly feel that there should be a statutory requirement for a ballot, which is currently merely encouraged. I hope that that issue will be addressed in the consultation paper.

The Social Landlords Mandatory Reduction of Service Charges (England) Directions 1997 require social landlords to charge no more than £10,000 for the same property over any five-year period for repairs, maintenance or improvements where ERCF money is received. To many of my leaseholders, £10,000 is a huge sum. No one could have foreseen the prospect of ordinary working people being hit with bills of up to £10,000 because of the policy of regeneration of their estates to which the Government are committed in their attempts to deal with social exclusion.

Increased service charges resulting from ERCF works will not necessarily reflect an increase in the value of leasehold property. As the Department of the Environment recognised in its 1995 report, "The resale of former council homes", right-to-buy purchasers experience difficulties in reselling. Where a buyer can be found, banks—and those increasingly rare animals, building societies; I am a member of the Nationwide—are often reluctant to lend money for a mortgage on such properties. I understand that that is known as red-lining, and that it often results in leaseholders being obliged to live elsewhere and to let their properties to recoup the cost of charges.

My view is that leaseholds have had their time. If they ever worked well, that time has long gone. I am sure that reform of the law will be welcome, but radical change is required, perhaps including the introduction of the much talked about commonhold. I ask the Minister whether he can publicly announce today that the Labour Government appreciate the scale of the problem and acknowledge that leasehold law as it relates to right-to-buy leaseholders has profound flaws. I do not ask him to pre-empt his consultation paper, but perhaps he can share its direction with us.

There are other problems about which my constituents have complained: rights to consultation, or lack of it; requests to be entitled to detailed accounting arrangements; the inadequate appeals procedures; and the absence of a clear definition of structural defects. All those relate to loopholes in the existing law. The refusal to allow local authorities to use receipts from sales to replace housing stock was another grave error.

I am confident that future legislation will improve the position of leaseholders in the UK, although the position in Scotland is different. I have no idea what leasehold legislation prevails in Brazil, but I am sure that the House will wish the Scottish team well in the opening fixture of the World cup this afternoon.

Tower Hamlets leaseholders association calculates that it is withholding about £3 million in service charges because of disputes with the local authority. This is not the famous 1922 rent strike, and I am certainly not George Lansbury, but it is a demonstration of how disaffected thousands of ordinary, decent, law-abiding citizens are in east London. I look forward to hearing the Minister's response, and I hope that we can deal with the problems that leaseholders experience.

9.47 am

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Beckenham): I congratulate the hon. Member for Poplar and Canning Town (Mr. Fitzpatrick) on being lucky in the draw to secure such an interesting debate. He acknowledged that this issue crosses the party divide, and, like him, I congratulate the hon. Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) on creating—rather, re-forming—the all-party group on leasehold reform, of which I am a member.

I am glad that the hon. Member for Poplar and Canning Town mentioned the consultation document, as I, too, look forward to its publication. It has been a long time coming. I remember talking to the Minister not long after I returned to the House, when he gave a guesstimate of spring for its arrival. The hon. Gentleman said it will come later this year, but I have heard June mentioned. I am not sure when it will finally reach gestation.

During debates on my private Member's Bill on commonhold, the Minister said that a Bill on leasehold reform would be in the first Queen's speech of the next

Parliament. I have a copy of *Hansard* with me, and will be happy to show it to the Minister if he doubts that he said that.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. Nick Raynsford): I have never made a commitment to legislation in the first Session of this Parliament. If the hon. Lady gives me the *Hansard* column reference, I will check that point and respond to it.

Mrs. Lait: It is with great pleasure that I give the Minister the *Hansard* reference. The quote is from 8 March 1996, when the hon. Gentleman said:

"I have great pleasure in assuring him"—

that is Mr. Dudley Fishburn, who was then the hon. Member for Kensington—

"that the Labour party will be only too pleased to introduce a comprehensive leasehold reform Bill in the next Queen's Speech."—[*Official Report*, 8 March 1996; Vol. 273, c. 610.]

I look forward to welcoming the leasehold reform Bill whenever it is introduced, and I hope for the Minister's sake that it is introduced in this Parliament, but I have a horrible suspicion that it may not be.

Will the Minister explain why he has not introduced the commonhold Bill drafted by the Lord Chancellor's Department before the dissolution of the previous Parliament? That Bill was put out for consultation, which is one of the processes that we now try to follow with most major Bills. It would be interesting to know why that Bill has not been introduced and whether the Minister thinks that it contained any flaws.

I do not want to go over the issues again in great detail because those of us who are involved know them in enormous detail. There is agreement that we should move forward on commonhold. I said publicly long ago that leaseholding is an outmoded form of land tenure, but several issues need to be resolved. I hope that the Minister will make it clear in the consultation document whether his Government believe that there should be any element of compulsion in the change from leasehold to commonhold, whether there will be any element of retrospection in any change and how the Minister plans to treat the issue of marriage value. Many well-intentioned attempts at reform have foundered on that issue, because we have to recognise that freeholding is a form of property ownership.

Moving on to more practical elements, will the document cover those who are caught by what is acknowledged to be very tortuous and painful legislation such as the Landlord and Tenant Act 1987? I have constituents who are, unfortunately, caught by that Act and who are going through the usual tortures and agonies experienced by leaseholders when there are difficult freeholders.

The hon. Member for Poplar and Canning Town talked about leaseholders and social housing. The Minister will know the Broomleigh housing association well because I understand that he was its adviser when it bought Bromley council's housing. I follow in the footsteps of my predecessor, Piers Merchant, who was very active in trying to solve the leaseholders' problems. *[Interruption.]* I shall not pursue that intervention.

Broomleigh has told me that it would welcome the introduction of commonhold and, as a freeholder, it does not foresee any problems with that. It would want to take a share for each of its tenants in a block so that it would be an active member of the commonhold association.

Broomleigh is involved in an active programme of upgrading its properties, which is where problems arise. My predecessor used to have many constituents complaining to him about bills for renovations of up to and sometimes more than £20,000. I am glad to say that the complaints that I receive concern renovation bills of about £8,000. Even so, that is a huge sum for many people.

I agree with the hon. Member for Poplar and Canning Town that many of the people who bought leasehold did not receive the correct advice at the time. However, we must deal with the present situation. It would be helpful if the consultation paper included proposals for housing associations to be able to deal with leaseholders in a less legalistic manner. For example, while Broomleigh does its best to help by providing methods of paying bills over time and assistance with mortgage advice, it would be helpful if there were a relaxation in the amount of money that Broomleigh is able to use to fund the repairs so that it would be easier for leaseholders to pay it back.

The Association of Broomleigh Leaseholders was recently formed to deal with the troubles, and it is becoming very active. Broomleigh housing association has said that although, under the Housing act 1996, there are problems in recognising a leaseholders' association as a registered association because it does not fall into the definition of a residents association, it is very happy to work with the leaseholders to try to solve some of the problems. We need that flexibility built into any future development for social leaseholders so that housing associations can deal with them humanely.

Leaseholding in social blocks is still a way for people to gain a foothold on the property-owning ladder. In Bromley, people are still enfranchising at the rate of a couple of blocks a year, and I would not want to stop that. People genuinely want to be able to own their property. I hope that when we receive the consultation document and, in due course, the Bill, this becomes a cross-party issue on which we can all agree so that we allow as many people as possible to have access to property ownership.

9.56 am

Ms Karen Buck (Regent's Park and Kensington, North): I had not expected the debate to divide on gender lines, but I fear that, for several weeks, all debates will be divided between the gentlemen in the Chamber, who will manage to weave a football reference into every speech that they make, and the women, who will not.

However, my sense of sisterly solidarity with the hon. Member for Beckenham (Mrs. Lait) was somewhat diminished by her claims that the Government deserve criticism for failing to introduce proposals for leasehold reform after 13 months in government. The Conservative Government were unable, over two decades, to resolve that difficult problem and made at least three botched attempts to do so, leaving leaseholders deeply dissatisfied.

Mrs. Lait: The hon. Lady might acknowledge that the Government are, perhaps, realising that there is no simple solution to the problem of leaseholding, and that it will

[Mrs. Lait]

take time to find one. That is why I have some sympathy with the Minister. Although I was teasing him about his promise to bring in a leasehold reform Bill, I believe that he has realised that the problem is infinitely more complex than one thinks in opposition.

Ms Buck: The hon. Lady cannot have it both ways.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Poplar and Canning Town (Mr. Fitzpatrick) on his success in securing this important debate. I echo his congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) on his work for the all-party leasehold reform group, which has been tremendously successful and tapped into Members' recognition that this is a difficult problem.

In the two boroughs that my constituency covers, there are 24,000 leaseholders—one of the highest figures in the country—who are roughly evenly divided between private and social landlord leaseholders. I shall discuss both those problems.

For lessees of private and social landlords, the core problem is that the power relationship between the landlord and the lessee is fundamentally unbalanced. At best, the imbalance relates to information about costs and services and, at worst, with a minority of landlords, it descends into nothing less than extortion, bullying and fraud. Like many of my hon. Friends, I have people coming to my surgery with harrowing tales of their experiences with private landlords. Only last week, a gentleman who has a lease on a property in Edgware road brought several complaints to my attention. He wrote:

"Life threatening faulty wiring has been extended and left hanging".

He added that lights on the staircase were not installed for many years,

"as the wiring was never repaired or maintained."

The letter continues:

"I persistently complained over the years, but to no avail . . . At no time were we furnished with estimates"

for the cost of works, as required by law. He clearly thinks that the freeholder was

"anxious to gain control of all five flats, doing so for their own financial gain."

Among his experiences of intimidation over the years, the upstairs flat

"was rented to prostitutes, 24 hours a day. I had no lights or staircase and clients were tramping up and down the stairs all night long. I got no sleep! I felt they were doing their best to push me out."

Furthermore, in the mansion blocks in Maida Vale and St. John's Wood, which I represent, there are cases of work being left half completed for a decade, which not only blights the lives of the residents but means that they are in an almost impossible position if they want to sell and move on.

Hon. Members have addressed the policy issues surrounding leasehold reform. I support early action on the right to manage and on the introduction of commonhold. I also urge my hon. Friend the Minister to take a message from the debate to the Lord Chancellor to that effect, so that we can introduce proposals on commonhold as quickly as possible. I look forward to the publication of the consultation document.

Two areas of local authority responsibility should be addressed, and I hope for support from my hon. Friend the Minister. The case that I outlined is one in which local authorities have legal responsibilities. Some have taken a strong line against landlords who fail to provide proper summaries of cost and access to inspect service charge accounts. Brighton and Hove council has an excellent record and, to give credit where it is due, Westminster city council, part of whose area I represent, has a team that has done some, but not enough, good work with lessees in taking action against their landlords.

However, other boroughs appear to be less rigorous in using the enforcement powers available to them through the law. My colleagues who serve on the royal borough of Kensington and Chelsea council have drawn to my attention the fact that only one landlord was prosecuted last year, despite property in the south of the borough being heavily skewed to lessees in mansion blocks. Westminster prosecuted 12 landlords. I congratulate my colleagues on bringing the issue to public attention.

Kensington and Chelsea council points out that it invests a considerable sum in advice and mediation services for private tenants and leaseholders; indeed, it is more generous than Westminster in that respect. Resources for mediation and advice, and a hard line on enforcement, are undoubtedly necessary. The mediation approach is less effective when local authorities are not sending out a signal that they are prepared to take tough enforcement action against landlords who abuse their relationship.

I should be grateful if my hon. Friend the Minister promoted best practice, especially in the consultation document, and encouraged local authorities to take a firm line on enforcement. Given that legal powers are underused and that many lessees, especially in small blocks, do not have the expertise or the money to take legal action, or exhaust their resources in doing so, people need a powerful friend. Some local authorities are doing a wonderful job, but most have probably not invested resources in such work.

Council leaseholders have been mentioned, and it would be extraordinary if I did not draw attention to the acute problems experienced by Westminster council leaseholders, who bought from the council over the past 15 years. There are 6,500 council leaseholders in Westminster, many of whom bought flats in tower blocks, thereby creating a problem that is much more concentrated in London than in other parts of the country, because of the particular problems and costs of such properties. That was linked to the aggressive home ownership policies pursued in the late 1980s and the problems of gerrymandering, which have been brought to the House's attention.

Many people make it clear at my surgeries that they purchased their property in good faith, but with very poor and misleading advice, and that it was the worst decision they ever made. There are not a few instances over the past year of people who had bought a flat at a reasonable price losing their home—being made homeless—as a consequence of the crippling cost of service charges and major works bills.

Ms Oona King (Bethnal Green and Bow): Does my hon. Friend share the disgust of one of my constituents, who described the Conservatives' offer of the right to buy

as the right to die? She thinks that her husband's death was brought on by the stress, strain and unreasonable pressures placed on them by the scheme.

Ms Buck: I am sad to hear that story. Unfortunately, such experiences are mirrored in a number of other areas. I have constituency experience of terrible stories of people who have gone through breakdowns or attempted suicide as a consequence of the financial pressures placed on them by home ownership.

Mr. Andrew Dismore (Hendon): Does my hon. Friend agree that part of the problem in Westminster has been compounded by the difficulties that leaseholders face because of the inadequacy of the investigation procedures? There was an internal inquiry, which was a complete whitewash, following the rather more satisfactory internal audit report.

Does my hon. Friend also agree that part of the problem is that the ombudsman will not investigate any collective complaint on behalf of leaseholders generally, and that a problem with the district auditor's investigation is that dealing with the gerrymandering of the granting of leases and with failure to bill is taking many years? As a Westminster resident, I submitted objections several years ago. I have repeated those objections, and the district auditor has only just started to look into them.

Ms Buck: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I agree with every point that he made, and I shall touch on a couple of them later.

I bring to the attention of my hon. Friend the Minister some of the bills that have been brought to my surgery recently. Three weeks ago, a lady from the Avenue Gardens estate in Queen's Park, who bought her flat in 1993, brought the estimate of her major works bill to me. The estimate is £43,000. I echo the comments of my hon. Friends: there is no conceivable way in which ordinary working people could meet such financial obligations. Most people would not have taken on leases if they had expected such bills to come through.

The impact on lessees of estate action and the estate renewal challenge fund has been mentioned. A resident of the Mozart estate, which is in an estate action programme, was given an estimate of works two years ago, when the next phase of the work was under way. He was told that he would be billed for

"general works including landscaping and fencing".

The bill was expected to be about £3,000, but when the final estimate came through, the cost had risen to £30,000. Those "general works" included the construction of a new road.

Several problems are tied to that, the first of which is the general point that no council leaseholder, unless he is very lucky or wins the lottery, could possibly meet such financial demands. There are caps on the cost that can be recouped from lessees on estate action programmes, but, even so, the amounts are unreasonable. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) said, the legacy of managerial incompetence and political abuse of the leaseholder situation going back over a decade has made it impossible for people to plan with security.

Another lady, who bought her flat on the Lilestone estate in Church street, expects to have to pay £8,000 for works on a property that cost her £19,000, although her neighbours are escaping with a bill for a quarter of that sum. The reason is excessive delays in starting the major works, which have tipped her over the 10-year indemnity period, leaving her with full liability. The situation is further complicated by the fact that 37 different leases have been issued by the council over the past decade, which further weakens the position of individual leaseholders because they find it difficult to develop common strategies in response to the problems.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hendon mentioned the problem of the ombudsman. I particularly wanted to ask the Minister to address that. My colleagues and I have sought to refer a number of lessee cases to the local government ombudsman, but have been refused on the ground that the lessees have redress in law. We seriously doubt the feasibility of that in many cases and believe that justice is being denied to lessees as a consequence. I should be grateful if the Minister would examine that problem and find out whether anything can be done to ensure that lessees do have some redress.

The Minister has repeatedly demonstrated a sympathetic understanding of the plight of council leaseholders, and we look forward to seeing the specific measures that have been promised, but I also ask the Government to give sympathetic consideration to some specific policies that are being developed by the council, belatedly and in response to its mismanagement, including, in particular, the option of development on the Brinklow, Oversley and Polesworth blocks, or the BOP estate, which was at the heart of Westminster's leasehold mismanagement policy. That development would provide long-awaited redress and a solution for those lessees. I know that the proposed solution is imperfect, but the need is desperate, and I hope that the Government will give sympathetic consideration to the project.

Council lessees have been let down by Westminster council in particular. Other council lessees throughout the country have been victims of policies that were not thought out, with councils finding it extraordinarily difficult to develop the complex management processes that are necessary for them to undertake the job. Private leaseholders have waited decades for justice. I am pleased that, after only a year, we can very shortly expect a consultation paper which will begin to provide justice for people in that position.

10.11 am

Mr. Adrian Sanders (Torbay): I congratulate the hon. Member for Poplar and Canning Town (Mr. Fitzpatrick) on securing the debate. I am glad that he and I are on the same side, supporting the same cause, although, this afternoon, like any self-respecting Torquay United supporter, I shall naturally be cheering on the team in yellow and blue.

Leasehold reform is a serious issue which affects thousands of people's lives throughout the country. It is estimated that there are nearly 1 million leasehold flats in Britain, a large proportion of which are in London and most of which are in urban areas. Many leaseholders have a satisfactory relationship with their freeholders. Works to properties are agreed in consultation, charges are fair and accounts are kept in good order—but, for many more, the experience of leaseholding is unpleasant and frustrating. Unscrupulous freeholders can condemn their lessees to a life of constant disputes over charges, building repairs and building alterations.

[Mr. Adrian Sanders]

People may purchase a property for a large sum, in the belief that they will become an owner-occupier, when they have bought little more than a timeshare. A leaseholder may invest a significant sum in a property and the freeholder a fraction of that sum, but it is the freeholder who retains the real power. Rather than gaining the freedom and security of home ownership, leaseholders may end up becoming involved in costly court cases, or at risk of eviction for failing to pay inflated charges for services that transpire. Alternatively, leaseholders may find themselves with a well-managed but wasting asset. Refusal by the freeholder to extend a lease and refusal by a mortgagee to lend on leases that he considers to be too short trap leaseholders in a home that they no longer want, or force them to sell at a discounted price.

Leaseholders who are unfortunate enough to find themselves at the mercy of incompetent or criminal freeholders must feel greatly aggrieved. Those leaseholders' dream of home ownership ends in the knowledge that they have little. Endless Government endorsements of the benefits of a home-owning democracy must ring a little hollow.

In 1997, the Leasehold Enfranchisement Advisory Service Ltd. dealt with 10,000 inquiries from people who were dissatisfied with their freeholders. They were probably the tip of the iceberg. How many more people go straight to lawyers, sell their property and move on, leaving the problem to someone else, or just put up with the misery and cost because they do not know what else to do?

Despite the obvious failings of the current leasehold system and campaigns by newspapers such as the *Evening Standard*, which highlighted some of the worst cases in London, the Government have so far failed to act. The Leasehold Reform, Housing and Urban Development Act 1993 was viewed by some people as a significant change to property law, which would end the tyranny of bad freeholders. At last, it seemed, leaseholders could become enfranchised or more easily extend their lease. It would tip the balance between leaseholder and landlord and create a more level playing field. It would give owner-occupiers the power, if they wished, to buy their freehold and to take control of their property. We are having this debate because the Act has failed. Under the Act, enfranchisement has proved complex and costly. Extending a lease, although more popular, is still a lengthy, difficult and costly business.

Earlier this year, the Leasehold Enfranchisement Association wrote to me saying that, although, in theory, most leaseholders have a right to extend their lease, in practice, there is so little confidence in the legislation that estate agents often refuse to take on the marketing of a flat unless the vendor extends the lease first. It also said that when people ask for advice on selling a lease that is too short to be mortgageable, it has little choice but to explain that there are only two options: the leaseholder can engage in a lengthy and time-consuming battle to extend the lease, or sell the property at a discount.

Provisions in the Housing Act 1996 and legislation dealing with leasehold valuation tribunals which was introduced last year attempted to strengthen leaseholders' hand, but they only tinkered with an unworkable structure. The Under-Secretary who is to reply to the debate was reported as saying recently:

"I believe the existing leasehold law in this country is fundamentally flawed and there is no question in my mind that the time has come for comprehensive reform."

In a written answer, the Minister for Local Government and Housing said that the Government were

"considering the scope and practicability of possible new measures"—[*Official Report*, 20 January 1998; Vol. 304, c. 457.]

to assist leaseholders. She also stated that the Government expected to make an announcement about their proposals and to invite comments from interested parties in the spring.

At the time, I assumed that the Government meant spring this year, but we are still waiting to hear the announcement and to see the proposals. The Under-Secretary has blamed the delay on the complexities of the issues and on the need to ensure that any future legislation really works—an aim which I am sure every hon. Member supports—but the continued delay means more misery for leaseholders and more opportunities for unscrupulous freeholders to line their pockets. The Government now hope to issue a consultation paper later this summer, but make no promise of when legislative changes can be brought before the House. Will the Minister please clarify the Government's timetable for bringing forward their proposals to reform this deeply inequitable situation?

Liberal Democrats believe that the Government should phase out the leasehold system as a matter of urgency. England and Wales are the only places in the western world where a leasehold system exists. It is archaic, unfair and more suited to feudal Britain than to cool Britannia. The Government should replace the leasehold system with one of commonhold, which would give occupants total control over the properties in which they live. Anything short of that will only replace one bureaucratic system with another. The Government must find the time and commitment to make leasehold reform a priority. The current system is a shambles and should have no place in a country that espouses the benefits of home ownership so forcefully.

10.18 am

Mr. Barry Gardiner (Brent, North): The history and traditions of this Palace of Westminster have evolved, and revolve, around a central conflict—a conflict that has continued down the centuries from Magna Carta until today, when we have a Government who propose to do away with the hereditary rights enjoyed by their lordships in another place. It is the struggle for power between privilege and the common people, and in that struggle, your office, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and that of Madam Speaker, represent the claim of the common people—the claim of the many over the few.

I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and Madam Speaker for allowing this Adjournment debate on leasehold reform, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Poplar and Canning Town (Mr. Fitzpatrick) on having submitted the proposal for the debate to Madam Speaker for her attention.

The fundamental reason why leasehold reform is necessary is that it confers on the freeholder, or landowner, exceptional and unwarranted privileges and powers. Those powers concentrate wealth in the hands of the few rather than the many—but that is not why they

are wrong. They are wrong because they fundamentally distort the proper relationship of power and investment, of equity and control, in a property.

Imagine, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that you have just made the second largest investment of your life and bought a new car from the garage. It may have cost you £15,000 or £20,000, and as you drive away you are pleased with your purchase. Only one doubt lingers in the back of your mind—the fact that you bought the car under a 99-year leasehold scheme. But you comfort yourself that the car probably will not last that long anyway, and even if it did, you, Mr. Deputy Speaker—although I would it were otherwise—probably would not. You therefore reassure yourself that the leasehold arrangement should bring no unforeseen problems with the car. After all, you do own it, do you not?

Now imagine that in six months' time, long before the car's first annual service is remotely due, the garage writes and tells you that it intends to put four new tyres on the car and respray the roof. "But," you protest, "It doesn't need it." "Well," says the garage, "Now we have given due regard to your views, which is all that the law obliges us to do, we will proceed with the work at a cost of £1,500." "But it's my car," you protest. "No; you merely have the right to drive around in the car for 99 years."

We would not, Mr. Deputy Speaker, consider that a sensible way of owning a car. Nor, I contend, is it a sensible way of owning a house or a flat. The value of a 999-year freehold interest on a property may be a matter of only a couple of hundred pounds on a property for which the leaseholder has paid £50,000 or more. Yet it is the freeholder who has the effective power and decides how a property is run and managed on a daily basis. I repeat, the proper relationship of power and investment—the greater the equity, the greater the control—has been distorted. The party with the least financial stake in the property has become the party with most control.

Adam Smith is not the political philosopher most frequently quoted by Labour Members, but he surely understood the inequities of the leasehold system when, in "The Wealth of Nations" he declared:

"Landlords, like all other men, love to reap where they never sowed."

I shall now chronicle some of the ways in which landlords reap where they have not sown. Some of the ways are legal, some are illegal, but the reality for the leaseholder is the same: exploitation.

I am sure that all hon. Members wish to see more than the simple closing of the huge gaps in current legislation. What point would there be in making exploitation illegal if it continues unabated because the remedies of the law are so difficult for leaseholders to obtain? Radical reform of the legislation is overdue, but it must bring effective relief.

Let me tell the House about a new breed of landlord, which I call the ground rent grazers. Grazing animals require vast areas to feed on and they make up in bulk what they lack in quality. Simarc, Castle New Tower Holdings, Shenstone's and Estate and Management Ltd. are all ground rent grazers that have bought up literally hundreds of thousands of freehold interests, usually at auction in the north-west of England.

The freehold interests are sold for a few pounds each and, unlike in the south of England, most of the leasehold properties involved are houses rather than flats. The ground rent grazers have little interest in the ground rents themselves, as they are usually a minimal annual sum of a few pounds. Unlike a service charge, however, a ground rent is due whether demanded or not, and on a house, unlike on a flat, the right of forfeiture can be pursued by the landlord for arrears of ground rent. For the sake of a £20 ground rent that is a day overdue, and has not even been demanded or invoiced, the ground rent grazer can start recovery proceedings, and on top of that £20 can charge a fee for the recovery costs incurred. That is what those companies want.

Let us take the case of Mr. Mitchell of Rugeley in Staffordshire. His ground rent of £20 was overdue, and although he paid promptly when reminded, his freeholder, Castle New Tower Holdings, is now demanding £698.78 for its time and trouble in sending him an overdue notice, and his home is under threat of forfeiture.

Mr. and Mrs. Leyland of Heysham in Lancashire have a ground rent of just a few pounds, but Simarc, their freeholder, discovered that they had built a small conservatory years ago, long before it purchased the freehold interest. Under the terms of the lease a consent should have been obtained from the freeholder, and Simarc is now demanding £493.37 for retrospective consent. That is legalised extortion.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): As well as the companies that my hon. Friend has mentioned, there is also the Compton Group and Helpfavour. Does he agree that when such companies send letters that sometimes make what appear to be offers, but that go way beyond their powers as defined in the original document, that can be extremely worrying for elderly people living alone? Should not those people see their Member of Parliament, a solicitor or the citizens advice bureau before responding to some of those offers, which are totally fictitious and are an attempt to extort money from them under false pretences?

Mr. Gardiner: Absolutely. I thank my hon. Friend for that timely intervention pointing out how the freeholders are abusing their power and intimidating the leaseholders, who expect to be treated fairly and reasonably. Many people who find themselves in that situation have no idea what to do when they discover that money is owing, and they are bullied into paying up, which is what the companies intend.

I trust that my hon. Friend the Minister will consider the abolition of forfeiture. It is an outdated and unnecessary remedy. Other remedies are clearly available to freeholders, and it would be better to apply them.

The ground rent grazers have another trick. When they encounter resistance to their exorbitant demands, they have taken to approaching the mortgage lender behind the back of the leaseholder and, under threat of forfeiture, demanding that their costs are met. Sadly, many mortgage lenders simply pay up without even consulting their mortgagor, and add the sum to the balance of the outstanding loan. I say many mortgage companies—thankfully, that does not apply to all of them.

I pay singular tribute to Mr. John Driscoll, who works for a major mutual building society. He has investigated and chronicled abuses by freeholders and, with exceptional courage and in the face of much abuse, he has resisted their demands. He has brought such scams to the attention of his own building society—Britannia—and has

[Mr. Gardiner]

informed other building societies and financial institutions of them. As a result of his campaign, the ground rent grazers are going through a lean patch. Unfortunately, like all grazers, they tend simply to move to pastures new.

I should add that Britannia building society has asked me to say that as yet it has no formal policy in that area. None the less, it has cause to be immensely proud of its employee, who has shown great initiative, courage and tenacity.

If there is a ground rent grazer, there is also a service charge shark. That beast has a huge variety of scams. Capital works programmes are systematically over-specified by tame surveyors and then systematically under-performed by in-house or arm's-length contractors.

At my constituency surgery on Monday, I was approached by a leaseholder who showed me what even to my, by now, somewhat cynical eyes appeared an extraordinary variation of the capital works scam. She showed me the list of quotations provided by her landlord for roof repairs. Each was duly shown as so many thousand pounds plus value added tax. The quotation recommended by her landlord, however, was recommended not on the basis that the figure was lower or that VAT was included in the price shown, but because VAT would not be charged. Presumably, the work would be cash in hand. That quotation is being referred to the police.

The service charge sharks avail themselves of the right contained in the lease for freeholders to arrange insurance on the property. The practice of abuse is well established. Landlords set up off-the-shelf insurance broking companies, which arrange wholesale insurance with the insurance company and receive a commission for doing so. Then, as landlords, they charge a second fee for arranging insurance for their tenants with the broking company. The cost of the insurance to tenants is often hugely greater than that available to them as individuals on the open market, despite the bulk purchasing power of which the landlord has availed himself.

I am extremely grateful to the Under-Secretary of State for his Department's response earlier last week on the question of the reasonableness of service charges, in which the arguments that I made during the debate on my ten-minute Bill on 10 March were taken on board. They are to be enshrined in a statutory instrument.

Tenants have a limited time in which to respond to the reasonableness of capital works that are proposed. The landlord must inform tenants of the nature of the work to be done and provide copies of at least two tenders. Tenants then have only one month in which to comment.

Regulations cover how accounts for service charges must be presented. The 1987 amendment to the regulations states that there must be a fair summary and that it must include certain information, which is divided into three sections: costs paid in the period in respect of bills not presented in the period; costs paid during the period relating to bills presented in the period; and bills presented in the period but not paid in the period. A further stipulation states that funds still outstanding to tenants must be declared at the end of the period.

The landlord must produce the summary within six months of the financial period ending. Once the six-month period is at an end, the landlord has a further month to produce the summary. Failure to do so is a criminal offence, and the local authority has the responsibility to prosecute.

Unfortunately, there are two major weaknesses with that aspect of the legislation. First, tenants can ask only for the latest year's accounts. If they have not asked for accounts before, they have no way of checking that their money was spent as their landlord claims. Secondly, experience suggests that giving local authorities the role of prosecuting corrupt landlords is simply not appropriate. They lack the necessary resources, knowledge, experience and sometimes the inclination to exercise their powers. Of course, there are exceptions—notably Brighton and Westminster. However, the local authority with the biggest concentration of leasehold flats—Kensington and Chelsea—is unable to provide any statistics in that area. When asked by Councillor Rima Horton whether the council had ever successfully prosecuted on the ground of non-provision of access to relevant accounts, the reply from the tenants' public relations officer was that that information was not available.

Despite the piecemeal attempts to protect tenants' rights and to legislate against unscrupulous landlords, the law has clearly failed. Landlords continue to misappropriate tenants' funds. They unjustly spend their money and abscond with it in the almost certain knowledge that they will not be prosecuted.

To illustrate the problem, I shall cite one final example given to me by Mr. Nigel Wilkins. He lives in a block of flats in south-west London managed by a firm of managing agents called Monkton and Co. of 23-24 Margaret street, London. Under sections 21 and 22 of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1987, Mr. Wilkins wrote to Monkton and Co. asking to inspect the set of accounts for the previous financial year and to see supporting documents. On his first visit, he was given a pile of invoices in no particular order, and took photocopies, for which he was charged the reasonable price of 10p a copy. Upon inspection, Mr. Wilkins wrote to Monkton and Co., saying that he did not believe that he had been shown all of the documentary evidence that supported its accounts for the given financial period. Monkton and Co. replied, agreeing that despite it being his clear legal right, he had not in fact seen all of the supporting evidence. The accountant had bank statements and cheque stubs that Mr. Wilkins had not seen. He was allowed to make a second visit.

Surprisingly, on his second visit, Mr. Wilkins was still unable to see all of the supporting evidence. Monkton and Co. said that it had lost the pay book for one of the accounts, and that the bank statements were held by the solicitors and would be made available if he would like to see them. On his third visit, Mr. Wilkins was still unable to see all of the supporting evidence. Invoices were not supported by bank statements, and where invoices and cheque stubs matched, receipts were not produced to guarantee that payment had gone where it was alleged to have gone.

Payments were also made before the period. Bank statements showed the period to have begun with cheque No. 61, but Mr. Wilkins was shown an invoice for £18,745.07 for a staged payment for replacement lifts which related to cheque No. 44. Also listed was a transfer and a bank statement for an alleged payment of

£56,000 to the lift company, but Monkton and Co. was unable to produce any supporting evidence that the money had gone where it was intended to go.

Prior to the visits of Mr. Wilkins, a major programme of capital works had begun. Alan Ward Architects drew up the original specification and employed Mr. Geoffrey Tagg, whom tenants were informed was a member of the Institute of Building, to conduct the survey. A programme of works was decided on, based on Mr. Tagg's survey.

Mr. Wilkins was curious because a member of the Institute of Building should now be calling himself a member of the Chartered Institute of Building, which it had become on receiving a royal charter. On investigation with a member of the Chartered Institute of Building, Mr. Wilkins discovered that Mr. Tagg was a total fraud and was lying about his credentials. The institute failed to prosecute, but obtained a written assurance from Mr. Tagg that he would not claim to be a member in future.

Other hon. Members want to speak in the debate. I could chronicle many more instances, but instead I will provide my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State with information so that he can pursue them.

10.39 am

Mr. Alan Clark (Kensington and Chelsea): I am grateful to you for calling me, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Although I was not in attendance at the beginning of the debate, I was watching it simultaneously while, rather unsatisfactorily, attempting to conclude a long-standing appointment in my office. I have, therefore, seen the earlier stages of the debate out of the corner of my eye, so to speak.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Poplar and Canning Town (Mr. Fitzpatrick) on getting the time to ventilate this highly important subject, which is of great importance to those of us with many leasehold properties in our constituencies. I also express my general accord with certain aspects of the speech of the hon. Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck), which I watched from my office. I do not know whether it is in order to refer to watching the currency of a debate from one's desk, but as you have allowed me to do so, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I hope that the House will accept my apologies for not being in attendance for the whole debate.

There is no doubt that serious abuses are being visited on tenants in a range of different contexts. The hon. Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) has cited some of them, many of which are horrific. Every hon. Member will have had tenants coming to their surgeries telling them stories that arouse their indignation, but about which they can do very little because there is no redress available. The hon. Member for Brent, North gave a shocking example of someone claiming false credentials and using the label that attaches to that to help the landlord, or whoever is trying to get possession of the property, to give them extra prestige and status. That is a form of intimidation. Every example that has been cited in the debate has been replete with intimidation against which we, as Members of Parliament, regardless of party, should be able to defend our constituents.

Before turning to the consultative paper, I want to follow an analogy that the hon. Member for Brent, North took up. It was a vivid and compelling example of someone buying a car, which he drove around, confident in the knowledge that it was his property. However, because of the small print in the lease, he found himself with a bill for respraying and new tyres, which the car did not need, and there was nothing he could do about it.

What about the obverse of the argument? Let us suppose that a car owner, who has bought his car, decides to rent it to a neighbour to do the school run, or whatever, for a small sum. Perhaps he is a member of the services and is being stationed abroad for a while, so he sets up proper arrangements and insurance. Let us assume that the neighbour pays the hiring fee and all goes well for a while, but he then allows his teenage children to drive the car. It may be bashed around; perhaps it disappears and then reappears; or, parking tickets and fines may accumulate. At that point, the car owner may decide that he wants the arrangement to end and to have his car back. But however hard he tries, and whatever devices he uses, he finds that he cannot repossess his own property.

That happens all too often—in many cases to people at the bottom of the range. I know that owning a second home is thought by the Labour party to be a disreputable form of material possession, but sometimes people invest in a second home, which they let, but then they cannot get the tenants out. Tenants may stop paying rent or sublet the property and pocket the money. The original saver, whose house it is, has little redress. I know that there are legal measures that can be taken, but the law grinds along and people find it practically impossible to repossess their property. It is still frightfully difficult for ordinary, humble people to seek redress. They do not have the resources of major landlords to use intimidation, small print, lawyers, surveyors, architects and general leverage against their tenants.

There is another category of people who desperately need to recover their own tiny property—it could be a house, flat, or even a couple of rooms or the basement of their own house—but cannot do so.

Mr. Pike: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I do not know whether the right hon. Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Mr. Clark) knows that the spokesmen on the two Front Benches have only 15 minutes to contribute to the debate.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): There seems to be some unawareness on the part of right hon. and hon. Members that the debate is time-limited. If it is to have any value, Front-Bench spokesmen must make a contribution.

Mr. Clark: Thank you for that clarification, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) for raising the matter.

The document being prepared by the Under-Secretary of State should consider the need for a total overhaul of leasing arrangements. The guiding principle should be that tenants who generally conform to the terms of their lease, who behave decently, pay their rent and look after their properties, should not be subject to the sort of victimisation of which we have heard. However, it should be much easier for owners to recover their property and rapidly to evict tenants who abuse their terms.

10.45 am

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk): I congratulate the hon. Member for Poplar on securing the debate, despite his reluctance to approach the issue in the bipartisan spirit for which I had hoped, and which the subject deserves.

The issue concerns many thousands of people. I declare an interest as the leaseholder of a flat not far from the House of Commons—a leaseholder who gained rights under legislation passed by the previous Parliament, and which rights might be further affected by the outcome of the consultation process on which the Government are embarking.

The hon. Member for Poplar concentrated on the position of leaseholders who had acquired their leases through the right-to-buy scheme. He correctly identified the rather eccentric approach of Liberal Democrat councillors in Tower Hamlets.

Mr. Fitzpatrick: My constituents in Canning Town may be offended if I do not advise the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) that my constituency is known as Poplar and Canning Town.

Mr. Yeo: I am glad that the hon. Member for Poplar and Canning Town (Mr. Fitzpatrick) had the opportunity of putting that on the record.

I was referring to the rather eccentric approach adopted by the Liberal Democrats when they controlled Tower Hamlets. I was interested to note that the problems highlighted by the hon. Member for Poplar and Canning Town arose primarily from the landlord—the local authority—confirming that the difficulties in such matters are by no means confined to the private sector, although clearly they extend to the private sector.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mrs. Lait) on her excellent contribution. She spoke with much authority and expertise on the subject, as illustrated by the quotation she dug up from the Minister when he was in opposition two years ago. She referred to the slipping timetable for the consultation paper. There is something of a competition in the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions to see which papers can be put back the longest. I am trying to help the Minister by saying that the integrated transport strategy is taking even longer than this matter. I am emphasising that we do not want to be churlish, but are prepared to be patient.

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Yeo: No, I must give the Minister time to respond.

The speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham confirmed that we in the Opposition recognise that abuses still occur and that further reforms are still needed.

The hon. Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck) listed some of the reforms facing leaseholders who exercised their right to buy. I was not sure whether a trace of the old Labour opposition to the right to buy was lurking somewhere underneath the surface of her remarks.

Mr. Dismore: Will the hon. Gentleman explain why, given all the abuses outlined at Westminster city council, the Conservative party has signally failed to condemn the way in which that council abused the position of leaseholders who exercised their right to buy and the council's designated sales scheme?

Mr. Yeo: As a resident in the Westminster city council area, I have voted for Conservative councillors in each of the four elections in which I have been resident. I note that this year, the council gained seats from the Labour party, which was a resounding vote of confidence by the voters in Westminster in support of the Conservative council that has managed its affairs in an outstanding fashion.

To return to the subject of the debate, I agree that some buyers have proceeded with the purchase of their leases without fully foreseeing the costs that might subsequently arise. The hon. Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) drew attention to some examples of continued abuses by freeholders. I am glad that my right hon. Friend the Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Mr. Clark) was able to contribute to the debate; he drew attention to a slightly separate, but nevertheless important, point—landlords have rights that can be abused by ruthless tenants. Undoubtedly, in the long term, that operates against the prospective tenants' interests because it means that other landlords will be reluctant to make their property available.

The Opposition, when in government, adopted two broad principles on leasehold reform. First, we believed that leaseholders must be properly protected against the risk of incompetence and exploitation by unscrupulous freeholders. The hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders) acknowledged the fact that many freeholders adopt a perfectly responsible attitude and respect the position of their leaseholders. However, we recognised the fact that abuses were occurring, which is why legislation was introduced in the previous Parliament.

Service, repair and renovation charges—perhaps I should say overcharges—are the obvious areas of possible malpractice. For that reason, we gave leaseholders several new rights. The basis on which we operated was to try to reflect the balance of interest between the leaseholder and the freeholder. Where leaseholders' interests were clearly more important, greater rights should attach to their position.

Secondly, we believed that, in any rights granted to the leaseholder, we must recognise the fact that the freeholder had a legitimate interest in such matters. That principle is easier to state in general than to translate into a simple financial formula, but it is important and should be recognised in any further changes that are made.

The Opposition are prepared to be constructive and we look forward to learning more about the Government's thinking. During our term of office, we set up the leasehold enfranchisement advisory service with public money. It has been helpful in identifying some of the difficulties that arise in current legislation, not least the excessive complexity of the process that faces leaseholders hoping to exercise their enfranchisement rights. The impenetrability of much of the detail of calculating figures, such as marriage values, is enough to deter anyone from even embarking on the process. Other problems, such as those of eligibility, also arise.

We are ready to consider what the Government have to say. I hope that the Minister can share with the House a little of his thinking today, and we recognise the fact that the leaseholders are continuing to experience abuses.

Dr. Iddon: I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister is aware that, in 1991, my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley (Mr. Lewis) raised all the matters that have been referred to in this debate, and your party in government promised that all the problems would be corrected and that commonhold would be looked at. You lost the election in 1997.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is addressing the Chair.

Mr. Yeo: Some progress was made after 1991. Legislation that addressed some of the issues was enacted in 1993, but I realise that further reforms might be needed. That is why I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say.

I conclude by joining other hon. Members in welcoming the work of the all-party group on this matter, which has a valuable contribution to make. We are prepared to be constructive in responding to the Government.

10.53 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. Nick Raynsford): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Poplar and Canning Town (Mr. Fitzpatrick) on his success in securing this debate and providing the opportunity for us to focus on this most important issue. I shall not be able to respond properly to all the concerns that have been raised this morning because of the shortage of time, but I assure the House that the Government are well aware of them and committed to comprehensive reform.

There are over 1 million leaseholders in England and Wales. Although they may be legally regarded as tenants, most of them would consider themselves to be owner-occupiers, having invested substantial sums in their homes. Unfortunately, as we have heard today, too often, leaseholders do not have the security and the degree of control over their homes that owner-occupiers normally expect to enjoy. As my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) admirably said, it often comes as a great shock to people who think that they have bought their homes to discover that they simply do not have the rights and control that they expect.

The key to the problem is that the balance of control between landlords and leaseholders is unfair. In most cases, it bears no relation to the respective shares of the equity in a building. In many blocks of flats, the value of the leasehold interests can amount to £1 million or more, but a landlord who has acquired the freehold, for perhaps a few thousand pounds, can exercise total control over its management. With some leasehold houses outside London on very long leases, the value of the freehold can be a minute proportion of the total value. However, the landlord often has rights to exercise considerable control over the leaseholder—for example, permission may be required for alterations, extensions and the like. Landlords might insist on a fee for giving that permission. They might also insist on a particular insurer, from whom they often receive lucrative commissions. That unfair balance of control has resulted in a variety of problems for residential leaseholders in recent years.

Although many landlords are good managers, there is an all too significant minority whose management styles range from the incompetent to the criminal, with all the attendant misery which the leaseholders have to endure. Some are absent or neglectful, so that essential work remains undone and the buildings deteriorate. Others are lazy, keeping on contractors or agents for year after year without testing the market, so that the leaseholders who pay for those services do not get value for money. The more unscrupulous charge for work that has not been done, undertake work that is unnecessary, or charge inflated prices. My hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North cited many examples of the activities of people whom he graphically described as ground rent grazers or service charge sharks. The out-and-out criminals misappropriate service charges and sinking funds.

The problem is not confined to difficulties with the management of buildings. At the start of a lease the cost of a leasehold property can be comparable to a freehold one, but the leaseholder acquires a wasting asset. As the time remaining on the lease gets shorter, it becomes more difficult to sell. In many parts of the country, mortgagees will not lend on leases that have less than 60 years remaining.

There are, in theory, a number of safeguards for leaseholders, but it can be difficult and expensive for them to exercise the rights they have. Unscrupulous landlords can often exploit such difficulties and intimidate leaseholders. I have no doubt that existing leasehold law is fundamentally flawed. I have said so on several occasions, and the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders) has quoted me saying such. I confirm my view that the current arrangement is flawed and that the time has come for comprehensive reform.

I know that some hon. Members, including the hon. Members for Beckenham (Mrs. Lait) and for Torbay, have expressed concern about the time taken to produce detailed proposals. I fully appreciate the concern of leaseholders for early action. I assure leaseholders that their concerns have not been forgotten. However, the subject is very complex. There is a history of legislation on the hoof that has not always worked.

The previous Government had good intentions when they introduced legislation in 1985, 1987, 1993 and 1996. However, I suspect that not even Opposition Members would claim that those measures were as effective as they would have liked. They contained problems and were often ill thought out, because they were prepared in a hurry. Both the Landlord and Tenant Act 1987 and the Leasehold Reform, Housing and Urban Development Act 1993 have proved to be seriously deficient. Therefore, we must ensure that we get it right this time. We do not want to create new anomalies or difficulties to replace the current problems.

We plan to consult on proposals later this year. The consultation paper will spell out the range of options and the Government's proposals. On some matters, we shall put forward proposals; on others, we shall put forward options to deal with the enormous range of subjects. The hon. Member for Beckenham asked specifically

[Mr. Nick Raynsford]

about marriage values. That will be covered in the consultation paper, and other technical issues will be considered.

We will legislate as soon as we can when we have assessed the results of our consultation. However, I am sure that all hon. Members will appreciate that there is considerable pressure on parliamentary time, with a large number of other important measures pending.

I know that the House would like to hear details of the scope of our reforms, but I regret that shortage of time, plus the fact that we are still working up the proposals, means that I can make no specific commitments this morning. Our overall objective is to provide leaseholders with the opportunity to reap the full benefits of owner-occupation and, individually or collectively, to have control over the way in which their homes are managed.

After many false dawns, we intend to create a new framework that works and gives leaseholders the protection that they deserve. In conclusion, I should like to thank all the hon. Members who have contributed to the debate. They have graphically highlighted, from their own constituency experience, many of the serious problems in the current arrangements that justify the comprehensive reform approach to which the Government are committed.

Preventive Health Care

11 am

Dr. Peter Brand (Isle of Wight): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise the issue of preventive health care and home insulation. People might wonder why I want to discuss home insulation in June, but the purpose of the debate is to take the crisis out of winter. Each winter, many people suffer from illness and even premature death because of drops in temperature—much more so in this country than in, say, Scandinavian countries or even Siberia.

I am pleased that a Minister from the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions will respond to the debate. However, I am disappointed that the Minister for Public Health is not gracing the Benches this morning. The Government's public health statement was full of warm words, and there is an opportunity this morning for them to make a commitment to warm homes; that would do much more to help people than the leaflets, advisory papers and so on that are made available to keep people warm.

Many initiatives have been taken by local health authorities, often working with local authorities. Such schemes are commendable, but they are just drops in the ocean. It has been estimated that about 8 million households in the United Kingdom suffer from fuel poverty. People cannot afford to heat their homes properly, which means that about 10 million people shiver unnecessarily in the winter. That is a matter for the individuals concerned, who should be our priority, and it is also amazingly wasteful of energy resources, which are finite not only in this country, but elsewhere in the world.

There have been commendable initiatives. The home energy efficiency scheme was a good start. Unfortunately, its funding has been pegged.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): Cut.

Dr. Brand: Cut, in real terms.

The regulations have been changed, so that people can no longer use the schemes to improve the insulation that their properties so desperately need. Homes need to be fitted with materials and appliances that stop energy loss and provide sufficient heating. I come across too many homes where people cannot afford—or believe that they cannot afford because of the uncertainty of fuel payments—to use the heating that is installed. They rely instead on paraffin heaters and gas-bottled heaters, with all the accompanying danger that goes with such appliances.

A proper scheme for home insulation and proper heating would save money in the long run. It would cut costs, not only for the national health service, but for the Department of Social Security. We rightly pay much lip service to keeping people in their own homes, which is where they want to be. We must make sure that their homes are fit for them and, unfortunately, we are failing to do that. The debate is supported strongly by several organisations, such as the Association for the Conservation of Energy, the Child Poverty Action Group, Friends of the Earth, Help the Aged, the National Housing Federation, the National Right to Fuel Campaign, the National Energy Association and Unison. Those groups have banded together to emphasise the multidisciplinary

nature of the problems of cold homes. It is a health problem and also an environmental problem. It is a problem for the most vulnerable members of our society—the very old and the very young.

The Government have an opportunity to do something dramatically useful. The new deal correctly identified opportunities when people who have been unemployed or young people who have not found employment can work in environment task forces. It is important that those task forces learn from the experience of the home energy efficiency scheme and that they are resourced properly to carry out the work that we all know needs to be done. It is also important that the change in the rules for the home energy efficiency scheme is reversed, so that people can return to homes where only minimal work has been done.

Each winter, we have heated debates—I am sorry, that is the wrong phrase; we have concerned debates about the effects of cold weather on our constituents. It is interesting that at least four of the long list of private Members' Bills relate directly to that issue, such as the Energy Efficiency Bill which is promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and West Devon (Mr. Burnett). There is also the Energy Conservation (Housing) Bill, the Warm Homes and Energy Conservation (Fifteen Year Programme) Bill and the Cold Weather Payments (Wind Chill Factor) Bill. I am proud to be a Member of the House of Commons where such an issue is so important. Many of us are very concerned about it.

As I said, the Government have an opportunity to take action. We must ensure that materials are made available and, if they have to be paid for by people who can afford them, let us exempt such materials from value added tax. It is nonsense to charge a tax on materials that stop us using finite fuel resources. During the next 15 years, there should be a proper programme of action to insulate the 1.5 million homes that need to be insulated. The new deal programme and environment task forces must work together with HEES and, if we can get that package together, the Government can show that they are truly committed to public health.

11.7 am

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro and St. Austell): I warmly congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Dr. Brand) on introducing such an important debate. The issue has a great deal of cross-party support and the list of private Members' Bills to which my hon. Friend referred clearly shows that. The matter combines social poverty, health care and environmental concern, about which I speak for my party. It draws attention to the fact that, if we are to have a society that is environmentally sustainable, it will also be socially and economically sustainable. The environment is not isolated in that sense; it links up with other issues.

It is extraordinary that as many as 8 million people in the United Kingdom are still suffering from fuel poverty. It affects some families more than others; single-parent families are particularly affected. Almost half of Britain's 1.5 million lone parents, let alone the 2.3 million children for whom they care, are on incomes of less than £100 a week. That often leads to cold homes. One in five lone parents report dampness; one in five lone parents have no central heating.

It is not just a personal issue of being cold in the home. It costs the Government and the NHS, in particular, vast sums. At present, the Secretary of State for Health is wrestling with the monster of increasing waiting lists. This is not easy to tackle, but those hon. Members who care to visit hospitals will be told that they are overwhelmed in winter with patients who are cold at home and who are therefore suffering the associated health problems.

It is estimated that the NHS wastes £1 billion a year on extra hospital admissions—let alone the knock-on impact of increasing waiting lists. Government figures show that, every winter, between 30,000 and 60,000 people die prematurely as a result of the cold. We might think that that is inevitable. Of course, when it is cold, wet or damp, people suffer increased health problems.

We might think that would be true anywhere in the world, but statistics from other countries show that they do not have the same level of problems. Of course, they have an increase in ill health during the winter, but not on the same scale as us. For instance, Sweden suffers a 14 per cent. increase in deaths in winter; in Norway, it is 10 per cent.; and, in Germany, 12 per cent. In the United Kingdom, it is 31 per cent. That is a great worry.

Tens of thousands of people should not die prematurely because they cannot keep themselves warm at home. I have already mentioned the environmental impact of the energy that is wasted through the roofs of those who are fruitlessly attempting to warm their homes. The unnecessary burning of fossil fuels costs money, and it also harms the environment.

Several systems are in place to tackle the problem, but they are not adequate. The cold weather payments scheme suffers not least because it is based on statistics rather than the reality of how cold people are at home; it takes no account of wind chill. We all know that a biting wind makes us feel far more cold than the ambient temperature about which we hear on the television news. That problem needs to be tackled. A private Member's Bill on the subject has been tabled. I hope that the Government will accept the case for taking account of wind chill.

The home energy efficiency scheme is brilliant in principle, but it is underfunded and suffers in the way in which it is administered. In particular, only one corrective measure is allowed per house. That leads to a waste of resources. A team enters a property to assess what needs to be done to insulate the home and then carries out the work. It seems nonsensical that, if the team lays insulation in the roof, it cannot cover the cracks around the doors and windows; if it does the cracks around the doors and windows, it cannot insulate the roof; and, in either case, it cannot lag the water tank.

Once a team has started work, it makes sense for it to do a comprehensive job—obviously within limited funding—and to do a range of work, rather than only one job. The irony is that, although the funding is limited, in those properties that need a mix of work to be done the money available cannot be spent because no more than one piece of work can be done. It is not necessarily a question of limited finance; it is merely one of bureaucracy.

Worst of all, the work of the Energy Saving Trust remains massively limited by the gas regulator's block on a levy being raised to carry out that work. The Government urgently need to undertake to change that through legislation. A utility regulation Bill should be introduced before too long; it could reverse that block and put a clear obligation on the regulators to take account not only of price but of environmental and health issues.

[Mr. Matthew Taylor]

The previous Government, when setting up the Energy Saving Trust, promised a programme amounting to as much as £1 billion a year. They secured the Treasury's acceptance that the levy would not count as Government spending. The Conservative Government did the necessary background work, but they failed to deliver by not ensuring that the money was made available and by not overcoming the problems caused by the gas regulator. As yet, we have seen no progress on the matter from the Labour Government.

I hope that the Minister will say not only that the Government are aware of the problem, but that they intend to overcome it. The industry has the potential to invest vastly more money than has been put into home energy insulation. It should particularly target the poorest groups, who need it most.

VAT is charged on energy-saving materials. It is a great disappointment that the Government have not felt able to carry through what the Labour party said before the general election, although some Government schemes—we do not yet know which—will be exempted. All schemes should be exempted. Although the Government claim that European Union rules prevent that from happening, I note that at least one other European country has not found itself so restrained, but has already implemented such a policy.

The Government frequently refer to the new deal, and the environment programme within the new deal, as an opportunity to carry forward home energy insulation. Indeed, when questioned on the matter, the Prime Minister and other Ministers spoke of a massive programme of home energy insulation. I have spoken in detail with those administering the new deal, I have met the head of the agency involved, and I have detailed statistics.

I shall not bore the House with those statistics, but they amount to a few programmes being signed for home energy insulation under the new deal, which involves a small number of people. The programmes are handicapped above all by the fact that there is no funding available for the extra material costs, other than the small amount allowed for those participating in a new deal programme. It makes no sense to do that, unless a great deal more material is made available. Indeed, it is most likely to result in different people carrying out the same old schemes, rather than more people carrying out many more schemes.

There is plenty of room for Government action. From all that the Government have said, I believe that their heart is in the right place, as do many Labour Back Benchers. The hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mrs. Gilroy), who will shortly seek to speak, has been an outstanding campaigner on the matter before and since the election. I am sure that she will reinforce many of the points that I have made. I hope to hear a strong and robust statement from the Minister supporting what we have said and showing that the Government will take action at the earliest possible moment.

This afternoon, my hon. Friend the Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) will introduce the Preventative Health Care and Home Insulation Bill. It has cross-party support, and I hope that it will be taken up in the next Session of Parliament—by a member of any party—and that it receives Government time. It would require health authorities to assess their role in getting people warmer homes, and how to carry through a programme of preventive health care to prevent people from having to go to hospital.

Several local health authorities have already done that on a trial basis. Cornwall and Isles of Scilly health authority has spent £300,000 insulating the homes of people with asthmatic children. That has led to a significant and dramatic reduction in the incidence of severe asthma attacks, as a result of which children have not had to take time off school, and have not had to go to hospital or receive so much treatment. That sort of preventive health care, rather than the traditional role of health authorities insulating homes or even simply identifying problems, has a lot going for it. I hope that the Government will take a positive attitude to a Bill that commands cross-party support in the House and has huge support among the relevant organisations.

11.19 am

Mrs. Linda Gilroy (Plymouth, Sutton): I warmly welcome the debate initiated by the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Dr. Brand). I also welcome the Preventative Health Care and Home Insulation Bill referred to by the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Mr. Taylor). It certainly has the backing of the campaign for warm homes. Indeed, we discussed it at recent meetings and hoped that it would come to the attention of the House. I welcome this early opportunity to debate the matter. It is certainly necessary to engage all public agencies and private businesses. I pay tribute to the Association for the Conservation of Energy, which supports us all in our work. As has already been mentioned, the matter enjoys cross-party support, as evidenced by the Bills that the hon. Member for Isle of Wight read out, including my Warm Homes and Energy Conservation (Fifteen Year Programme) Bill.

In the fight against fuel poverty, the Government have an enormous task, which I think is recognised by all hon. Members present, but we must put that message across to others. Mention has been made of 8 million households—hence the 15-year programme envisaged in my Bill, to tackle that problem by measures for 500,000 houses during each year of the programme. We have examined both what needs to be put in place to achieve that and the programmes that were developed under previous Governments.

Our recent estimates suggest that about half the resources required for the purposes of my Bill are already available and dedicated to such work. The challenge is to ensure that we get every penny of value out of such programmes, as well as identifying and dedicating new resources to the fight. I know that the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Angela Eagle), has attacked the problem with great passion and focus in the Government's early months.

The initiative to engage and focus health authorities and trusts, which is the subject of this debate, is most welcome, because the size of the challenge is truly daunting. We have mentioned the 8 million households that are thought to have to spend 10 per cent. of their income to achieve adequate warmth. However, we should also bear in mind other figures, such as the 1.5 million

people who live in severe poverty and who would have to spend 20 to 30 per cent. of their disposable household income to achieve adequate warmth, and the 1 million people in extreme poverty who would have to spend more than 30 per cent. to do so.

I invite hon. Members to consider what that would mean in terms of our disposable incomes, and to imagine the effect that would have even on us, were we to be presented with a bill for £3,000—if it were to be 10 per cent. of disposable income, or thereabouts; hon. Members' circumstances vary. Imagine a bill for £7,000 to £8,500, which would reflect 20 to 30 per cent. of expenditure from disposable income.

That is enough to cause a sharp intake of breath. I suggest that it might increase hon. Members' blood pressures significantly. The incidence of coronary heart attacks might rise suddenly—we do not want to promote by-elections, so I sincerely hope that that will not happen. However, it could drive some hon. Members into deep depression; everybody's reaction is different. However, that is happening for real to many of our constituents who are in far more straitened circumstances and have far less disposable income remaining after paying their fuel bills. In the part of the country from which the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell and I come, water bills add to the pain of that experience.

The relationship between ill health and inadequate heating has been known for a long time. When I worked for Age Concern Scotland in the 1970s, my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North (Mr. Wicks) was one of the first people to publish a study on hypothermia and excess deaths in winter. When I was involved in organising conferences across the country, working with colleagues in Age Concern in England, Wales and Northern Ireland on the manifesto on the place of the retired and elderly in modern society—more than 20 years ago—a paper by my hon. Friend was developed. Sadly, although some progress has been made in the intervening years, the issue is not taken seriously enough. We are about to engage on a conference with a similar theme, "The Debate for the Millennium", with much progress still to be made.

In the 1970s, Jack Benny, the comedian who was then only in his 80s—he lived to be 100—said that age was a case of mind over matter: if people don't mind, it doesn't matter. I used to use that a great deal in the talks that I gave for Age Concern. However, what must be added to that is, "as long as you have your health," because health is probably the key issue that makes for a happy and fulfilling old age. A key factor in maintaining that health, and in relieving ill health, is warmth, with the relief of fuel poverty and the promotion of energy efficiency.

Engaging health authorities and agencies is an idea that has been mooted for a number of years, but actions speak louder than words. It is good to hear of an increasing number of places where practical projects are being developed. Mention has been made of the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly health authority; I pay tribute to what it is doing. Initiatives are also being developed in Birmingham, Doncaster, Northampton, Eastleigh, Nottingham and Shropshire.

This morning, I asked the local energy advice centre in Plymouth how its work was going and whether it was engaging in such activities. It informed me that, yesterday, it spoke to about 20 health care professionals in Plymouth, outlining the services that local energy advice centres offer.

I am sure that hon. Members recognise, as I do, the great service that more than 30 such energy advice centres provide throughout the country. Health authorities can help, working jointly with local energy advice centres. I understand that the energy advice centre in Solent has a programme working closely with its health authority on such issues.

I am reminded of a constituent, for whom I recently sought help from the energy advice centre in Plymouth, an 80-year-old lady who had inherited a rather dilapidated property, with all the usual accompanying energy efficiency problems. She made a plea to me for help. She was going out during the winter looking for wood to burn in a fire to augment her heating. When the energy advice centre visited her, it found that her property had a standard assessment procedure rating of only 1. I am glad that it can work with her. Another organisation that contributes a great deal working with health authorities as we envisage is Care and Repair. It will work with my constituent to try to deal with her heating problems to ensure that her next winter is more comfortable and, I hope, more healthy for her.

Hon. Members might expect me to be slightly more effusive in acknowledging what my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary and other Ministers have already done. We have taken the issue of fuel poverty seriously. We have cut VAT on fuel to 5 per cent., which is worth £18 a year to an average family. We have introduced special winter fuel supplements for pensioners this year and next, which of course is worth more to the poorest and to people who struggle to pay fuel bills. We should not underestimate the capital receipts initiative, which channels more money into housing investment. Much more work is in hand. I shall leave it to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary to remind us of what is in the pipeline, emerging from the consultative document "Our Healthier Nation" and the Green Paper on utilities regulation, which has been mentioned.

I thank the hon. Member for Isle of Wight for initiating the debate and for bringing the matter to the attention of the House. I look forward, as I am sure he does, to working with the Under-Secretary and her team throughout this Parliament to ensure that we make significant progress.

11.30 am

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): I am happy to follow the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mrs. Gilroy). My hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Dr. Brand) corrected himself when he said that every winter in this place there is a heated debate about insulation of people's homes and deaths. He need not have done so, because there is such a heated debate. I have been in the House for 15 winters and questions have been tabled on a regular basis, especially from colleagues who represent Scottish constituencies. The hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) is noted for campaigning for proper recognition of the colder climes that people in her part of the country experience. My colleagues in Wales have done the same. The winter issue has arisen every year I have been here, because that is what constituents and news, radio and television reports tell us is important. We know that people die in this country because they are cold.

[Mr. Simon Hughes]

My constituency is different from that of my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight, who introduced the debate. One of the great benefits of this Parliament is that we have a sprinkling of medical doctors which we did not have in the previous Parliament. They have brought with them practical experience of their surgeries and their hospital and public health backgrounds. My hon. Friend made it clear that we must get our public health priorities right—he has made that point to me at more meetings than I wish to remember. He represents what seems to me to be a relatively affluent constituency off the south coast of England.

Dr. Brand *rose—*

Mr. Hughes: I was being careful to say that it seems to me to be relatively affluent. That is my perception from one of the most deprived inner-city constituencies. No doubt my hon. Friend is about to say that rural and coastal areas of Britain have as many problems, including those of public health, as areas that are identified as centres of regional or national deprivation.

Dr. Brand: My hon. Friend gives me the opportunity to put it on record that the Isle of Wight has a gross domestic product of 64. The European average is 100. We have the lowest male wages in the country and the highest unemployment on the south coast. Only 3 per cent. of the population are higher-rate income tax payers. We have real problems and I am certainly aware of the problems of fuel poverty.

Mr. Hughes: My hon. Friend the Member for Truro and St. Austell (Mr. Taylor) and his predecessor used to make similar points. My former hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne, Mr. Bellotti, and all my hon. Friends who represent southern seats, which are perceived as being relatively affluent, have also made similar points. When I was canvassing in the Christchurch by-election I met elderly couples who were complaining about the issue. I put the matter in that context because I know that one of the paradoxes of my constituency—I represent more council tenants than any other English Member—is that people spend a great deal on heating their homes. However, most of that heat goes out the window and through the doors.

The hon. Member for Sutton made the point very well. The bills that some people run up are phenomenal and they get into terrible financial predicaments. Their fuel supplies are eventually cut off in spite of the protections in the system and their children suffer. Those people experience terrible stress and mental health problems, and families can break down. I am sure that the hon. Lady has the same undercurrents in her constituency. The alternative, especially for single or elderly people who are afraid of the cost, is not to turn on the heating. They sit in their homes doing—if I may say so—the Edwina Currie act of putting on a woolly hat and another blanket. That may be fine for a couple of hours, but it is not fine through the night and into the morning.

The issue is real. I am glad that we are debating it in June, and I share the views expressed. I think that the Government want to address the issue. I was with the Minister the other day when she came to my constituency to launch the showroom of an environmentally sustainable building suppliers. It was so good that, when I do the bit of building work that I have to do on my house, I intend to go back there. However, it may not be as cheap as other supplier. If we are to have environmentally sustainable buildings, let us have environmentally sustainable results, with good public health.

There are good practices. Like most hon. Members who have been in the House for a while, I get invited—I think every year—by the neighbourhood energy action group to visit one of its activities in a constituent's home during Neighbourhood Energy Action Week. I have done that regularly and have seen that the suggestions make a great difference. Last year, I watched a simple process of insulation in which relatively cheap strips were put around windows and doors as draught excluder. Even those of us who are privileged enough to be in fairly good circumstances really notice a draughty place in the winter.

This is a good debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight has done us a service by introducing it. I am glad that there is such consensus. I should like to flag up a couple of the health aspects associated with the issue, in which my hon. Friend the Member for Truro and St. Austell said that I have an interest. We hope to combine our concerns with those of other colleagues who have put the issue on the agenda.

Before I do that, however, I want to make a specific objection. I did not think that I would have to make it without the presence of the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth). By blocking the Bill promoted by our hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and West Devon (Mr. Burnett), the right hon. Gentleman is doing the House and many old people no service. That Bill concerns mortgage valuation and energy efficiency.

I have looked at the list of Bills to be debated on 3 July. To do service to the business on that day, we would have to sit for about year because of the number of private Members' Bills tabled, which includes the Bill promoted by the hon. Member for Sutton—the Warm Homes and Energy Conservation (Fifteen Year Programme) Bill. Those are not silly Bills that people are introducing for party political purposes; they all have cross-party support and wide backing outside the House. I hope that, in protecting the interests of Back Benchers, we will not allow them to abuse the interests of a huge number of our constituents and citizens when we are trying to improve their health and welfare.

My Bill, which I will present this afternoon—the Preventative Health Care and Home Insulation Bill—adds to the Bill that my former hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch, who is now Baroness Maddock, got through the House as a result of the private Members' ballot in the previous Parliament. I have entered the private Members' ballot for 15 years and have never got near the top 20. She managed to promote two Bills in her four or five years in the House. Life is not fair, even for Members of Parliament.

Dr. Brand: Especially for Members.

Mr. Hughes: As my hon. Friend says, especially for Members.

My Bill would do for health authorities what my former hon. Friend did for local authorities. It would require health authorities to include in their annual reports best

practice and what they could do to improve matters. They would have to state the benefits and practicality of possible measures. The purpose of the Bill is to establish a preventive health care scheme to improve the health of people by tackling the problems that cause ill health. It would set out how a health authority, working with the local authority, should proceed.

Six matters are specified which have health consequences. We are always reading and hearing about health outputs not inputs—it is not what is spent, but what is purchased that counts. That is true. We need to reduce the risk of hypothermia and the number of people who suffer from it. That is an output. My hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight explained that in much colder Scandinavian countries hardly anyone dies prematurely in winter; in our country, which is much warmer, people die prematurely all the time. That is unacceptable. I know that the Minister would agree and I hope that we will have made progress by the end of this Administration.

We need to deal with circulation problems, which have a huge effect on people; stress and mental health problems; cold-related illnesses, such as bronchitic and asthmatic conditions; and hospital admissions. My hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight knows the reality as well as I do. I often visit Guy's hospital and see people who regularly go in and out of it. They are discharged to places that are not good for their health. That is unacceptable. I am not an expert on the demand for general practitioners' services, but my hon. Friend could no doubt produce an assessment of how we could reduce the demand on surgeries.

There obviously has to be consultation. A local health authority would consult the community health body and local authority with the intention of working with them. That could be done. It is consistent—I am sure that the Minister and even her absent colleague the Minister for Public Health would accept this—with the Government's public health strategy to ensure that the health of the nation is improved.

I want to make a couple of points that have telling conclusions. First, an assessment was conducted by Dr. Brenda Boardman of Oxford university—it was not conducted by my party and it has no party political base—which showed that the NHS spends £1 billion a year from its budget of £45 billion on additional admissions, visits and prescriptions because appropriate work is not being carried out. That significant sum, which constitutes 2 per cent. of the health service budget, could be saved and redeployed to support policies for which we argue all the time.

Secondly, the Department of Health could promulgate good practice among health authorities and share it around. It could pick up an initiative in one region and convey it to another region. The hon. Member for Sutton rightly said that the saving to households that resulted from the Government's cut in VAT is already about £20 a year, which is welcome. A similar point is made in the briefing that I received—and I still remember last year's briefing. My understanding is that, if a home insulation programme began with the lowest-income households—my hon. Friend the Member for Truro and St. Austell has more knowledge of this matter than I do—one could reduce a household's cash expenditure by about £85 a year, although the same costs were involved. Taking appropriate action is relatively cheap.

The Minister may be in a better position than I am to comment on the fact that plenty of good practice is around—many health authorities, for example, have good practice. The hon. Member for Sutton discussed the general position in Nottinghamshire. I gather that Newark and Sherwood district council, which covers a relatively small area, estimated that home insulation could save the local health authority £4 million a year, which is a valuable saving.

My hon. Friend the Member for Truro and St. Austell has first-hand experience of a pilot programme that his county's health authority established in the Isles of Scilly, which was targeted at children with asthma. I do not have first-hand experience of it, although I am interested in it. No one knows exactly how asthma is brought on, but we know which factors appear to trigger it. Quite honestly, the figures are amazing. The programme examined a group of the islands' children, who suffered from asthma, before and after their homes were insulated. Those independent statistics show that the number of days off school that those children took reduced from 4.1 days over the study period to less than one day—0.6 of a day.

I was privileged the other day to spend our most recent half-term week in the Isles of Scilly, which I visited for the first time. It is a beautiful place, but in winter some of the cottages on those islands would not be the warmest places on earth if they were not heated. The same is true of coastal areas, and we must make progress in that regard.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas (Harrow, West): I am interested in the hon. Gentleman's comments on health authorities, and I shall read the Bill's details carefully. Does he agree that one of the problems affecting local energy conservation programmes is often the fact that key stakeholding organisations have not worked in partnership with one another? Will not health improvement programmes, which are a key reform in the Government's White Papers and Green Papers, help to encourage partnership between local authorities and to spread good practice, of which he gave isolated examples?

Mr. Hughes: In the interest of straight talking, my answer to those questions is yes. My local authority has a different priority, although it has a health action zone, which the Government designated and which I welcome. I hope that I shall carry the hon. Gentleman with me on this issue. I believe that in our near political lifetimes the logic of running together health and social services will become overwhelming, and that we shall wonder why it was not done previously. That will also save much management money. If we take that step, the experts on the ground and the people's democratically elected representatives will be able to plan together.

I have no idea what the hon. Gentleman's views are, but I hope that I will carry him with me and persuade the Government that health and local social services authorities need to work together to plan services. They should also involve the same people, as they do in Northern Ireland. My hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight, who sits on the Select Committee on Health, studied the situation in Northern Ireland, and I believe that the Committee will produce its report before the summer.

We are getting used to the fact that people can go to their doctors to get a prescription not for drugs but for something else—they might be sent to a local health

[Mr. Hughes]

centre or fitness centre, or they might be advised to carry out insulation. The Minister for Public Health described the situation clearly earlier this year. One scheme allocated money to general practitioners, which enabled them to write a prescription that allowed people to cash in a receipt to pay for insulation. That is lateral, intelligent thinking and it helps to meet people's needs. Instead of giving a patient a drug to cure his bronchitis, the cause of the problem is being faced.

We have an opportunity to get our act together and to establish a coalition, and we thank all the people who have encouraged us, including our constituents. I hope that we can serve them well and that between us—whichever Bill is lucky enough to make progress—we might persuade the Minister and her colleagues to persuade the Government to make such legislation one of the goodies in the next Queen's Speech, which I am sure still contains some spaces. We cannot consider constitutional legislation and nothing else during the coming year. The Bill is a prime contender for one of those spaces, and, if the Minister wants us to join a small lobbying group, we shall be happy to oblige her.

11.46 am

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): I begin with an apology for not being here at the start of this debate—I had an urgent meeting at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which overran slightly. I congratulate the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) on what he is trying to achieve, and should like to add some brief points on this important subject.

I want to continue the debate about fuel poverty which was initiated some months ago by my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, North (Mr. Chaytor), who highlighted the fact that people's inability to heat their homes is an important aspect of poverty. In that debate I spoke about home improvement agencies.

I should declare an interest: for the past 10 years, I have been a member of a home improvement agency in my constituency, Care and Repair England, and I still sit on its board. In a speech in May, my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary, who is to reply to the debate, emphasised the importance of energy efficiency measures. Partly in response to that speech, Care and Repair England wrote to her suggesting how advances could be made in home improvements and especially energy efficiency. I shall repeat some of the points that it made, in the hope that my hon. Friend will respond to them.

Home improvement agencies, including Care and Repair England, emphasised the need to secure funding in the longer term. The part of the voluntary sector that works in capital repair—and, indeed, the voluntary sector generally—finds it hard to organise one year's funding at a time. It is therefore asking not necessarily for more money but for funding that is secure and stable: a three-year programme might be one way to achieve that.

Secondly, although Care and Repair England has a good relationship with local authorities, the danger is that cuts may have to be made because of the problems that local authorities currently face. The organisation therefore asked whether some kind of ring fencing should be considered, especially as it has to rely on grant funding, which is an elastic way of providing funds. It has asked not necessarily for arbitration between local and central Government but that there should be the possibility of appeal in cases where local government does not provide the funds for the voluntary sector that it should.

I am sure that my third point was raised earlier but I want to emphasise it in my own way. There is a need for appraisal and for the assessment of quality, which will help us to measure outcomes. The National Energy Audit suggests that there should be one measure—which I am sure was discussed earlier—the idea being that we can promote energy efficiency only by dealing with the whole house: the household as well as the house. Educating people in the use of central heating and other methods of ensuring that their property is warm and dry is an important part of the process. When appealing, as always, for funds, we need to recognise that informing and educating people is important. I am sure that the Government will be take that on board.

I referred to the impressive speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, North, and anything that can be done to help is important. We know that there is real poverty out there. Fuel poverty is something that we can identify and do something about. I am sure that the House will play its part and that the Government will reply accordingly.

11.50 am

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): I join other hon. Members in congratulating the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Dr. Brand) on securing the debate. The subject is most important and obviously gives him a certain amount of work in his constituency. While he was referring to the statistics it occurred to me that he is probably one of the hardest-worked Members of the House, being the Member of Parliament for the most under-represented constituency in the United Kingdom. So that he may represent his constituents more effectively in future, I hope that he will argue for a smaller constituency in the Isle of Wight—but that is a controversial matter and I shall not pursue it.

The hon. Gentleman identified the crux of the problem: we need to ensure that more homes are properly insulated and fitted with energy-saving appliances. He was attracted to the idea of exempting from VAT energy-saving materials. It is ironic that, when our hands are tied by the European Union, the Liberal Democrats conveniently ignore the constraints and remain the most enthusiastic party for further integration into the European Union. That is one of the luxuries of being a Liberal Democrat.

The hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Mr. Taylor) concentrated on the impact on the health care system and highlighted the number of winter deaths. I am told that one should only ask questions in the House to which one knows the answer. I have a question to which I do not know the answer. There is a suspicion in my mind that the statistics used for international comparisons are not strictly comparable. In a genuine spirit of inquiry—that is allowed during Wednesday morning debates, which are effectively held in private—I should like to know whether any work has been done on the international comparability of the statistics. I should be interested to see the results of any such work.

The hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell, who is now in his place, referred to the environmental impact of wasted energy. That must be included in our consideration and I shall return to it later.

The hon. Gentleman also referred to the cold weather payments scheme and said that it takes no account of wind chill. I hope that he will not think that I am souring the atmosphere with party political debate if I say that many hon. Members who now occupy the Government Benches, and even one or two on the Opposition Benches, including my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans), campaigned very hard for the wind chill factor to be taken into account. Many of those Labour Members have now gone rather quiet on the subject. In the heated party political pre-election atmosphere, the issue was exploited to the full, but the Government now seem to have no intention of taking any action on it. We considered the matter when in office, but we remain to be convinced that it is the answer, so we reluctantly support the Government's attitude on the inclusion of the wind chill factor. We need to take into account the difficulties of measurement and of deciding how much compensation should be provided, and the difference between different houses in different locations suffering different degrees of wind chill. The matter is very complex. I would not begin to question the Government's sincerity in dealing with the problem of poor people paying their fuel bills: accusations of cold-heartedness or callousness benefit no one.

The hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell said that not enough money is being devoted to the Energy Saving Trust. Money seems to be one of the main issues in this debate. It is easy to call for more money to be spent, but it is irresponsible unless we can identify where the money will come from.

Mrs. Gilroy: Will the hon. Gentleman acknowledge the step taken by the Minister to restore funding to the Energy Saving Trust? I intended to refer to that when speaking of the local energy advice centres, which welcome that restoration of funding.

Mr. Jenkin: I am coming to the hon. Lady's remarks. The energy advice centres were set up by the previous Government and have proved to be very successful. We welcome the money that is being devoted to energy advice centres.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: May I clarify the Conservative party's position on funding the Energy Saving Trust? When it was set up by the previous Government, they intended to introduce a levy on gas, which would have provided much higher funding for the Energy Saving Trust. That was the then Government's policy. If, as I hope, the new Government amend the position through the utilities Bill and restore the potential for that levy, will the official Opposition support that?

Mr. Jenkin: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to say that we considered the matter when in government. It was a fantastically ambitious project and it saddened us that we could not proceed with it. The plans foundered on the attitude of the Director General of Gas Supply, which was that regulatory bodies were not set up to become tax collectors. If that problem can be solved, we shall consider favourably any proposals from the Government, but not until we have seen those proposals. I recognise the nifty little trap that the hon. Gentleman is setting and I shall not fall into it.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Angela Eagle): Will the hon. Gentleman admit that the difficulty was caused by the way in which the legislation creating the regulatory system provided an individual regulator with the capacity to take that view? When the Conservative party was in power, that was contrary to its stated policy, but because the then regulator said that he did not agree, the legislation setting up the regulator gave him the power to make that choice and so defeated the then Government's laudable aims.

Mr. Jenkin: One of the delightful features of the Labour Government is that they are now engaging, responsibly and constructively, in the debate about how the privatised utilities are managed. Had they engaged in constructive debate when we privatised those industries, instead of showing blanket opposition and blocking their ears to the benefits of privatisation, I might be more inclined to take the Minister's comment as an admonition. Those privatisations were hugely successful. They contained a large experimental element and there is no doubt that, like any other legislation, they can be perfected and improved. If the Government bring forward proposals to that effect, we shall consider them, but will not commit ourselves to any hypothetical proposals.

The hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) spoke of his 15 winters in the House dealing with this subject. I was a little wary of the concept of directly involving the health service too much in the process of home insulation. GPs are busy enough as it is without making them consultants on home insulation. Perhaps, in forming commissioning groups, a GP should be appointed with responsibility for home energy efficiency. However, I imagine that people who work in the health service will think that the ability to compartmentalise such problems is essential for the efficiency of the health service, and that it is the responsibility of other bodies to ensure that people are not queueing up in doctors' surgeries because they have home energy efficiency problems.

Dr. Brand: I agree that GPs have neither the expertise nor the will to take on that expert role, but the hon. Gentleman must recognise that members of the primary health care team go into people's homes, day in, day out, and know the real consequences of fuel poverty. We can make enormous steps, by providing access through the primary health care team, which nominally includes GPs, and by allowing health authorities and local authorities to do that sort of work, provided that they are properly funded. There is nothing worse than identifying a problem and finding that the only thing one can do to alleviate it is to hand out an advisory leaflet. That is not helpful.

Mr. Jenkin: I fully accept what the hon. Gentleman says. Funding is inevitably part of the debate, and one to which I shall return in a few moments.

Mr. Simon Hughes: May I make two quick points? First, health authorities, the public health bodies responsible for ensuring the general public health of the community, can have responsibility for saying what is good practice, and should promote and sell that as the evaluating body.

[Mr. Simon Hughes]

Secondly, in some practices—I believe that Birmingham is one example—grants were made available from public funds, and GPs nominated which of their patients should be the recipients of those grants. They did no more than that, but they said, "This person should qualify for this insulation scheme because it will be more useful to her or him than to others." So there are two different areas of potential responsibility. As my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Dr. Brand) said, it may involve other primary health care members, who may not be GPs, but there are functional things that health service practitioners can do.

Mr. Jenkin: I am bound to say that the way in which the hon. Gentleman explains that now is less scary than the idea of GPs being asked to write out prescriptions for home insulation, which is how he described it before.

I am extremely wary of putting additional statutory burdens on the NHS, which is already deluged with bureaucracy and obligations. This is not my portfolio and I should probably shut up, but there is a case for considering how we can deregulate the health service so that it can better get on with its job, rather than Members of Parliament—bless their cotton socks—looking for good headlines by introducing new measures which may be wholesome in principle and intent but which do not make life easier for people.

I concede to the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey that the problem is that so much of the energy that poor people burn in their homes goes out of the window. There is an instructive page in the Library brief on the Energy Efficiency Bill about how much simple measures save. Although the leaflet on its own may be frustrating—if one thinks that nothing will be achieved by handing over the leaflet—it says that loft insulation, which might cost £75 as a DIY job, will save £35–£40 in a single year. Draught proofing a whole property may cost £50, but will, on average, save £15–£25 a year. Those are two or three-year paybacks on the investment, which makes it a good investment—certainly better than leaving money in the building society, which is what many elderly people do. They leave money in the building society instead of having the information explained to them and perhaps having someone younger and more able to help them with those simple tasks. The new deal has a role to play in getting young people to come into elderly people's homes to help them with simple tasks that need not cost any public money. Information and voluntary help, or help from another Government programme, are perhaps a more practical answer.

The hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) spoke of the need to assess the quality of what we do. That is always a problem with Government programmes; there is a fanfare of intent and the allocation of money, then weaknesses occur in the implementation. That underlines why public money is not always the answer.

This debate is primarily motivated by the record of terrible suffering, particularly of elderly people, and the huge implications for the NHS. The figure of £1 billion mentioned by the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey is not one that I have heard before, but it is a useful reminder. We all know that our local casualty departments become choked with elderly people because GPs are no longer able to cope with the influx of people into their surgeries. If energy efficiency can contribute towards reducing that misery and suffering, we should all join forces to tackle the problem.

The previous Government set up the home energy efficiency scheme grant, and since 1991, 2.3 million vulnerable homes have benefited from grants. So it is not as if nothing happened under the previous Government, and I hope that the Minister will acknowledge that in her reply. However, I suspect that her greatest problem is the Treasury, and that the message she receives from the Treasury is the same message that I am trying to give—that more money is not necessarily the answer to the problem. In some respects, the Government have already cut off their nose to spite their face. Yes, we know that VAT on fuel was politically suicidal, but there was something rational about it in terms of increasing energy costs to encourage energy conservation and to make more money available for the Exchequer, which might, perhaps, contribute to such schemes.

Against the background of privatisation, VAT on fuel was perfectly rational. According to the Library, electricity prices have fallen by 9 per cent. and gas prices have fallen by 8 per cent. over the past five years, even taking account of the residual VAT on fuel that still exists. Indeed, gas prices have fallen by 26 per cent. since 1987. The danger of those falling prices is that people start to believe that it is no longer worth insulating. If we had continued to gather the revenue, we could have spent it on the information and the extra grants that most hon. Members who have spoken this morning seem to think necessary—that would have been a better use of resources.

The Library briefing paper on the Energy Efficiency Bill states:

"the introduction of competition in electricity and gas markets is leading to falling energy prices",

which must be good for alleviating fuel poverty. It continues:

"According to DTI evidence received by the Trade and Industry Committee, every 10 per cent. drop in energy prices stimulates demand by 2 per cent."

We should consider the extent to which falling prices and the reduction of VAT on fuel have contributed to the amount of fuel that is wasted.

Mrs. Gilroy: I believe that VAT has significantly helped those who are poor to afford warmer homes. Another figure that the hon. Gentleman can find in briefing papers—it is significant to the health debate that we are having—is that people in the poorest households tend to take 50 to 60 per cent. of the benefit of energy efficiency works in added warmth. The decrease in VAT has helped people immediately, whereas other measures may take longer to implement.

Mr. Jenkin: I question that judgment, although we are talking about water under the bridge and I do not intend to dwell on the subject.

Our role as an Opposition is to scrutinise Government policy, but one of the glories of being in opposition is that we can start with a clean sheet. *[Interruption.]* The Labour party cleaned the sheet a few times in opposition,

and much good it did it—Labour became a good deal more palatable as a Government than it would have been a few years ago.

I conclude my remarks by inviting representations to the Opposition from all the organisations that are concerned with energy efficiency and poverty, and from those who have to struggle to pay their fuel bills. Our policies are in a state of flux, and we want to include all points of views in our debate about the future of policy—if people want to contact me, they are extremely welcome to do so.

12.12 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Angela Eagle): I congratulate the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Dr. Brand) on securing this debate and on drawing our attention to the role of preventive health schemes in reducing the number of people who live in uncomfortable and unhealthy surroundings. I also take this opportunity to welcome the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) to the Dispatch Box in his new role. I hope that he continues to revel in the glory of opposition for a long time. He may think that he is starting with a clean sheet, but the Conservative party has form on these matters as long as all of our arms put together, as we shall continue to point out. However, I would be the first to say that not all that form was completely bad—we inherited some good practice as well as some things that we wish we had not.

I assure the hon. Member for Isle of Wight that I am working closely with my hon. Friend the Minister for Public Health—although she is not sitting beside me at the moment, the hon. Gentleman can rest assured that there is much co-operation between our Departments on this matter. The hon. Member for North Essex did not seem fully to appreciate that we are trying to switch spending from the symptoms of a problem to its causes—a theme which ran through what I believe has been a worthwhile debate on one of the most important issues that we face.

Being cold at home in winter and unable to do anything about it is clearly a form of social exclusion—it reduces the quality of life for many people, including the most vulnerable. Moreover, it represents a barrier to progress towards achieving our Kyoto environmental targets, which form a background to the whole debate; those targets will force a change in the way in which we live and behave, and will be the focus of much Government policy. How can we expect the conservation message to be successful when too many families are facing an increased risk of ill health because they cannot keep warm at home, even if they consume fuel at a rate that they cannot afford?

When we came to office, I was deeply concerned about the problems associated with fuel poverty. I quickly set up an interdepartmental group of officials—they come from a surprising number of Departments—to take a hard look at the issues surrounding fuel poverty and to work up imaginative policy options. We are looking from all directions and angles for the best ways forward, which I hope will lead in the medium term to a more coherent and integrated strategy for dealing with the problem. To extend the discussion, I invited interested bodies to enter into a national debate about the best ways in which to overcome the problem of too many cold homes.

The inability of households to enjoy adequate heating without spending disproportionate amounts of their income means that they lack affordable warmth. As hon. Members have pointed out, that means that there is an increased risk of ill health, with all the consequent economic and social costs. Typically, 30,000 more people die in winter in the United Kingdom than would be expected at the average death rate for the year. Several thousand of those deaths are likely to be associated with cold conditions in homes.

The hon. Member for North Essex asked about the statistics. The statistics that countries bandy around are national ones—we have not been able to find any internationally comparable statistics on cold-associated deaths. We can make comparisons only by using the figures that are collected nationally, which may be incompatible. Nevertheless, we must accept that, as a nation, we have an unacceptably high excess winter death rate, if I may use the jargon.

Mr. Simon Hughes: The hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) may not like everything about European organisations, but, as it is difficult to find good comparables, the collection of statistics is exactly the sort of job that we could reasonably devolve to either the Community statistical office, the Council of Europe or one of the other European bodies. Such comparative figures would be useful—the information could enable European Union social policy to be targeted at helping the countries that are at the bottom of the league table.

Angela Eagle: I do not disagree with that. International statistics are always interesting and sometimes—if they are coherent and justifiable—very revealing.

As I was saying, several thousand of the 30,000 deaths are likely to be associated with cold conditions in homes. The excess is highest in the elderly—the main causes are heart attacks, strokes, respiratory illnesses and accidents. There is good evidence that temperature contributes to winter mortality—there are more deaths in colder winters, and in colder spells within winters, and there are known physiological mechanisms by which temperature can affect the major causes of excess deaths. Excess winter mortality may arise partly from acute exposure outdoors, but it is greater in the United Kingdom than in countries that have colder winters but warmer homes. It has decreased as home heating has improved—that is another sign of its causes—and many deaths occur among those people who do not go outdoors, which must also be taken into account.

In a typical winter, 2.5 million households in England occupy homes cold enough to increase the risk of ill health—in very cold weather, that figure rises to 3 million. Below 12 deg C, there is an increased risk of cardiovascular disorders and hypothermia. Up to 15 deg C, there may be a risk to cardiovascular and respiratory health, but a less acute one than at below 12 deg C. Illness and death could be reduced if living room temperatures were at least 16 deg C. Those risks apply to all people, but certain groups—elderly people, infants, and people with long-term illnesses who do not work—are especially vulnerable to cold-related ill health. People in those groups are found in half of all households, and, because they are more likely to be at home all day, their homes can be assumed to require heating for longer periods than those of other households, so their bills start to rise.

[Angela Eagle]

The prime causes of fuel poverty are lack of income and energy efficiency, and the size of the home. In the poorest households, keeping warm in housing of typical size and energy efficiency can easily take more than 20 per cent. of income, and more than 1 million households—about 6 per cent. of all households—spend more than that amount. Many households are neither able nor willing to spend that much, so those homes will be under-heated, and the occupiers cold.

A household may be cold because less is spent on fuel than a satisfactory heating regime in that home would dictate, so actual expenditure on fuel as a proportion of income is not necessarily an indicator of fuel poverty, or its degree. We consider that households in cold homes that need to spend more than 20 per cent. of their income on fuel to achieve satisfactory heating are in severe fuel poverty. Households that need to spend more than 30 per cent. of income may be described as being in extreme fuel poverty. In setting priorities, those households are obviously our prime target group, and there are about 2.5 million of them in England.

Big homes are an important, and largely ignored, factor contributing to the large number of households in fuel poverty. The fuel-poorest people tend to have larger homes on average than those who are not fuel poor. That is of particular concern in local authority housing, where most "under-occupation" involves low-income households, especially lone-pensioner households. As many vulnerable households seem to be concentrated in the least energy-efficient types of houses, allocation policies and housing management could help to tackle fuel poverty, as well as physically improve the stock.

If we are to examine effectively the effects of housing quality on health, we need a reliable yardstick against which to identify housing that presents the worst health risks. Earlier this year we issued a consultation paper on the housing fitness standard. The main proposal is to develop and test a fitness rating approach as a replacement for the current fitness standard. A rating approach would give an overall rating to a dwelling rather than using the current pass-or-fail test. It would encompass the important health risks in the home and distinguish between their varying degrees of severity. It should provide a more effective mechanism for identifying and targeting action on the worst housing, including the worst-insulated and the worst-heated housing. Responses to the consultation paper are still being considered.

People in extreme fuel poverty tend to occupy housing with low energy efficiency. In 1991, the mean energy rating of their homes was 17 points as measured by standard assessment procedure, against a mean rating for all housing of 35 points. Since then, the overall picture has improved a bit. The latest English house condition survey suggests that the mean value has risen by about four points.

Part L of the building regulations dealing with energy conservation matters is currently under review, with the aim of establishing the maximum possible contribution that building regulations can make to carbon dioxide reduction targets while still observing proportionality, allowing flexibility for designers and avoiding unreasonable technical risk or excessive cost. In addition to reviewing measures affecting new construction, we want to see how the existing stock of buildings can be brought more under control. All that will help us to improve the energy efficiency of buildings.

In terms of absolute numbers, half the fuel-poorest are owner-occupiers, but that reflects the fact that most households are in the owner-occupied sector. In percentage terms, the incidence is greater in the rented sectors. Ten per cent. of owner-occupiers, 18 per cent. of social housing tenants and no fewer than 30 per cent. of private rented tenants are in severe or extreme fuel poverty. Hardly any of them actually spend more than 20 per cent. of income on energy to achieve a satisfactory heating regime, so most of them live in cold homes.

There is a clear correlation between severe fuel poverty and household type. Lone pensioners account for 44 per cent. of all households in that category, and for 37 per cent. of the total. Most of the rest are pensioner couples, lone adults and single parents.

Mr. Drew: Surely one of the key issues is education. There has been significant success in using home safety checks to help pensioners to make their homes much safer. A similar co-ordinated approach on energy efficiency could make a useful hit.

Angela Eagle: I welcome my hon. Friend's comments, and those of everyone who has spoken and who has fed ideas to my Department's review. We have clearly identified the problems, and, as I have said, we have begun to deal with some of them. We came to Government determined to do more to tackle poverty—both general poverty and fuel poverty. We have cut VAT on fuel to 5 per cent. That is worth around £18 a year to an average family and impacts most effectively on those in severe or acute fuel poverty. We introduced winter fuel supplements for pensioners for this year and next, and those, too, are worth more to the poorest pensioners.

We have started to deliver on our promise to increase energy efficiency activity and investment. The capital receipts initiative is channelling £750 million more into housing investment, and our welfare-to-work programme is making more activity possible through help with employment and training costs. Very soon, there will be a reduced rate of VAT on energy efficiency grant schemes, which will increase their output by about 10 per cent. As the hon. Member for North Essex said, there is the question of European Union regulations and potential further reductions, and we are bringing that matter to the attention of our EU partners. We hope to make some progress, but I have none to report yet.

I am particularly keen to see how existing programmes might do more to get to the heart of fuel poverty. The main one concerned with improving the insulation of homes is the familiar home energy efficiency scheme, which has already given extra insulation and other measures to 2.5 million homes, giving benefit worth an average £45 a year to each household through a combination of more comfort and reduced energy consumption. The scheme is at present improving the energy rating by about 3.5 standard assessment points on average.

Last year I agreed to the changes announced by the previous Government, because they were almost implemented when we came into office. However, I said that I would review the scheme as soon as possible to see

if it was meeting customers' needs. That review is not complete, but it is becoming clear that we could do more to direct benefit to people in the worst fuel poverty, rather than to those who are simply poor. A large proportion of grants goes to people whose homes are more energy efficient than the average for the housing stock, and many of the recipients are not in any degree of fuel poverty in terms of actual expenditure on heating. The scheme is not successfully reaching private tenures.

The scheme was recently examined by the National Audit Office, whose report was considered by the Public Accounts Committee. As a result, we are committed to making a number of changes to the way in which the scheme is administered. Changes that I expect to emerge from the present review will address those issues. I want to make a good scheme even better, and will look carefully at the present structure of the scheme to see whether there are any barriers to giving real help to the most fuel poor. I want to consider particularly whether we can target grants better, and achieve greater improvements to the insulation standards of the very worst homes.

I have no doubt that my present review will conclude that there are arguments for modifying the home energy efficiency scheme to make it work better.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: Does the hon. Lady hope to be able to lift the gas regulator's block through changes that are due in utility regulation?

Angela Eagle: The hon. Gentleman will know what our Green Paper said about that. We hope to ensure that Ministers will be responsible for that policy. The consultation process is not complete, and it would be wrong for me to make any announcement about what we intend to do. The hon. Gentleman will know that we have a great deal of sympathy for his points.

The task ahead is to integrate present policies and programmes into a strategy for a concerted and coherent assault on the social exclusion that fuel poverty causes. We will consider whether it might be more cost-effective to concentrate more on the quality of housing, and to make houses easier and cheaper to heat, rather than to help people with the cost of fuel. We might in that way be able to take more households out of fuel poverty, thus improving their quality of life while making a real impact on the consumption of energy, which will help us to achieve our challenging Kyoto target, increase people's health and do something about social infrastructure.

A strategy with investment in more energy-efficient housing at its heart would succeed only if it brought the homes of the fuel poorest up to acceptable standards. We would have to bear it in mind that, for some households, energy efficiency is not the major factor causing fuel poverty, and other solutions would still be necessary to help them. However, for people for whom energy efficiency is a solution, we need to consider how much we would have to improve their homes to take them out of fuel poverty.

I agree with much of what was said about linkages to health authorities. My hon. Friend the Minister for Public Health and I are seeking innovative ways to pursue those.

I have launched a national debate on how we might best achieve our aim of getting rid of the evils of fuel poverty. My officials are actively studying how we might produce coherent and integrated strategies that go to the heart of the problem and we are reviewing existing programmes to see if they can be targeted better. We have not been helped by the Conservative party's legacy of years of under-investment, and we intend to address that neglect.

Sports Grounds

12.30 pm

Mr. Ian Pearson (Dudley, South): As we rapidly approach World cup kick-off time, if, by some miracle, football fans could divert their attention from that, they would undoubtedly cheer on the Government in their actions to implement their manifesto pledge to stop the sale of playing fields, which schools and communities need. Where will we find the next Alan Shearer—or, perhaps I should say, the next Duncan Edwards, who started his football career in Dudley schools—if we concrete over all our school playing fields? I am glad that the Government are giving the issue their serious and determined attention.

The Government's actions to date have focused on local authority-owned playing fields. I should like to raise the issue of privately owned sports grounds and highlight a loophole in the law that allows their owners to take them out of public use and use scorched-earth tactics, deliberately allowing the grounds to go to rack and ruin and, in effect, turning them into bomb sites in an attempt to get planning permission.

As I understand it, there is nothing in the town and country planning Acts or other legislation to prevent owners from deliberately and systematically dismantling or demolishing properties used for recreational purposes. There is nothing in the landlord and tenant Acts to prevent owners from refusing to renew a lease to football or other sporting clubs. National planning policy guidance does not help; nor does the local development planning process. The planning system can prevent a change in usage from sport to commercial or housing development, but it cannot prevent owners from stopping all sporting activity on their property.

There is a growing national problem. Privately owned sports grounds are being taken out of recreational use and sold to developers who put the assets into a land bank until they can get planning permission for housing or commercial development. The only game now being played at those grounds is a waiting game as owners wait for the community to get sick to the back teeth of the dereliction that they have created and for the local authority to agree to a planning application, which will allow the owners to make a financial killing.

I shall illustrate that general problem with two specific examples in my constituency. The first is Round Oak stadium. The site was originally owned by the Earl of Dudley, and I understand that he donated it for use by the workers at the local steel mill. It has been used as a sports ground since at least the 1920s by successive generations of steelworkers and their families. The stadium was built up to include a football pitch, a covered stand and terracing, a substantial clubhouse—which was used by organisations such as Age Concern for tea dances and other events—and a bowling green. Cricket, netball and tennis have all been played there. The facilities were there for the local community to use and it was rightly proud of them.

The ground has been paid for many times over with the blood, sweat and tears of the community, particularly the steelworkers, in Brierley Hill, Brockmoor and Pensnett. With the closure of the steelworks in the early 1980s, problems started to arise. British Steel began to look for somebody to take over the running of the sports ground and, in 1986, was in discussions with Dudley metropolitan borough council, which helped to obtain a grant of £35,000 from the Sports Council to fund partly the purchase of the ground. If Dudley council had purchased and taken control of the site, none of the present problems of dereliction would have occurred.

However, a gaping hole appeared in the pitch at Dudley Town football club. Such holes appear with depressing regularity in the black country, where there are many old mine workings. Obviously, Dudley Town football club could not play at the ground and looked around for a home. With the council's assistance, it was agreed that the Sports Council grant would be transferred to the club, and it took ownership of the Round Oak stadium. It was explicitly intended at that time that the football club—a duly constituted members' club—would hold the land in trust, and a restrictive covenant, which formed part the sale agreement, stated that the site should be used only as a community sports ground and social club for the next 80 years. That restrictive covenant is still in force.

Problems have arisen since 1994 when Dudley Town's duly constituted members' club transferred its assets and liabilities to a private limited company owned by two local business men—Philip Edwards and Trevor Lester. The circumstances surrounding the transfer were, to say the least, not entirely satisfactory. At that time, the club had estimated debts of £100,000. Those were more than covered by the asset of the ground, but members felt coerced into agreeing to the transfer of ownership. They were told:

"if this proposal is not accepted the liabilities of the club then fall upon you the members".

That was a deliberate use of scare tactics by the two new owners and it is indicative of some of the tactics that they have employed since then.

The ground was transferred to Philip Edwards and Trevor Lester in May 1994 and it seems that from that point they aimed to market it as a development site. A deal was quickly concluded with a developer to purchase the site for £1.3 million if planning permission was obtained. The original planning application is interesting. Philip Edwards and Trevor Lester tried to get local community support for it by saying that Dudley Town football club was in debt and the only way to ensure its survival was to sell the ground. The fact that the club is still playing proves that that was not true.

The business men tried to persuade local residents that if the plan did not go ahead, they would have to turn the clubhouse into a night club, or the whole property would be sold, and 20 or 24 floodlit five-a-side soccer pitches would be created on the site. That threat was also a deliberate use of scare tactics, and shows that the owners have no regard for the local community.

Dudley council, to give it credit, stuck to its guns and said that the land had value as a community resource and refused to give planning permission to the owners. Since then, it has taken the case to appeal and the planning inspector has, rightly, also said that the land should remain a sports ground.

I understand that the latest reports are that the debts of Dudley Town Football Club Ltd. stand at £600,000. I fail to see how they could so quickly have escalated to that level. It seems abundantly clear to me that Philip Edwards and Trevor Lester have not invested any money in the club for a considerable time. I seriously question whether

they have the club's interests at heart. It is said that the limited company is constituted so that the two men cannot benefit financially from it. What is obvious to me, however, is that it would require only a clever accountant to convert the sponsorship money that they have put into the club into directors' loans. They would get out of it all the money that they have put into the club, and would probably make more money in the process. They should not be allowed to get away with it, and I do not believe that they have the right to sell the ground, which should be held in trust for the local community.

It is clear that the owners have no interest in maintaining the ground as a sports ground, so I challenge them: sell it to someone who will. I repeat my offer to get the money together so that the ground can be placed in trust and used for the benefit of the local community. I say directly to Philip Edwards and Trevor Lester, "If you love football, and if you have any commitment to the local community, sell the ground at a fair market value as a sports ground, not at some inflated price based on the assumption that planning permission will eventually be given if you turn it into a sufficiently disgusting eyesore that the council and the local community get sick to the back teeth of it."

The second issue is Dudley Wood stadium, which is another difficult case. Nothing has happened to it since November 1995, when the owner terminated the lease of Cradley Heath speedway club, which is an internationally renowned team. It was one of the leading clubs, nationally and internationally, and it operated from Dudley Wood stadium from 1947 until 1995. The team managed to ride the 1996 season at Stoke-on-Trent, but, since then, riders have had to be contracted out or loaned to other clubs. In effect, Cradley Heath is not in existence.

That is a terrible shame. Cradley Heath is the only world-class sporting team in Dudley borough. It won two league championships; eight knock-out cups, which is a record; six premierships, which is also a record; two four-team knock-out trophies; one inter-league knock-out cup; and one British trophy. It has produced three riders who have won the world championship—Bruce Penhall, who won it twice; Eric Gundersen, who won it three times; and Jan Pederson—and I have watched them all. In the year that Cradley Heath was kicked out of the ground, it finished third in the premier league, won the four-team knock-out final and reached the semi-final of the knock-out cup.

The current owner has terminated the lease and concluded an agreement with a developer, subject to planning permission, to build houses on the site. The planning application was turned down by Dudley council and was also lost on appeal. The council has tried every way that it can to bring Cradley Heath speedway club back into existence. The owners turned the council down flat, rejecting a land-swap deal which I discussed with Ministers in the previous Administration.

The stadium has not been used for three years, and it is as if a sign has been put up saying, "Open for vandalism". Little has been done to protect the property, and there have been numerous arson attacks. There is little usable structure left, with the result that most of the ground is obsolete. Nothing is happening to the stadium, and the owners are again talking to developers, even though the appeal went against them.

Hon. Members should consider those two cases. Round Oak stadium has been completely demolished and destroyed. The clubhouse was sold off—piece by piece and, eventually, brick by brick—after the planning appeal inspector ruled that the site could not be used for residential development. There is nothing there, and it looks like a bomb site.

Both cases are mirrored up and down the country, and the practice of deliberate dilapidation, dereliction and devastation is a growing problem. If we are to protect our sports grounds, we must take action. I have several suggestions that the Minister might consider. First, the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 gives local authorities the power to intervene where houses are to be demolished, but not to protect recreational facilities. The Government should consider such controls, to give local authorities the power to intervene where sports grounds are to be demolished.

Secondly, it is at least worth considering whether the Government should require owners of sports grounds to keep them fit for the purpose for which they were intended. There could be problems with that, but the Government might consider a duty of care.

Thirdly, we should consider giving leaseholders or, failing that, another bona fide sporting organisation, rights to continued use or the right to buy out a lease if the landlord wants to use the property for purposes other than the sporting purposes for which it was intended.

Fourthly, we should consider legislation on compulsory purchase powers and allowing not only local authorities, but public bodies or trusts, to buy sports grounds at an open-market valuation if the owner fails to keep it fit for public use.

The use by owners and developers of scorched-earth tactics—the deliberate and systematic vandalising of their own properties—is an abuse of the planning system. It should not be tolerated. I hope that the Minister will assure us of the Government's determination to stamp that practice out and their total commitment to protecting sports grounds for community use.

12.46 pm

Mr. Ivor Caplin (Hove): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley, South (Mr. Pearson) for allowing me to make a brief contribution.

My hon. Friends will be aware of my concern over some time about this issue, especially in respect of the home of my football club, Brighton and Hove Albion. I do not want to go over the ground that I discussed in the House last Friday, but I should mention one issue to the Minister: the possibility of the Government's developing and supporting planning policies that allow sports grounds to be developed for local communities.

Far too often, sports clubs involved in football, cricket, speedway and rugby union that are trying to gain planning consent are held up by local planning committees or by Departments. The Government should tackle the issue in a way that would make it easier for sports clubs to develop in their communities. That would avoid some of the problems mentioned by my hon. Friend. I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to raise that issue.

12.47 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. Nick Raynsford): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley, South (Mr. Pearson) on initiating the debate. I fully understand why he has raised the important issue of the threat to urban sports and recreation grounds.

My hon. Friend will appreciate that the disposal of private land is, in the first instance, a commercial matter. The Government have no powers to influence such disposals directly, but they are subject, where appropriate, to planning controls. Any application for the development of land is subject to the normal planning procedures. In respect of playing fields and sports grounds, the relevant guidance to which local authorities must have regard is in planning policy guidance note 17.

My hon. Friend will be aware that the planning applications in respect of Round Oak sports ground and Dudley Wood stadium, the home of the former Cradley Heath speedway team, were both considered by the local planning authority. Planning permission was refused, largely because they would be contrary to the guidance in PPG 17. As he said, both applications were subject to appeal, and public inquiries were held. In both cases, the inspectors upheld the decision of the local authority and refused the appeals. I understand that new applications are likely to be submitted, so my hon. Friend will appreciate that it would not be proper for me to comment further on the merits of those individual cases; to do so might fetter the impartiality of the Secretary of State, should the case be referred to him later.

Although I cannot say more on the individual cases—despite the powerful case that my hon. Friend has made in respect of both sites—I am pleased to be able to use the debate to explain our planning guidance for the use of sports and recreation grounds. I hope that I will be able to reassure him that we are dealing with the issue with the seriousness that it deserves.

Under the previous Government, local authorities were placed under severe pressure to find alternative resources to support their normal functions. That led many local authorities to sell sports grounds, playing fields and open spaces. Many private owners and operators of sports and recreation grounds also faced pressures—mainly commercial—to sell their grounds in favour of more profitable uses.

This Government believe that it is wrong to sell and to develop sports and recreation grounds that communities need, and we propose that the practice should be subject to greater scrutiny. We acknowledge that there are growing pressures with regard to the potential use of sports and recreation grounds. Those pressures could increase, for example, in the light of our need to accommodate a growing number of households.

On 23 February, the Government issued their policy in "Planning for the Communities of the Future", which shows how authorities should manage planning for household growth. The policy aims to ensure that, as far as possible, new housing development is located within existing urban areas. That will help to promote more sustainable patterns of development and to reduce the pressure for development in the countryside.

However—this is important—we also want to ensure the availability of good-quality playing fields and open spaces, so that urban areas are attractive places in which people want to live. Urban quality should not be sacrificed; indeed, in many places, we must enhance it. That means that sports and recreation grounds, including playing fields and open spaces, need greater protection.

We believe that sports and recreation grounds are important components of civilised life and are vital for maintaining the quality of communities. It is important that such facilities are close to where people live, so that they can participate in sports or spectate; my hon. Friend drew attention to the role of the two sites as a location for people both to play and to watch football and speedway. We attach high importance to retaining sports and recreation grounds in urban areas. In the past 20 years, too many of our sporting facilities, in particular playing fields, have been lost and grass-roots sports have suffered as a result.

It is part of the function of the planning system to ensure that adequate land is allocated both for organised sport and for informal recreation. As I have said, the policies are set out in PPG17 on sport and recreation. That emphasises the special significance of all sports and recreation grounds, including those that are privately owned, and the fact that they should normally be protected. It advises local planning authorities to distinguish in their development plans between sports and recreation grounds—including playing fields, parks and other open spaces—that need protection from development, and sites that are temporarily in recreation use, and unused open land, that may be suitable for development.

Local planning authorities should prepare development plan policies and proposals that cover specific needs for both mainstream and specialist sports grounds, including local motor or air sports, and football stadiums. Sports and recreation grounds should not be developed for other uses unless it has been established that the sites will not be required in the longer term for community use, or unless alternative replacement provision is to be provided as part of the proposed development.

The emphasis is on identifying whether there are local deficiencies in provision and, where there are deficiencies, protecting such grounds by local planning authorities adopting clear strategies for sports and recreation. Local planning authorities should have clear plan policies that show the sites that will be protected. That is the most effective way to ensure their survival.

On 16 January, the Government announced how we will fulfil our manifesto pledge to stop the sale and development of playing fields that schools and communities need. The Deputy Prime Minister announced that the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions would tighten planning controls in respect of development of all local authority-owned playing fields, which include sports grounds, where the English Sports Council advises against proposed developments. We will require a local planning authority to notify the Secretary of State of any proposal for development of a local authority-owned playing field, where the English Sports Council has objected because it considers that it would have a detrimental effect on the provision of playing fields.

We consulted all local planning authorities about the proposed arrangement and there was overwhelming support for the proposal. We will shortly issue a direction under the General Permitted Development Procedure Order to bring the arrangements into operation.

In 1996, my Department commissioned research into the effectiveness of PPG17 in protecting and promoting sporting interests. That research confirms the growing concerns about the redevelopment of sports grounds and suggests revising the guidance. We will shortly publish the report on the research, and we will announce how we propose to respond to its recommendations. Clearly, we wish to ensure that planning guidance is up to date and relevant.

Local planning authorities are required to determine planning applications in accordance with their development plans. For planning applications involving the development of sports and recreation grounds, local authorities should take into account the longer-term needs of the wider community and consider whether there is, or is likely to be, a deficiency.

If the application is likely to result in a local deficiency in the supply of sports and recreation grounds, there should be a presumption in favour of rejecting it. If there is doubt about whether there is a deficiency or whether the application is likely to result in a deficiency—in other words, where a local planning authority and the English Sport Council disagree—the application should be referred to the Secretary of State, who will decide whether to leave the application for the local authority to determine, or determine it himself.

Once developed, sports and recreation grounds are gone for ever. Therefore, stringent scrutiny of proposals to build on them is vital. That is what we are providing and, in so doing, we are delivering our manifesto pledge.

My hon. Friend raised four specific questions. The first was control of demolition, on which there has been an interesting case in recent months involving the Thames Ditton lawn tennis club, where similar issues to those that my hon. Friend has highlighted were raised. We have been considering carefully the implications of the judgment in that case and whether further action is required by the Government.

My hon. Friend's second point was about the maintenance of properties. It is essentially for the owners to ensure that properties are maintained, but, where there is a serious threat to public health as a result of deterioration, local authority environmental health departments do have powers to take action.

On the third point that my hon. Friend raised, leaseholders' rights are an issue with which I am familiar, having already dealt with a debate on the subject this morning. Different rules apply in respect of residential, as against commercial, leaseholds. The Government's commitments to leasehold reform are explicitly in respect of residential leases. My hon. Friend has, however, raised the precarious position of sporting clubs with a leasehold interest and highlighted their vulnerability. That certainly deserves further consideration.

Finally, on my hon. Friend's concern about compulsory purchase powers, he will be aware that the Government have been considering both the current working of compulsory purchase procedures and the blight on properties that may arise from the use of such powers or from other factors. I cannot give him any commitments this morning, but I assure him that the whole issue of the use of compulsory purchase powers is under careful consideration by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Regions, Regeneration and Planning.

Mr. Pearson: Will my hon. Friend specifically say something about what I call scorched-earth tactics—a deliberate tactic by owners and developers systematically to dilapidate their properties in the hope and expectation that, eventually, they will get planning permission?

Mr. Raynsford: My hon. Friend raised that matter in his speech, and I hoped that I had conveyed the fact that the existing planning powers available to local authorities, if properly applied, provide a safeguard, in that there should be no presumption by a developer that he or she will secure planning consent simply by allowing a site to fall into disrepair.

If a site is necessary for the provision of local recreation space and open space for the community, that is a legitimate community need which the local authority can and should properly take into account in considering any application submitted by a developer for a change of use.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hove (Mr. Caplin) asked about the interests of sports clubs. Of course, he will understand that the Government have to give equal treatment to all applicants for development, whether they be sports clubs or not, but I assure him that the Government are very conscious of the needs of sports clubs and the need for sports provision, and we are keen to ensure that we develop the appropriate facilities.

Magistrates Courts (Suffolk)

1 pm

Mr. Richard Spring (West Suffolk): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to introduce the debate. I also thank the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, for being here, and for his considerable courtesy in receiving my hon. Friends and myself on more than one occasion to discuss this important issue in the life of Suffolk.

Five of the 10 existing courthouses in Suffolk are under threat. Two are in my constituency, and the others are in the constituencies of my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) and my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Ruffley), both of whom, I am sure, will seek to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am most grateful for the support of the hon. Member for Ipswich (Mr. Cann), and I have here messages of support from my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) and the hon. Member for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard).

Throughout Suffolk there is a universal view that closure would mean a terrible breakdown of the criminal justice system locally, and would have a detrimental effect on local communities. There is a simple principle at stake here—that local justice should, if at all possible, be done locally, in local magistrates courts, by local magistrates.

The question at the heart of the issue is: is the proposal to close the five courts justified? I have to tell the House that I do not believe that there is any justification whatever. Suffolk is a rural county and settlements are geographically spread out. The public transport infrastructure is poor, and to the extent that it exists at all in many areas, it hardly works. It would certainly not be convenient for those seeking to use the courts. The small towns and rural communities of Suffolk are often self-contained, and very different one from another.

The working party report of the magistrates courts committee in Suffolk sought to justify the proposals. Under the heading, "The National Background", it says:

"In Suffolk we are fortunate that the County Council, the Police, the Prosecution Service and the MCC share the same boundaries. Nevertheless, we cannot be complacent and if we are to remain as an independent unit as one of the smaller MCCs we will have to be financially viable. We consider that a serious attempt by the MCC to prepare itself for the 21st century is essential."

I do not believe, and I am sure that the Minister does not believe, that there is any fundamental reason based on national criteria for the MCC to take that view, because it is not confirmed by reality.

The report highlights economies of scale, as follows:

"It cannot be considered either effective or efficient use of resources to have court staff travelling around the County when we already have a problem with the number of court clerks actually sitting in courts."

That reminds me of the story in which, at the turn of the century, someone was shown all the great yachts belonging to Wall street bankers—"This is Mr. J. P. Morgan's yacht, this is Mr. Rockefeller's and that is Mr. Vanderbilt's." That individual turned round and asked, "Where are the customers' yachts?"

The courthouse system of local magistracy exists not for the convenience of court clerks but for the carrying out of the criminal justice system in local communities, and for defendants, witnesses, magistrates and solicitors. Those are the people primarily concerned with making the system work well. Local magistrates know their communities and areas well, and the difficulties of recruiting magistrates are already well known. Everything would be put at risk.

Magistrates, the police, defendants, witnesses and solicitors would all incur substantial additional costs if the courthouses were closed. Here, I am delighted to have the support of the commander of the western area of the Suffolk constabulary, who entirely shares my view about additional policing time and costs.

The public purse would lose far more money through the closure of the courts than would be gained by any possible savings highlighted by the magistrates courts committee. Indeed, the North Essex and Suffolk Law Society says that additional costs for solicitors alone, primarily because of legal aid costs, would outweigh any possible savings, without even considering all the other cost pressures on the public purse.

In a letter to me dated 24 March, the justices' chief executive wrote:

"The Courts Committee has had regard to the poor facilities at those courthouses".

The Minister's predecessor as Parliamentary Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Devon (Mr. Streeter), visited the courthouses in my constituency in January last year, and saw for himself what the facilities were like. There was no question of criticism of their fabric. Furthermore, I have never heard any criticism from magistrates, members of the public or anyone else in the local communities about the facilities.

The working party report says:

"Many rural courts are cramped and not conducive to the dignified delivery of justice."

That is a matter for magistrates and those involved in the local criminal justice system to decide, and those people are entirely happy with the fabric of the courthouses. That argument, like all the other arguments advanced by the MCC, does not wash.

Another argument that the MCC has hinted at is access for the disabled. I have yet to have a complaint from any disabled person about access to the courts, where arrangements are made should the necessity ever arise in the first place. No local magistrate believes in the closure of the courthouses—that is an essential element in the situation.

One of the two courthouses in my constituency is in Haverhill, a town with a population of more than 20,000 and growing rapidly. Surrounding villages bring in another 8,000 people, and recruitment of magistrates has been especially difficult. Such is the real concern in that community about the potential closure of the courthouse, that I have had sackloads of letters from people there on the subject. The town council is prepared to spend £9,000 of its minuscule budget to help to keep the courthouse open.

The reason for that support from the local community lies in the campaigns, to which I pay tribute, by the *Haverhill Echo* and the *Haverhill Weekly News*, which have been most supportive. Both papers point out that it would be impossible for them to send a reporter long distances—to Bury St. Edmunds, say—to report what happens in the magistrates court, which is an important part of the local criminal justice system.

Newmarket, the world headquarters of racing, has a population of 20,000, soon to be increased by 5,000 in the nearby village of Red Lodge. Already, one prominent local magistrate has resigned because there is no adequate public transport between Newmarket and Mildenhall. There is a huge wave of public fury in Newmarket at that, and I salute the *Newmarket Journal*, the local newspaper, which has been running a coupon campaign. The fabric of the building concerned contains cells; it is adjacent to the police station; it is complete; and it works extremely well.

The Parliamentary Secretary has seen the correspondence, and he will know that the magistrates courts committee has a budgetary surplus this year and next year. All of the salient points that I have sought to raise in correspondence with the chairman of the MCC have been ignored; he has refused to answer those points.

That brings me to my final point, which concerns the consultation process—or rather, the lack of it. Solicitors in the county of Suffolk have been extremely angry at the lack of full consultation with them. We as Members of Parliament sought meetings with the chairman of the magistrates courts committee. We offered to meet him in London; we offered to meet him in Suffolk; we offered to meet him privately; we offered anything for his convenience; but he flatly refused to see us. That reflects an attitude of utter contempt for the democratically elected representatives of the people of Suffolk.

It is a matter of judgment for the magistrates who sit on the magistrates courts committee whether, knowing how the matter has been conducted, they would want the chairman and vice-chairman of the committee to continue in their jobs. If I were a magistrate, knowing how the public in Suffolk have lost confidence in the MCC, I would seriously consider their future.

The Minister will know that the county council has appealed. Every district council in the county shares its view, which is one of opposition. The local daily paper, the *East Anglian Daily Times*, has been magnificently supportive. There is no basis or justification for the closures. Our country, of course, comprises urban and rural areas; people must have no perception of an urban-rural divide. I know that the Minister will agree with that. If magistrates courts are closed in a rural county such as Suffolk, that will be regarded as a body blow to the fabric of our rural communities and our rural county. I therefore beseech the Minister to reject the proposals to close the magistrates courts.

1.12 pm

Mr. Jamie Cann (Ipswich) *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. Does the hon. Member for Ipswich (Mr. Cann) have the permission of the Minister to speak? In an Adjournment debate, the Minister must give his authority for that.

Mr. Cann: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker; I will not speak for long.

I congratulate the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) on initiating this Adjournment debate, and on the work that he has put in on the issue. I am not quite as harsh about the members of the MCC as he has been; they are honest, decent people trying to do the right thing. It is perfectly appropriate for them to review costs and levels of service. My problem with them is that they have produced candle-end savings, at great cost to the service provided to the people of Suffolk.

It may be thought odd that I am speaking in the debate; there is no proposal to remove the magistrates court in my constituency. However, we must recognise that under the proposed reduction in the number of magistrates courts, more and more people will use the court in my constituency. There is a great danger that the process of justice, which in many cases is already too slow, will be further slowed by such closures. It is of interest to everyone in Suffolk if the police budget will be affected in the way that everyone to whom I have spoken tells me that it will. More people being transported greater distances means fewer people on beats; it is as simple as that.

I am therefore against the MCC's proposal, and I am sure that my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary will listen to us.

1.13 pm

Mr. John Gummer (Suffolk, Coastal): I thank the Parliamentary Secretary for allowing me to speak briefly.

There are two magistrates courts in my constituency. One is in Felixstowe, the population of which and neighbouring parts is more than 25,000. The court has a proud record; it is busy, and perfectly adequate for the magistrates who want to sit there. Certainly there is no room for more cases in Ipswich without considerable changes in the Ipswich courts. I have occasionally argued with the hon. Member for Ipswich (Mr. Cann), but we are united on this matter. It is not sensible for either Ipswich or Felixstowe. It is important that there should be a magistrates court, which is of the town in Felixstowe and to which people can relate. That is what local justice is about.

At the other end of my constituency, in Saxmundham, there is a rural court, providing a crucial part of the service. We are talking about a rural area, so people are supposed to go to Lowestoft. But very few people use Lowestoft. Excellent though the town is, it is not part of people's normal run. It is hard, if not impossible, to get to Lowestoft by public transport from any of the villages. To go from Aldeburgh or Leiston to Lowestoft is a day's journey. It is far too complicated for most witnesses to want to bother. I am worried about having a justice system with witnesses being unavailable. They will not attend because it is all too much trouble. I am also worried that justice will be seen as something for the towns but not for the countryside.

The court at Saxmundham is excellent. It has all the facilities, and good access for disabled people. It is part of the town's fabric, and means that there are branch offices of solicitors in Saxmundham. All of us who defend rural areas know that, when such institutions, especially courts, are removed, all sorts of infrastructure is removed as well.

I am deeply opposed to the change, and want to add my considerable embarrassment that we have had to have this debate. The Minister has been extremely kind in using his time. But why, when the Minister has been prepared to see us twice and to allow this debate, will the magistrates courts committee not meet us at all? So rude was that committee that, when I offered to have a private meeting in my own home, the invited individual did not

[Mr. John Gummer]

even bother to say whether or not he was coming. That is the local situation, and we have been unable to solve the problem.

The money involved is not much, but it is far outweighed by costs for the time of the police, solicitors and witnesses. The costs to the public purse will be considerably greater. When one part of the public system feels that it can save money by making another service in the public system more expensive, the only person to whom to turn is the Minister. It is his job to say that it is not sensible to save £70,000 on one part of the public system, given that twice as much will be spent elsewhere.

Will the Minister do what he can to ensure that the magistrates courts committee's proposals, which are opposed by all three political parties in Suffolk, the district councils and the county council, are overturned, and that we can continue to have the excellent court service that we now have?

1.17 pm

Mr. David Ruffley (Bury St. Edmunds): May I place on record my appreciation of the courtesy, the time and trouble that the Minister has taken in addressing the concerns set out by my right hon. and hon. Friends? It is more courtesy than has been extended by the Suffolk magistrates courts committee.

I shall be brief, because the Minister will need time to respond. I am concerned about the future of Stowmarket courthouse. Stowmarket is a small market town in my constituency. In the past few months, there has been a movement of rural people who feel, with some justification, that rural values and interests are under threat. They see that in the health settlements that have been doled out, and they are unhappy about education funding. The issue of local justice is on all fours with their concerns about schools and hospitals. In Stowmarket, there is no local support whatsoever for the closure. The Stowmarket citizens advice bureau does not want it. Stowmarket and Needham Market town councils do not want it; nor does the local inspector, Inspector Davies. The reason why they are so opposed to the proposed closure is that it will undermine local justice.

We are in a new age of politics, when community is becoming increasingly important—no more so than in the case of Stowmarket. The magistrates in Stowmarket say passionately that only they are the best magistrates to dispense local justice. In a small town such as Stowmarket, they know many of the individuals, witnesses and local policemen. It is no use asking them to travel to Bury St. Edmunds or Ipswich to sit on cases of which they have not much knowledge. My constituents, whether witnesses or defendants, might have to travel long distances to go before people who simply do not understand them, the area or the local concerns. It is that fundamental undermining of localism that is the most offensive aspect of the closure about which we are protesting.

As my right hon. and hon. Friends have said, the magistrates courts committee has argued that it is seeking to introduce so-called economies. That argument is entirely bogus. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) has eloquently said, the cost to the public purse will far outweigh any minor savings resulting from the closure of Stowmarket magistrates court.

The closure will result in higher demands on the legal aid fund and on police time, as the local police force in Stowmarket has said. For those reasons, and for the reasons adduced by my right hon. and hon. Friends, I urge the Minister, if this case comes before him on appeal, to weigh those arguments very carefully, not least because rural areas will be hugely appreciative if he finds in their favour.

1.21 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): I grateful to the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) for the opportunity to deal with this matter once again. I met him, the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) and the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Ruffley) two days ago. I note the observations made by my hon. Friend the Member for Ipswich (Mr. Cann).

The provision of magistrates courts in Suffolk, in common with the rest of England and Wales, is the responsibility of a locally managed service. Each area is administered by a locally based magistrates courts committee, which is made up of local magistrates. Under legislation enacted in 1994 by the previous Government, those committees have a statutory responsibility to provide for the effective and efficient administration of the magistrates courts in their areas. Those responsibilities are now set out in the Justices of the Peace Act 1997.

It is for the individual magistrates courts committee, in consultation with its paying authority—in this case, Suffolk county council—to determine both the number of courthouses it needs and where they should be sited. If an MCC decides to close a courthouse, the paying authority has the right of appeal to the Lord Chancellor under section 56 of that Act. In determining its needs, both now and for the future, an MCC might consider it prudent to close one or more old, ill-equipped or otherwise unsuitable courthouses. Of course, that might be part of a continuing programme, which includes plans for new courthouses with improved facilities.

I emphasise that whether a court should close is, in the first instance, entirely a matter for the local MCC, which takes the decision in the light of local needs. The Lord Chancellor has only a limited role in the provision of magistrates courthouses. First, he may determine any appeal that a paying authority makes to him. That is the limit of the Lord Chancellor's jurisdiction on closures. Secondly, he may approve any bid for inclusion in the Lord Chancellor's Department's private finance initiative programme for new courts. Again, that must be supported by the local paying authority.

The Government are committed to the better distribution and use of the public resources that are allocated to MCCs as an integral part of the process for delivering justice. We want to provide a modern system of justice, with well-equipped and secure court rooms, and to reduce the time taken for cases to proceed through the courts, so honouring our manifesto commitment. We are committed equally to remaining within the spending limits that we have inherited. I cannot say, therefore, that more money will be available in future for a particular magistrates courts committee. It is the responsibility of the local magistrates court committee to manage within its existing resources.

The magistrates serving on the courts committees and those who sit in courthouses regularly are local people. Therefore, they are best placed to decide whether a

particular court is helping to provide an efficient and effective system to all court users. Over the past few years, Suffolk magistrates court committee has made savings of some £287,000 by streamlining administrative processes. The MCC felt it appropriate, therefore, to begin examining other areas of its expenditure.

I remind hon. Members that, before decisions were made locally, a formal consultation process was carried out by the Suffolk magistrates court committee. It consulted on two occasions, and did so much more widely than the law requires. It invited comments on its proposals from 705 individuals and organisations, seven local MPs, eight criminal justice agencies and other court users, seven district councils, 70 local solicitors, 230 parish councils and 364 magistrates, as well as carrying out the formal statutory consultation with Suffolk county council.

I understand that hon. Members who represent Suffolk were, during the second round, given six weeks in which to comment on the MCC's current proposals.

Mr. Gummer: I am sure that the Parliamentary Secretary is right to say that the letters were written and replies were sent, but, as he will know as a Minister, the only way in which to discover why people have done things is to ask direct questions. The MCC refused on all occasions to answer any such questions. It insisted that they were written questions, and, when they were written, the MCC did not give any answers. It was a consultation process without any consulting; it was a one-sided consultation.

Mr. Hoon: I am simply pointing out that the MCC exceeded the requirement to consult that is placed upon it by the legislation. It consulted more widely than required under the law, and, to that extent, it has fulfilled its responsibilities under the statute.

The MCC has produced a document that provides a great deal of information. The working party's report includes a description of the accommodation of the courts in question, together with a comparison of the court where it is proposed that the work is to go, a survey of users at each court, including the percentage of actual appearances from those scheduled, modes of transport, and the times and costs of local buses and trains. The MCC received 187 responses before it reached a decision about the closures.

As a result, Suffolk magistrates court committee made a formal determination to close Felixstowe, Haverhill, Newmarket, Saxmundham and Stowmarket magistrates courts, with effect from 31 December 1998. The work is to be transferred to existing courthouses at Ipswich, Sudbury, Mildenhall, Lowestoft and Bury St. Edmunds.

Hon. Members will also be aware that Suffolk county council has now appealed against all five closures, and those appeals have yet to be determined. It would therefore be inappropriate for me at this stage to comment in detail on the proposed closures of those courts. I can, however, describe the process and the matters that will be taken into account. The issues are presented by each party—in this case, the MCC and the county council—and each may comment on the various points that have been raised. The Lord Chancellor's Department will receive representations from several other interested parties, and I reassure the House that all those representations will be considered in detail when the appeal is decided.

The comments that Opposition Members have made to me during our two meetings, together with their observations in the debate, will be of great assistance in resolving such questions. Each appeal is considered separately and on its merits. It follows that there is no set formula by which the appeals are decided. However, certain considerations are common to every appeal. Account is taken of the accommodation that is offered, not just at the court that is subject to appeal but at the court to which the work will be transferred. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Ipswich will accept that that is taken fully into account.

For example, is the building fit for the purpose? What are the security arrangements in relation to violent offenders or those in custody? What facilities are provided for separate waiting areas for defendants and witnesses, and for access to telephones? What facilities are available for disabled people? What renovations are needed to bring the courthouse in question up to a modern and acceptable standard?

We also know of the distances that people have to travel, the cost of that travel and the time that is taken to complete the return journey. I know that that last element will be of particular concern to those right hon. and hon. Members who represent Suffolk constituencies. I am aware of those anxieties, and I shall certainly ensure that they are taken fully into account.

Local justice is not simply about the local delivery of justice; it is about local management, through the magistrates courts committee. Most important, it is about justice by local people for local people. Magistrates live locally, and they know that their communities are the bedrock of the local justice system. However, we must be open-minded about new ways of organising the business of magistrates courts. Just because things have been done in a particular way for many years does not necessarily mean that they are being done in the best way.

I am aware that difficult choices will continue to confront all the MCCs in England and Wales. I am sure that, in resolving those matters, the Government will derive considerable benefit—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We now come to the next adjournment debate, entitled, "Mr. Ray Herring and the Merseyside Police".

Mr. Raymond Herring

1.30 pm

Mrs. Claire Curtis-Thomas (Crosby): This debate revolves around the requirement to resign that was imposed on a former sergeant of the Merseyside police, his unfair treatment and the bias shown to him by senior personnel and the police service as a whole.

The man in question is Raymond Ravenscroft Herring, a constituent of mine. Mr. Herring is a 41-year-old man, who has served in the Merseyside police force for 20 years. He was qualified to the rank of inspector, and was twice commended for professionalism and dedication to duty. He held the position of custody officer in Liverpool's main prison detention centre, which is probably one of the most stressful and busiest posts outside London.

Mr. Herring's misfortunes started in 1993, when a summer ball was held opposite his home at the Blundellsands tennis club. Mr. Herring had been in dispute with the club for some time over its apparent flouting of the licensing laws, the volume of noise and the coming and going of visitors.

On the eve of 12 September 1993, the Blundellsands tennis club embarked on its summer ball. Mr. Herring rang the police to complain about the noise, but received no immediate response. He then crossed the road from his home to the lawn tennis club to complain about the noise. Mr. Michael Smerdon, a prominent character in the case, met Mr. Herring. Mr. Smerdon's wife was the president of the lawn tennis club, and Mr. Smerdon had the role of overseeing entry into the club and other managerial matters.

Mr. Herring obtained no satisfaction from Mr. Smerdon, which led to a lengthy dispute between the two men and other patrons of the club. As he left the ball, Mr. Herring was still awaiting the arrival of the police. There, Mr. Herring and his wife were outnumbered by people who were, in the main, worse for drink. A scuffle ensued, resulting in Mrs. Herring being pushed to the floor and receiving injuries. Mr. Herring did not respond, however, preferring to wait for the police to arrive to settle matters, which they duly did.

Even though Mr. Herring felt that the group had behaved in a disorderly fashion—in addition to his wife being pushed to the ground, his car had been damaged—he accepted the police decision that the matter should be resolved as a civil dispute, and that no formal action should be taken. Everyone was advised accordingly—and that should have been the end of the matter.

At this point, the following facts should be noted. When Mr. Herring made his complaint against the tennis club, Mr. Smerdon was unaware that Mr. Herring was a policeman. Mr. Smerdon became aware of that only after the incident. During the dispute at the lawn tennis club, Mr. Herring said that he would oppose any future application for an extension to the drinking hours that the lawn tennis club might submit to the local licensing committee.

Mr. Herring believes that those facts could have encouraged Mr. Smerdon to make a formal complaint against him. Mr. Herring believes that Mr. Smerdon wanted to discredit him, thus ensuring that any objection that he might raise with the licensing committee with respect to an extension of drinking hours would be placed to one side. Mr. Smerdon could thus assert that Mr. Herring had been disciplined as a consequence of a complaint against the lawn tennis club, and that any objection that he might raise against an application would therefore be based on malice and should be rejected.

Some weeks after the incident, Mr. Herring was made aware that the members of the lawn tennis club, alleging that he had acted in a discreditable manner, made a formal complaint against him. The investigation by the Merseyside police complaints and discipline department was, to say the least, thorough. Numerous statements were obtained, with far more vigour than a more serious complaint would normally receive. On one occasion, Mr. Herring asked for details of the guests at the club, a fact that the police would have known, to help him in the preparation of his defence. That request was denied.

The disciplinary case against Mr. Herring was held in the early part of 1995. Mr. Herring was unable to attend that hearing because of injury. The case proceeded in his absence; and from one incident, he was found guilty of four charges of discreditable conduct.

On 12 June 1995, the chief constable of Merseyside, Sir James Sharples, ordered Mr. Herring to resign from the force. Mr. Herring was also fined. In effect, merely for making a complaint of disorder, he had lost his job and his livelihood.

Is that a reasonable response to such a complaint? If so, will the Home Secretary explain why Inspector Andrew Lathom, who was convicted of assault, was merely reduced in rank? Why was Constable Robert Dunne allowed to retire on medical grounds, having been accused of indecency, only to repeat the offence in retirement and later be convicted? Why was Constable Neil Thompson, who was suspended from duty for fabricating a statement of arrest, later reinstated as, it was said, it was not in the public interest to prosecute? Why was Constable Michael Meadows, who was arrested for twice crashing his motor car while drunk and leaving the scene, only reprimanded?

All the officers guilty of those misdemeanours served Merseyside police. The examples given are not exhaustive; the details given are a matter of record. Can it be said that Mr. Herring's so-called crime of merely complaining about a noisy party—after 20 years of service—ranks above those?

Mr. Herring was devastated. After 20 years of service, and for such a trivial matter, he was now unemployed, financially unstable and completely isolated. With the help of the Police Federation, Mr. Herring appealed. A distinguished panel, including a retired judge and a chief officer of police, heard his appeal. The findings are a matter of record.

Although it accepted that Mr. Herring might have acted over-zealously in his approach, the panel unanimously found in his favour. The panel criticised Merseyside police for the late serving of discipline notices, and for preferring four charges to one global charge. They also criticised the fact that a staff appraisal had been submitted at the hearing, which flew in the face of all other excellent reports—and was, moreover, prepared by an individual whom Mr. Herring had never met. In all, the tribunal felt that Mr. Herring should never have been dismissed, and that, even if he were guilty as charged, he should receive no more than a reprimand.

Mr. Herring's relief was short-lived. The findings were sent to the then Home Secretary, the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), who chose to overturn them. Mr. Herring's appeal was dismissed. Mr. Herring firmly believed that that decision was the result of a direct intervention by the chief constable to ensure that he never had the chance to return to work, and thus be a potential irritant to the police on Merseyside.

Unfortunately, that was not the end of the matter. In September 1996, the Blundellsands tennis club held yet another summer ball. Once again, Mr. Herring and his neighbours were disturbed by the noise of the ball. Mr. Herring called the police, and the music was turned down for a while. As the music level rose, Mr. Herring rang the police again, and, receiving no response, appealed to Mr. Smerdon, who, it should be remembered, had been a witness in the disciplinary hearing that led to Mr. Herring's dismissal.

Following the advice of officers in the environmental services department—and fortunately for him, as it transpired—Mr. Herring took the precaution of carrying with him a small, concealed tape recorder so that there could be no dispute about what took place—the noise levels and so on.

After Mr. Herring appealed to Mr. Smerdon, Mr. Smerdon responded by ridiculing Mr. Herring. He belittled him, and even taunted him about freemasons and about his own acquaintance with senior police officers who were also freemasons. Despite that, Mr. Herring acted in a restrained and dignified way, as he had in September 1993. However, just before the police arrived—the police Mr. Herring had summoned—Mr. Smerdon suddenly accused Mr. Herring of spitting in his face. That was nonsense, and all present knew it, including a bystander who commented to that effect at the time.

When the two police officers arrived, they were apprised of the allegation, and immediately demanded that Mr. Herring go with them to the station. Knowing that he had done no wrong, Mr. Herring naturally agreed. Having been told that he was under arrest to prevent a breach of the peace, Mr. Herring was taken to Crosby police station. He was searched, given his rights and placed in a cell. Two hours later, the arresting officer returned with a statement from Mr. Smerdon alleging that he had been assaulted. Mr. Herring denied the offence, and was released without charge, awaiting the decision of the police and the Crown Prosecution Service.

Papers will show that the police decided to pursue the prosecution after noting that Mr. Herring had raised a complaint against them. On 14 February, the case was heard before South Sefton magistrates court in Bootle. In evidence, Mr. Smerdon, who was still unaware of the existence of the tape recording, confidently described how Mr. Herring had sworn and spat at him. He added that he was not given to aggressive behaviour.

Sergeant Foulkes followed Mr. Smerdon. Sergeant Foulkes described how he went to Mr. Herring and did everything according to procedure: how he had cautioned him outside the house, how he had taken hold of Mr. Herring, and how Mr. Herring had verbally objected. The sergeant, when asked whether he was sure of all the circumstances, was adamant in his response. He was certain that he was telling the absolute truth. He was not mistaken, he could clearly recall the incident, and he was certainly not lying. A second police officer, WPC Martin, who was called to give evidence at a later stage, gave evidence identical in every respect.

At this point, Mr. Herring then introduced to the court his tape recording, which clearly demonstrated that Mr. Smerdon, Sergeant Foulkes and WPC Martin had been lying. Having been told of the tape, Mr. Smerdon was instructed by the court clerk that he was not to inform anyone of its existence. He ignored this instruction and rushed out of the court at the first available opportunity to the lobby outside, saying loudly,

"He's taped the whole bloody incident."

In due course, Mr. Smerdon was brought before the court and fined £100 for contempt of court.

The court transcript records that Mr. Smerdon said that he was "exceptionally calm" and "never swore". The tape revealed that he said:

"Bog off, pratt features, piss off."

The court transcript records that Mr. Smerdon said, "The defendant swore." The tape reveals that the defendant did not swear.

The court transcript records that Mr. Smerdon said:

"Don't you dare push me."

The tape revealed that Mr. Smerdon did not say that. In fact, the defendant said, "Don't touch me." The court transcript records that Mr. Smerdon said that he told Mr. Ward, the commissionaire for the evening, to call the police if the defendant did not leave immediately. The tape reveals that this conversation did not take place. The court transcript records that Mr. Smerdon stated that he was "truthful and honest". That comment is not consistent with the evidence heard on the tape.

The court transcript records that Mr. Smerdon stated that, after the spitting incident, he went directly to make a phone call. The tape shows that Mr. Smerdon remained in discussion and made bird noises and impersonations. The court transcript records that Mr. Ward stated that Mr. Smerdon said:

"Did you see that man spit at me?"

The tape reveals that Mr. Smerdon said:

"Did you see that, Sergeant?"

The court transcript records that Mr. Ward stated:

"I don't recall Smerdon being abusive—didn't hear him swearing."

The tape reveals that Mr. Ward was present when Mr. Smerdon said:

"Piss off, bog off, pratt features",

and when he made bird impressions. The court transcript records that Sergeant Foulkes said:

"Spoke to defendant opposite club—he came up to me when I pulled up."

The tape reveals that WPC Martin stated that they met in the garden. The court transcript records that Sergeant Foulkes stated on arrival, "Defendant quite happy." The tape reveals that this was not the case. The court transcript records that WPC Martin stated that the music level was quiet. The tape reveals that the music was clearly loud.

[Mrs. Claire Curtis-Thomas]

The court transcript records that WPC Martin stated:

"Defendant seemed to be arguing with Smerdon";

and also:

"Smerdon said defendant was glaring and that there was an altercation."

The tape reveals that this was incorrect.

Sergeant Foulkes stated that he had cautioned Mr. Herring and arrested him immediately at the scene—he lied. Both officers said that they had made their detailed pocket notebook entries independently. Clearly, they lied. Both officers said that they had spoken to another witness, Mr. Ward, outside the club premises. Again, they lied.

Following the playing of the tape recording in court, the case collapsed and a new complaint and discipline inquiry began. Mr. Herring, now the complainant, alleged perjury, unlawful arrest and malicious prosecution. Sergeant Foulkes said that his arrest took place outside his home address; he lied on oath, as his arrest took place in the police car. When he asked for an outside force to investigate the complaint to ensure impartiality, his request was denied. Only after 14 months, with the direct intervention of myself and a senior member of the Police Complaints Authority, was the inquiry passed to the Lancashire constabulary. An officer of appropriate rank is still to be appointed to investigate the case.

But what have Merseyside police done to address the grave issues raised in Mr. Herring's complaint? Some 15 months after the collapse of the case, Mr. Herring has heard nothing, and the two police officers are still going about their business. Mr. Herring's life has been devastated by the sequence of events, yet he has nothing to show for what has happened to him, except extreme anxiety and a complete and utter loss of health and peace of mind.

I cannot underestimate the consequences of this matter for Mr. Herring's family: they have been truly catastrophic. Having destroyed his life, Merseyside police are seeking to preclude Mr. Herring from gaining access to his pension. It is accepted that such action may be considered only against persons who have committed a grave and serious crime. Is complaining about a noisy party a grave and serious crime?

I seek justice for Mr. Herring. I want the original complaint against him quashed in the light of the fact that one of the key complainants was a known perjurer. I want to know what action Merseyside police intend to take against the two police officers and Mr. Smerdon, and why they did not act earlier. I want to know why an officer who was found guilty of a minor incivility has been dismissed, while other officers, who have committed more serious offences, are treated more leniently. Is the Home Secretary confident that Merseyside police are capable of executing disciplinary procedures in a fair and equitable manner?

I want to know to what extent freemasonry is a factor in Mr. Herring's downfall. It is rare for a person who plays the masonic card to be found out. In this case, a tape recording exists in which Mr. Smerdon is heard invoking the support of the freemasons movement. Has Mr. Smerdon enjoyed the assistance of Merseyside police in other matters? Are we comfortable that police officers who commit perjury are allowed to work among the public, and may be—and have been—called to give evidence on oath? Is it fair that the Home Secretary should be the final arbiter of police disciplinary and employment matters? Should he have the power to overturn the findings of a tribunal, which is what happened to Mr. Herring?

I note that the Home Secretary has ordered a review of the PCA. I hope that it will consider the issues surrounding the discipline of police officers, the prosecution of police officers who have done wrong, and the role of tribunals and of the Home Secretary. I also hope that an open and fair system of police discipline will emerge for the benefit of other officers, but I suspect that it will be too late to help Mr. Herring.

1.47 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Alun Michael): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Crosby (Mrs. Curtis–Thomas) on securing the debate, and on her coherent account of a complex matter. It is difficult to provide a response that is both brief and adequate. A short question often deserves a detailed answer. In the little time available to me, I will respond as fully as I can. I will, however, respond in more detail when I write to her. Each question that she asked at the end of her speech could provide a thesis for a chapter of responses.

The issues surrounding police complaints, discipline and corruption are important and complex. The thrust of my hon. Friend's argument is that members of Merseyside police are corrupt and have committed perjury. Those are extremely grave allegations, and, if they can be substantiated, the Government will whole-heartedly support all efforts to bring such people to justice.

My hon. Friend made a general point about the need for a reform of the system. I assure her that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has responded to the House on the report of the Home Affairs Select Committee. Steps are in train to reform and improve the police complaints system and disciplinary procedures.

My hon. Friend specifically mentioned the existence of a tape recording. She underlined the importance of the evidence provided by it. I am informed that, to date, Mr. Herring has not provided that tape to the investigating officer, to the supervising member of the PCA or to an independent professional organisation for analysis. Through my hon. Friend the Member for Crosby, I urge Mr. Herring to enable that tape to be examined. It is crucial for the consideration of the points that have been raised.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: I want to raise one matter about the investigating officer, who has not yet been appointed. When he or she is appointed, the tape can be submitted, but until then it cannot be.

Mr. Michael: It is a question of the pros and cons of the process. As to the appointment of an officer to undertake the work, there were substantial delays in progressing the investigation, which is regrettable. One difficulty is that, on being told that a chief inspector had been appointed as the investigating officer under the supervision of the PCA, Mr. Herring said that his complaint included officers of a higher rank, and a higher-ranking investigating officer had to be appointed.

I believe that that difficulty has been resolved, in that a complaint against a superintendent has been completed and a report has been made to the PCA. No action will be taken on that report until the allegations against other officers have been dealt with. I understand that Mr. Herring accepted that a chief inspector is of a suitable rank for that investigation. However, a further difficulty has arisen, which suggests that it may be necessary to appoint yet another investigating officer. The PCA therefore set in train the necessary action to find an alternative.

If a complainant fails to co-operate with an investigation within a reasonable time, the PCA will agree to undertake a limited investigation without that co-operation. In this case, the PCA was concerned about the nature of Mr. Herring's allegations, and it was well aware of the potential importance to the investigation of the tape that was made of the incident by the complainant himself.

It is for those reasons that the PCA gave Mr. Herring an exceptional length of time to provide the tape. It also took the unusual step of enabling Mr. Herring to co-operate without handing his tape over to the Merseyside police, which would be the normal way forward. Handing over the tape is crucial for the completion of the inquiry. Two alternatives are open.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. If the hon. Lady wants the Minister—or any other hon. Member—to give way, she should stand up and ask him to do so.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: I want to respond to some of the Minister's points. I receive all Mr. Herring's mail, and I am acutely aware of all of the correspondence that he has received and of what it contains. Moreover, because of Mr. Herring's health difficulties, I have undertaken to respond to his mail on his behalf. There have been considerable frustrations about the appointment of an officer of suitable rank, but, as far as I am aware, there are no outstanding matters between Mr. Herring and the PCA.

Mr. Michael: My understanding is that there is one very important piece of outstanding business—the provision of the tape.

Our debate shows that simple questions sometimes need complex answers, and that the Chamber is not always the ideal forum in which to do so. Mr. Herring has two options that will help to progress his complaint. First, if he agrees to meet the new investigating officer and the PCA supervisor to establish the precise complaints that he wishes to be investigated—and if he gives the investigating officer his tape recording of the incident in question—a full investigation will be completed, and the PCA will assess the investigating officer's report to ensure that the work was undertaken thoroughly and impartially. When the PCA is satisfied that that is the case, it will issue an interim statement to that effect.

If there is a possibility of a criminal charge against any officer, the file will be submitted to the Crown Prosecution Service for its consideration and action. If there is no criminal charge, the file will be submitted to the assistant chief constable of Merseyside police, who will prepare his recommendations for any disciplinary action or training for the relevant officers.

These recommendations and the full file will be submitted to the Police Complaints Authority for a final decision on any disciplinary action.

Secondly, if Mr. Herring does not agree both to a statement clearly specifying his complaints, and to handing over his tapes to the investigating officer, the investigating officer will complete a limited investigation on the information available. In that event, the investigating officer would write to Mr. Herring giving a clear deadline by which his co-operation would be required.

I must reinforce the point that, unless the full evidence is in the hands of the Police Complaints Authority to enable the investigating officer to have possession of that evidence and to be able to undertake his inquiries, it is difficult to understand how progress can be made.

That is only one element of the issues raised by my hon. Friend. I have a great deal of sympathy with Mr. Herring's situation. Whatever the rights and wrongs of his claims, the loss of his job, the stress of the court appearance on an assault charge, the separation from and recent untimely death of his wife are traumas from which recovery will inevitably be painful.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: My hon. Friend made a comment that is factually untrue. Mr. Herring was never separated from his wife, although it is true that she suffered an untimely death. That is indicative of the sort of unsubstantiated information that has been passed around about Mr. Herring, and which does nothing to assist his character or reputation.

Mr. Michael: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for correcting that factual information. She raised a debate covering complex and personal issues affecting an individual. She raised that debate in this Chamber, so I must try to respond in this Chamber, but it is not always the best place for proper discussion of complex and personal issues.

It would not be productive in the time available to engage in an argument with my hon. Friend on precisely what happened outside the Blundellsands tennis club on the night of 11 and 12 September 1993. She will appreciate that other points of view exist as to the facts and their interpretation. The Chamber is neither a court of law nor a tribunal, in which different views can be adequately heard and adjudicated upon. That task must be undertaken through the police complaints procedure.

The conclusion of an investigation of the complaint against Mr. Herring led to his being charged with four disciplinary offences. Following the events described, a hearing was arranged for January 1995, when Mr. Herring was represented by counsel, although he himself was unable to attend. There was an adjournment, and in May 1995 the hearing was resumed.

After hearing the evidence, the chief constable found Mr. Herring guilty of all four charges, and there was a further adjournment to allow him to see the most recent appraisal report on him. At the resumed hearing in June 1995, the chief constable, having taken account of the circumstances of the offences, evidence of mitigation and

[Mr. Michael]

Mr. Herring's record of service, required him to resign from the force for two of the offences, and fined him for the other two.

That is when Mr. Herring exercised his right of appeal to the Home Secretary. As is normal in the majority of cases, the appeal was referred to a tribunal to inquire into the case. Appeal tribunals comprise three members. They are chaired by a lawyer, usually a QC, and the other two members are a retired chief constable and a retired member of the Police Federation.

My hon. Friend implied that determination of the disciplinary appeal amounts to ratification of the views and recommendations of the tribunal. I assure her from personal experience that that is not so. The statutory position—it is a responsibility in law—is that the Home Secretary is obliged to make his own decision. I can testify from my experience since the general election that that is what actually happens.

In determining the appeal, the Home Secretary took account of the tribunal's views, as he is required to do. He is also required to consider any matters of concern identified by the tribunal, and I understand that that is what happened. In his view, there was evidence of mistaken information, but, overall and most crucially, he was satisfied that none of the areas of concern identified by the tribunal was such as to have resulted in unfairness to Mr. Herring.

The Home Secretary considered all the material that had been submitted with the appeal, including particulars of the offences, Mr. Herring's record of service and evidence of character, and evidence relating to Mr. Herring's mental state at the time of the incident. Mr. Herring also submitted a letter for consideration in his appeal.

My hon. Friend said that the Home Secretary's decision not to accept the tribunal's recommendation to allow the appeal was suspected to have been the result of direct intervention by the chief constable. I can state categorically—

It being Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Sitting suspended, pursuant to Standing Order No. 10 (Wednesday sittings), till half-past Two o'clock.

Oral Answers to Questions

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

The Chancellor was asked—

Official Duties

1. **Mr. Hilton Dawson** (Lancaster and Wyre): What involvement he has had in his official capacity with the city of Lancaster since May 1997. [43495]

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Dr. David Clark): On 1 September last year, I visited Lancaster castle and magistrates courts and had discussions with the chairmen of the advisory sub-committees in Lancashire, lieutenancy staff and local magistrates. Last month, I was present at the installation of Eric Jones as the new constable of Lancaster castle, which was attended by many local dignitaries from the city of Lancaster and the county of Lancashire, and I was delighted to have the company of the two local Members of Parliament.

Mr. Dawson: I thank my right hon.—my thoroughly honourable—Friend for that answer, for the skill and dedication that he has brought to the public service and for the knowledge and commitment that he has demonstrated in his unique role in relation to the Crown, the state and Lancaster. As someone who knows the city well, he will share my delight that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has explicitly ruled out any change in the title and function of the post of Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

Does my right hon. Friend agree that Lancaster is a beautiful city, abundant in history, a cultural gem, and a superb place to visit and in which to invest and do business? Does he further agree that, when the mayor of Lancaster, the constable of the castle and I plant the red rose of Lancaster—rosa officinalis—in the grounds of Her Majesty's chapel of the Savoy next week, we shall be celebrating not only Lancaster's history but its future as the centre of a vibrant north-west region?

Dr. Clark: My hon. Friend made sure that we are all aware of his pride, which I share, in the city that he represents and in which I worked for a number of years. I was delighted to be at the installation of Eric Jones who, as a soldier, a trade unionist, a city and county councillor, a magistrate and a freeman of the city, was an ideal candidate for the post of constable. I felt that we were giving a little bit of the castle back to the citizens.

Correspondence

2. **Mr. Colin Pickthall** (West Lancashire): If he will undertake studies into the quality and timeliness of replies by civil servants to members of the public. [43496]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service (Mr. Peter Kilfoyle): Departments generally have arrangements in place to monitor the timeliness and quality of replies to correspondence from the public. I intend shortly to place in the Library information on the performance of the main Departments and agencies in handling such correspondence and against the five other service standards for central Government. This will be the first time that such information has been made available. That shows our commitment to open government and to reporting transparently on our performance.

Mr. Pickthall: I welcome my hon. Friend's reply. Is he aware that some responses from civil servants in some Whitehall Departments to members of the public have taken the form of standard letters that are so old as to be irrelevant or are not attached to Government policy? As part of the programme that he outlined, will he encourage monitoring to ensure that replies from civil servants to members of the public are rapid, relevant and at least congruent with Government policy?

Mr. Kilfoyle: As my hon. Friend knows, responsibility lies with the Departments and agencies involved, but if there are such instances—rare, I am sure—and he can give me details, I undertake to ensure that his views are brought before the Ministers responsible for the correspondence concerned.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid–Sussex): After the truly repulsive sycophancy of the question from the hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson), does the Minister agree that it is not civil servants from whom our colleagues have trouble getting replies to letters but Ministers? In his review, which we welcome, will he undertake to draw it to the attention of Ministers and Departments when their standards fall lamentably short of those required by the common decency and courtesy of the House of Commons?

Mr. Kilfoyle: We intend to ensure that Departments that are not meeting their own targets are reminded of them: hence the publication of information about those targets, which is an increasing feature of the openness of this Government. Civil servants, in the main, act according to the directives given them by their political masters. Responsibility falls fairly and squarely on elected politicians to ensure that targets are met and that civil servants are duly motivated.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): My hon. Friend is right in his last remarks. Will he therefore examine carefully the habit, into which some Departments fell under the previous Government, of diverting correspondence to several agencies? That is not a good idea and not to be encouraged. Members of Parliament who write on behalf of their constituents are entitled to ministerial replies.

Mr. Kilfoyle: As my hon. Friend asked, I undertake to bring to the attention of the responsible Ministers issues in which she is not getting the satisfactory form of reply that she has every right to expect.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): I stress to the hon. Gentleman that it is the timeliness and quality of ministerial replies, which are, after all, often drafted by civil servants, that is causing widespread concern throughout the House. Will he undertake to investigate the time scale in every Department? I had a letter from

the Home Office last week in reply to one sent in February. Such delays are unacceptable. Will he make his inquiries as wide-ranging as possible?

Mr. Kilfoyle: We shall continue to monitor and evaluate the performance of Departments. I stress that, as I am sure the hon. Gentleman knows, it is the responsibility of Departments to ensure that the performance targets that they set are met.

Freedom of Information

3. **Maria Eagle** (Liverpool, Garston): What assessment he has made of the likely interaction between the process of discovery of documentation in civil proceedings or in contemplation of proceedings and the citizen's right to freedom of information where a potential party to proceedings is a Government Department or agency. [43497]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service (Mr. Peter Kilfoyle): The process of discovery of documents in civil proceedings will not be affected by our freedom of information proposals. Departments that are parties to civil proceedings will not be unfairly advantaged or disadvantaged by freedom of information.

Maria Eagle: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that interesting reply. Is he aware that, in parts of Whitehall, there is some resistance to freedom of information? In introducing legislation to implement the new right of information for the citizen, will he be careful to ensure that that right is as wide as the White Paper said that it should be and that it will not be restricted by appeals to the law, and to the civil law in particular, about restrictions that currently apply?

Mr. Kilfoyle: As I said in my original answer, it is absolutely our intention to ensure that no one is advantaged or disadvantaged. Of course we intend to publish the freedom of information Bill in draft. There will be an opportunity then for my hon. Friend to make her representations on any technical or drafting points that may or may not need to be improved.

4. **Mr. Barry Jones** (Alyn and Deeside): What provision he has made for future consultation on his proposals for freedom of information legislation. [43498]

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Dr. David Clark): I shall be publishing a draft Bill for public consultation and consideration by the Select Committee on Public Administration. That will continue the effective and successful process of consultation that began last December.

Mr. Jones: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that answer. Is it his certainty that, in the lifetime of this Parliament, we shall see legislation enacted?

Dr. Clark: I thank my hon. Friend for those comments. I believe that open government is good government. As a first step towards that, I have produced a radical and ground-breaking White Paper. In our manifesto, we made it clear that we intended to introduce legislation on freedom of information, to sweep away the secrecy that has hindered good government in this country. I am working with colleagues to ensure that this long-overdue legislation is ready for consideration for inclusion in the Queen's Speech later this year. I emphasise that no one in the House wants to see that implemented more than I do.

Electronic Government

5. **Mr. Neil Gerrard** (Walthamstow): What assessment he has made of the public response to his proposals for electronic government. [43499]

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Dr. David Clark): Information technology is the key to improving services for everyone in our society. I firmly believe that the emphasis must be on ease of access. Great potential exists for the Government to deliver information and services to our citizens at the time and place of their choosing and by the method that is most convenient to them. I am determined to make the best of the technology on offer to make sure that service in the public sector is not second best to service in the private sector.

Mr. Gerrard: If we are to have Government services delivered by electronic means, is it not important that they are easy to use and accessible? Is my right hon. Friend aware that significant numbers of people still cannot afford computers and that elderly people in particular do not feel comfortable using them? What is he doing to ensure that the needs of those people are not forgotten and that services available electronically are accessible to as many people as possible?

Dr. Clark: My hon. Friend makes a valuable point. Technology is not an end in itself; it is there to make people's lives easier. I lay great stress on technology improving access for all. I do not want a society of IT haves and have nots to develop. I am formulating a range of initiatives to ensure that that does not happen. I was delighted that the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport endorsed that approach. I should point out to the House that, in 10 to 15 years, in an age of digital television, people will have access to services from their own front room as a matter of course. I make the commitment from this Dispatch Box that, at no stage, will we phase in technology without making the paper alternative available for those who are more comfortable with it. We are also conscious that there are difficulties for people with certain types of disability, and we are taking those issues on board.

Mr. Tony Baldry (Banbury): Does the Chancellor accept that new technology can obfuscate as much as illuminate? For example, letters can be churned out by computer. The Benefits Agency seems to write to all claimants by computer-processed letters, which often are not clear and do not explain why benefit has not been granted. Will the Chancellor look at that? Often, the most vulnerable people in our society need to have information presented clearly to them and the fact that it is done by new technology does not necessarily make the information any clearer.

Dr. Clark: I would not pretend for a moment that we can conduct Government business without using new

technologies such as computers and processors, but I shall draw to the attention of the Benefits Agency the point that the hon. Gentleman has made. I know that it is a matter of concern to many hon. Members on both sides of the House; our constituents continually remind us of it.

Mr. Dale Campbell-Savours (Workington): Any news on Genesis?

Dr. Clark: In the beginning—but my hon. Friend and I both know what he is really talking about. I guess that he is referring to an innovative IT scheme being launched by the county of Cumbria. My Department is working with the county to try to expand the use of that technology, which will revolutionise access to services in Cumbria. Together with my hon. Friend and our hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew), I was delighted to launch the scheme and to link up two schools which are in the same local authority district, but 100 miles apart. That made me realise the implications of such technology.

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire): The House may recall recently seeing a photograph of the right hon. Gentleman holding a prototype of an electronic red box. How many of his colleagues have placed a firm order for this device and what improvements in public service should we begin to look out for?

Dr. Clark: I welcome the right hon. Gentleman to his new post. I hope that he finds it worth while and enjoyable, and that he will have long tenure in it.

The electronic red box, as the right hon. Gentleman rightly says, is a prototype—

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): Ah!

Dr. Clark: The right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young) recognises that, even if the hon. Gentleman does not. We are now looking at the next prototype, which will be much smaller—the size of a laptop. Within the next few weeks, we hope to be able to share its secrets with the world.

We are now looking at the possibility of biometric recognition—reading a person's iris—to open up the red box. When that is up and running, I believe that it will revolutionise the work of Ministers and ensure that, wherever they are in the world, they will have access to the Government secure intranet.

Internet

6. **Mr. Lawrie Quinn** (Scarborough and Whitby): If he will make a statement about the use of the internet by Government Departments. [43500]

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Dr. David Clark): I was staggered on coming to office to discover that Government Departments could not communicate with each other electronically; nor could they even e-mail each other. One of my key priorities was to put that right. I recently launched the Government secure intranet, which makes it possible for Government Departments to have safe, controlled and high-performance access to the internet. For the first time, Government Departments can communicate electronically with each other and also with citizens and business.

More importantly, the service is being used. At the launch of the GSI, just over 4,000 civil servants had e-mail access—that was just six weeks ago. The number has now risen to more than 12,000, and it will continue to increase. By the end of the year, I hope that every Government Department will be connected.

Mr. Quinn: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer in respect of Westminster and Whitehall. How can people such as those in my constituency who live in more sparsely populated areas expect the technology revolution to help and empower them, so that they, as citizens, can take part in government to the fullest extent?

Dr. Clark: We are keen to use IT for the benefit of our citizens. I happen to believe that those, such as my hon. Friend's constituents, who live in more rural areas, will be among the main beneficiaries. Instead of having to traipse from one Government office to another—that can often mean from one town to another in rural areas—they will find that information technology, one-stop shops and highly motivated staff will allow them access to Government services across Departments, and even possibly across central and local government, at one point of access.

Sir Peter Tapsell (Louth and Horncastle): Would the need for electronic communication be less urgent if more senior Ministers were on speaking terms with each other?

Dr. Clark: Under this Government, Ministers speak to each other both electronically and personally.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): My right hon. Friend mentioned the number of civil servants with an e-mail address rising from 4,000 to 12,000. What provision is being made to archive e-mail communications, which might otherwise disappear into the ether and be lost to history?

Dr. Clark: My hon. Friend makes a reasonable point and the matter is one with which we have had to wrestle as we develop our freedom of information legislation. We have to try to ensure that electronic communications and electronic records are kept for the record and we are making provisions for that to be done.

Property Holdings

7. **Mr. David Heath** (Somerton and Frome): If he plans to require *(a)* Government Departments and *(b)* public bodies to establish, maintain and make available to public inspection computer-held terriers of property holdings. [43501]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service (Mr. Peter Kilfoyle): Individual Departments, agencies and other public bodies are responsible for establishing and maintaining proper records of their property holdings, following central guidance. All such information held by those bodies would come within the scope of the proposed freedom of information Act.

Mr. Heath: Is the hon. Gentleman as surprised as I am at the paucity of information on public bodies' property

holdings? Would not a comprehensive property record held in an appropriate form have the potential to improve efficiency, reduce costs in use, increase occupancy rates and improve services to the public?

Mr. Kilfoyle: The hon. Gentleman may not be aware that there is such as thing as the national assets register, which was published initially on 24 November last year. Details of those assets, including property holdings, are published on the internet and are accessible to the wider public.

Freedom of Information

8. **Mr. Ivor Caplin** (Hove): If he will make a statement on the report of the Select Committee on Public Administration on the Government's proposals for a freedom of information Act (HC 398). [43502]

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Dr. David Clark): I welcome the Committee's report, which sets out a clear general endorsement of our proposals for a freedom of information Act. The report is a key element in the overall consultation process and we are studying all of the Committee's detailed recommendations carefully.

Mr. Caplin: I quote from the PAC report—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"]—which states:

"A Freedom of Information Act is long overdue."

We are allowed to quote.

Madam Speaker: Order. Hon. Members should read the report of the Select Committee on the Modernisation of the House of Commons.

Mr. Caplin: Conservative Members should know better. Is that not symptomatic of 18 years of Tory rule?

Will my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster give an assurance that the report's 40 or so recommendations and conclusions on freedom of information will be given the utmost consideration in the generation of a freedom of information Bill?

Dr. Clark: I am particularly impressed by the Committee's report, because it raises certain important issues that have not been raised before. For example, its pertinent comments on coverage in Scotland following devolution and the interrelationship between freedom of information and data protection have certainly influenced my thinking.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross): Does the Chancellor accept that not only the Committee but most people who are anxious to open up and improve the quality of government welcome his White Paper, back his personal commitment to it and hope to see legislation at the earliest possible date? For the timetable on introducing legislation to slip would be a serious setback to the Government's goal of opening up decision making.

Dr. Clark: The right hon. Gentleman has a long record in this area, so I appreciate his kind comments. I repeat what I said earlier: no one in the House is keener than I am to get the draft Bill on to the statute book. No decision has been taken that will have delayed in any way consideration of that legislation for inclusion in the Queen's Speech later this year.

Elderly People

9. **Mr. Bob Blizzard** (Waveney): What proposals he has to improve the delivery of Government services to the elderly. [43503]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service (Mr. Peter Kilfoyle): Last week, we launched the better government for older people programme, which aims to improve public services for older people by better meeting their needs, listening to their views and encouraging and recognising their contribution.

Mr. Blizzard: I welcome the better government for elderly people project. When the 28 pilot schemes have been evaluated, will the best examples be rolled out nationwide?

Elderly people in my constituency complain from time to time that they have written to Government Departments and not received a reply. I have encouraged them to make their points through me, but I have sometimes had to wait up to three months for a reply, and then not received a reply signed by a Minister. Before I came to the House, the council that I led had to publish each year the percentage of replies that it had made within a certain period. Will my hon. Friend consider introducing league tables for Government Departments, so that they would reply within specified times?

Mr. Kilfoyle: The short answer to my hon. Friend's question about league tables is no, simply because we would not be comparing like with like. Nevertheless, we are publishing the material that has always been published on the efficiency of replies to hon. Members, and we shall shortly publish for the first time the figures for correspondence between the public and Government.

On the first part of my hon. Friend's question, it is true that we shall roll out the lessons to be learned from the 28 pilots. Before then, we are networking those 28 authorities with the other 36 authorities that wanted to be part of such an adventurous pilot scheme, but could not be. As the schemes roll out for the first two years, those authorities will also benefit from the good practice.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): If league tables are good enough for hospitals and schools, why are they not good enough for Government Departments? Following the excellent question from the hon. Member for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard), will the Minister consider publishing the proportion of ministerial letters that hon. Members eventually get that are not signed by the Minister?

Mr. Kilfoyle: I recall crossing swords with the right hon. Gentleman in the past on the subject of league tables. He will recall that the argument always centred on whether they were meaningful comparisons. As I explained to my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard), one cannot compare unlike Departments with each other. The comparisons would not be valid.

Freedom of Information

10. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton** (Macclesfield): When he next intends to visit the Macclesfield constituency to discuss his responsibilities for freedom of information in government. [43504]

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Dr. David Clark): Sadly, I have no plans to visit the fair constituency of Macclesfield but, if I were there, I should take great pleasure in highlighting the Government's proud record on their plans for freedom of information.

Mr. Winterton: I am eternally grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for that courteous response, but if he visited Macclesfield, I am sure that he would not be surprised to learn that my constituents wonder whether his responsibilities extend to other Government Ministers, such as Baroness Symons, who failed to declare that she had been fully briefed by Customs and Excise on the activities of Sandline before she made her statement in the other place.

Dr. Clark: I am certain that the hon. Gentleman is right, and that that is all that people talk about in the constituency of Macclesfield. We already have an independent inquiry into the issue, and we have an effective Select Committee. I am happy and satisfied that those two bodies will get to the truth of the matter.

11. **Mr. Dennis Canavan** (Falkirk, West): When he expects to finalise his proposals relating to freedom of information; and if he will make a statement. [43505]

Dr. David Clark: We are making good progress in turning the policy proposals set out in our radical White Paper on the freedom of information into draft legislation. I greatly welcome the support of the Select Committee on Public Administration in its recent substantial report on our proposals. My colleagues and I are now considering carefully the Committee's detailed recommendations. When we have done so, we shall publish a draft bill, again for consultation with the general public and the Select Committee.

Mr. Canavan: Would not freedom of information be enhanced by ensuring that all Ministers and their permanent under-secretaries told the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth to Parliament and to parliamentary Select Committees without having to be warned that, if they did not, they will be in contempt of Parliament?

Dr. Clark: Yes.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): Do the Chancellor's freedom of information proposals require him to tell the House what witnesses will be called before the Legg inquiry?

Dr. Clark: No, they do not.

12. **Mr. Ben Chapman** (Wirral, South): If he will make a statement on his proposals for freedom of information legislation. [43506]

Dr. David Clark: My proposals for a radical freedom of information Act set out in the White Paper "Your Right to Know" have been widely welcomed both in public consultation and, more recently, in a report by the Select Committee on Public Administration. I am considering those views and will publish a draft Bill as soon as possible to take forward the whole process.

Mr. Chapman: I join the Select Committee in welcoming the proposals for the freedom of information Act. Will my right hon. Friend assure me that the radicalism encompassed therein will be carried through when a Bill is brought forward?

Dr. Clark: The Government have a manifesto commitment to bring forward a freedom of information Act, and we shall do that. The White Paper set out our commitment to the basic tenets contained in that document, which remain the same today as when they were published last December. We are currently engaged in translating them into draft legislation so that the Select Committee may examine the Bill word by word and line by line in the pre-legislative stage. That will ensure that, when we bring forward this very complicated legislation, it will not only serve its purpose but be in line legalistically.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1.[43525] **Mr. Don Touhig** (Islwyn): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 10 June.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall have further such meetings later today. I hope to keep an eye on the Scotland-Brazil game, and I am sure that the whole House joins me in wishing the Scottish and English teams the best of luck in the World cup.

Mr. Touhig: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the statement made by a Conservative that he would be proud to act like a football hooligan in defence of the rights of the hereditary peerage? I am sure that all hon. Members believe that football hooligans are a mindless lot and would want to condemn that statement. Will my right hon. Friend condemn it and, further, assure the House that the Government are determined to end the right of hereditary peers to sit in Parliament?

The Prime Minister: I confirm that. It is not just the injustice of hereditary peers sitting in the other place and making laws; there is an in-built majority of three to one in perpetuity for the Conservative party in the House of Lords, irrespective of who wins the general election. The Salisbury convention exists for that very reason and I hope that the Conservative party will not do anything to break it. I challenge the Opposition to deny that they will. If they do break it, that will be the greatest constitutional outrage of all.

Mr. William Hague (Richmond, Yorks): The Prime Minister has always said that Ministers who knowingly

mislead Parliament must resign. Last month, Baroness Symons said that when she answered questions on 10 March all she knew about an investigation into Sandline was what she had read in a newspaper. We now know from the permanent secretary at the Foreign Office that that was not the case. Has the Prime Minister asked for her resignation?

The Prime Minister: No, I certainly have not. Furthermore, I believe that there is no evidence whatever that Baroness Symons has deliberately misled the House of Lords or anyone else.

Mr. Hague: Does it not concern the Prime Minister that the Foreign Secretary has spoken several times about this affair in the House—the Prime Minister may not be aware of that as he is hardly ever here—yet every answer he has given has implied that no Minister knew about the investigation until mid-April? Is it not absolutely clear from evidence given to the Select Committee yesterday that at least one Minister was informed in early March? Did the Minister fail to tell the Foreign Secretary or did the Foreign Secretary fail to tell the House?

The Prime Minister: No. Neither. First, on the subject of my attendance in the House—I point this out again to the right hon. Gentleman—I have answered more oral questions in my first year of office than did my predecessor in his last year in office. Also, I have made more statements and spent more time answering questions in the House. I say that so that we all get the facts.

As for the Sandline matter, an inquiry is in place. From what I have seen, I repeat that there is no evidence—indeed, there is not a shred of evidence—that any Ministers have deliberately misled anybody, or any evidence in support of the original allegation, which is that they have taken part in a great conspiracy to supply arms in breach of a United Nations arms embargo. There is not a shred of evidence to support that allegation and there never has been. This is simply an example of an Opposition with nothing to say about anything serious.

Mr. Hague: The Prime Minister obviously hopes that he reaches his reshuffle before the truth catches up with his Ministers. Is not the worst thing about this entire affair what it tells us about the condition of the Foreign Office—a Department of state known for its diplomacy and professionalism that has been reduced in one year to a place where telegrams are sent but never arrive, where answers are given but have to be retracted, where papers are submitted but no one ever reads them and where Ministers do not know what is happening in their own offices, let alone overseas? And it is presided over by a Foreign Secretary who boasts that he does not need to finish the paperwork. Can the Prime Minister put his hand on his heart and say that he is proud of his Foreign Office team?

The Prime Minister: Let me say what those questions indicate about the Opposition. We have India and Pakistan and all the problems of nuclear proliferation. We have Kosovo and instability in the Balkans. The middle east peace process is stalled and we have Eritrea and Ethiopia. We have the upcoming European Union summit. Those are the issues that I expect the Foreign Office to concentrate on. If we had a serious Opposition, they would concentrate on those issues.

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland): Is my right hon. Friend aware that last week's increase in interest rates was greeted with dismay in areas such as he and I represent, which depend on exports and manufacturing for their prosperity? Is my right hon. Friend just a little afraid that in our two-speed economy employment growth in the hard-hit regions will always be undermined by monetary policy that is aimed at the overheating regions?

The Prime Minister: Of course I understand the concern at any interest rate rise, but the very worst thing that could happen is that by not taking action to produce monetary stability and financial prudence we would return to the conditions that we had under the Conservative Government, when we had interest rates of 15 per cent. for a year, record repossessions, record borrowing and record bankruptcies. That would be the worst thing of all for British industry. There are difficult decisions, but they are the right decisions and we shall continue to pursue the right policies for the long-term strength of the country.

Q2.[43526] **Mr. Matthew Taylor** (Truro and St. Austell): The Prime Minister is aware that the decision whether to close four hospitals and a maternity unit in Cornwall now rests entirely with the Secretary of State for Health, and has done since February. Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that the delay in taking a decision is severely lowering morale and that some staff are seeking alternative employment, which may effectively close the hospitals simply because there is delay in making a decision?

Can the Prime Minister try to speed up the decision so that the four hospitals and the maternity unit can celebrate the 50th anniversary of the national health service in the knowledge that they have a secure future?

The Prime Minister: I speak from memory, but I seem to recall that the chairman of the health authority has indicated that the health authority's original decision was not taken primarily on cost grounds. However, I have to say to the hon. Gentleman that of course we want to ensure that a decision is taken as quickly as possible. There have been many representations about the matter and we want to ensure that the decision is taken in the right way.

Q3.[43527] **Mr. Bill Michie** (Sheffield, Heeley): When my right hon. Friend talks to his ministerial colleagues on the outcome of the consultation paper on the modernisation of local government, will he reflect on previous Governments' attitude that local government is an expensive luxury rather than an essential part of our democratic system? If the Government want people to vote in local elections and value local government, the House should set an example by giving credit where credit is due and refinancing the services that have been devastated for decades.

The Prime Minister: I am happy to pay tribute to the vast majority of local government and local councillors, who do an excellent job on behalf of their local communities. As we have set out recently, it is obviously

why important that we try to modernise the institutions of local government, but we are well aware that local authorities are essential in delivering the best public services for people, which is one reason why we have put additional money into schools for this financial year and hope to put in additional money in future years. We want to decentralise power to them, but we also want to reform and modernise them so that they provide efficiency and best value.

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): Our first and firm aim, of course, must be for a diplomatic solution in Kosovo, but is not one of the lessons of Bosnia that diplomacy seems to work rather better with President Milosevic if it is backed by a clear and credible threat of compulsion?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I agree with that entirely, and it is precisely why we are trying to arrange the maximum support so that we can take military options should diplomacy fail.

Mr. Ashdown: Then will the Prime Minister confirm that if President Milosevic refuses to respond to calls to silence the heavy weapons that he is using against his own civilian population, the international community might have to do it for him?

The Prime Minister: Certainly that is my view. Obviously, we must build the maximum support in the international community. That is why we are having a series of meetings at the moment, culminating on Friday in a meeting of the G8 Ministers and a meeting of the NATO Defence Ministers. My own view, as I have stated clearly during the last couple of days, is that the only circumstance in which we will ensure that President Milosevic responds to diplomatic pressure is if that is backed up by the credible threat of the use of military force. The sole hurdle that remains in our way at present is obtaining the necessary support for that course of action. We are working as hard as we possibly can. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has been having a host of meetings recently, and he will be having more meetings tomorrow and in the next few days to obtain that necessary diplomatic support. If we can do that, we will be in a position to make that diplomacy work, and if it fails we should be in a position to take the military action that is necessary.

Mr. Roger Casale (Wimbledon): Knowing my right hon. Friend's interest in tennis, I am sure that we shall soon be seeing him in the Labour-held constituency of Wimbledon for the All England Lawn Tennis and Croquet club championships there. While he is there, will he take the time to visit Wimbledon Park first school in my constituency where, thanks to the Government's new deal for schools, all the children are already wired up to computers—*[Laughter.]*—and even helping their local Member of Parliament track down the Wombles on the internet?

The Prime Minister: I had not realised that our school reform programme has gone quite that far. The £1.3 billion school repairs programme is helping us to get the internet and new technology into schools. That is tremendously important because our children need those skills for the future. They were denied them for a long time. The purpose of the programme is to allow schools to carry out the repairs that they need, which is often important if they want to build better classrooms and install new technology. That is precisely what will give our children the best chance of education in the future.

Q4.[43528] **Mr. Richard Spring** (West Suffolk): Quite apart from the fact that waiting lists are rising, is the Prime Minister aware that full ambulance cover was recently withdrawn in the largest town in my constituency, Haverhill? Is he also aware that for the first time in the history of the county of Suffolk school budgets are being cut across the board? Does the Prime Minister understand the growing disillusion about his failed promises on health and education, or does he merely dismiss my constituents' anxieties as "overblown hoo-hah"?

The Prime Minister: No, I do not dismiss them at all. I can tell the hon. Gentleman's constituents that we are putting more money into Suffolk—in hospitals and in schools—than the Government the hon. Gentleman supported planned to put in and, if we take the right decisions on public spending, we shall get more money still over the next few years. We shall meet our pledge on waiting lists and, after 10 years of rising class sizes under a Conservative Government, we shall get class sizes down.

Q5.[43529] **Mr. Lawrie Quinn** (Scarborough and Whitby): Almost one in six of the people who have visited me in my constituency surgeries over the past year have been from the hard-pressed agriculture community. Does the Prime Minister agree, on hearing the remarks of Ben Gill, who is also a North Yorkshire farmer, that today's success in Brussels on the recommendation to lift the ban on British beef is due to the patient diplomacy of my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture—*[Laughter.]* Conservative Members laugh, but the concerns of many of my constituents are founded on the failure of Conservative policies over 18 years. All credit should be given to my right hon. Friend.

The Prime Minister: I pay tribute to the work my hon. Friend has done on behalf of the farming industry. The decision to lift the ban in respect of Northern Ireland was an important first step; the Commission's decision today is a very important further step because it applies to the whole of the UK. However, there is still a long way to go and I counsel caution until we are through all the various stages of the European negotiations. It is right to point out, however, that not only did the previous Government give us the BSE crisis; they ended up causing what has probably been the most diplomatically disastrous episode in the country's history.

Mr. William Hague (Richmond, Yorks): Is the Prime Minister aware that, according to figures from the Library, a typical family is more than £1,000 a year worse off through tax and mortgage increases since the Government came to office? Is he also aware that Treasury Ministers have so far refused to publish official figures on that subject, presumably because they are scared to do so? Will he instruct the Treasury to publish up-to-date figures showing the tax burden on families?

The Prime Minister: As the right hon. Gentleman knows, Treasury Ministers have published the figures.

As a result of the decisions that we have taken, we have managed to get rid of the huge Budget deficit that we inherited from the previous Government. The right hon. Gentleman is right: the interest rate decisions have been difficult for people. The alternative—the policy proposed by his party—was no interest rate rises at all and no action to cut the deficit. Under the policies proposed by his party on the Finance and Social Security Bills, there would have been an extra £6 billion-worth of spending. Those are precisely the policies that would have returned us to Tory boom and bust which, thank goodness, we are escaping.

Mr. Hague: How can the Prime Minister say that Treasury Ministers have published such figures when they have not, and everyone knows that they have not? We have now seen tax increases for pension fund holders, home owners, married couples, businesses, and now even for charity aid workers overseas. That is from a Prime Minister who said at the election that there would be no tax increases at all. Now the Government plan more taxes for people who drive cars, for people who park cars and, incredibly, for people who put out the rubbish. Is it not bad enough that the Prime Minister breaks all his early pledges without taxing people who put them in the bin? If he is to impose all those new taxes, should not he at least publish the figures that show what the tax burden on families will be?

The Prime Minister: The rubbish that has just been recycled comes from the right hon. Gentleman. The measures that we have taken have been absolutely necessary to cut the Budget deficit. The choice is simple: either leave the huge borrowing and national debt that we inherited from the Conservative Government, which would put inflation back in the system and give us cycles of boom and bust again, or take the decisions that we have taken. We have taken the right decisions in the interests of the country. Long-term interest rates are now down to their lowest level since we last won the World cup. Those decisions have been difficult, but they have been absolutely necessary to deal with the economic situation and to ensure that we have the long-term stability that the country needs.

Mr. Hague: Does it not come to something when, at Prime Minister's Question Time, the Prime Minister cannot even answer a straightforward question, such as whether he will publish a set of figures that until last year had been published for the past 17 years? The fact that the Government will not publish the figures shows that they are not straight with people about taxes. His pledges on taxes, which have gone up, are like his pledges on waiting lists, class sizes and inflation, all of which have gone up. Does he not understand that when he made those pledges people expected him to keep them and not to do the opposite?

The Prime Minister: We shall keep each of the pledges that we made. [HON. MEMBERS: "When?"] After years of rising waiting lists and rising class sizes under the Conservatives, we shall get them down. We are taking measures to ensure that we squeeze inflation out of the economy. [HON. MEMBERS: "When?"] Now. We are taking the measures now to tackle the Budget deficit. As for broken promises, we remember the last Conservative Government. We remember the right hon. Gentleman and his colleagues who now occupy the Opposition Front Bench going into an election promising that they would never raise VAT and then raising it straight after the election. We remember them and their 22 tax rises that they promised they would never make. The Labour party made promises on tax, waiting lists and class sizes; when we go into the next election we shall have kept every single one of them.

Angela Smith (Basildon): May I refer the Prime Minister to today's report of the Office for Standards in Education, which shows that under the Tory Government the gap between the best and the poorest schools grew wider? May I also refer him to Essex county council, where the Tories lost a by-election in Basildon last week largely because of their poor record on education? The council has cut £3 million from the education budget and has closed schools in Basildon. The public know that they can trust Labour on education—not the Tories.

The Prime Minister: I am pleased to say that there is strong evidence that standards are getting better, but we are concerned about the widening gap between the best schools and those down at the bottom of the list. It is important to put investment into our schools, which we have done this year and hope to do again in future years, and to combine that with reform to tackle failing schools. We need to reform the structure of the teaching profession to get the best possible people into teaching, to maintain a school repairs programme to give our schools the facilities they need and to replace the nursery voucher system with proper nursery education. We have a programme of investment and reform that I believe over the medium and long term will give this country exactly what it needs: the best skilled and educated work force that we can possibly achieve.

Q6.[43530] **Mr. John Wilkinson** (Ruislip-Northwood): How many jobs does the Prime Minister believe will be lost in this country as a consequence of the withdrawal of the concession on duty-free goods for travellers by air and sea within the European Union, which was somewhat impetuously agreed by the previous Government and quite culpably confirmed by the present Administration, against the wishes of Labour as well as Conservative Members? How can the British people have faith that the UK presidency will protect their interests on this matter, on EU tax on arts sales in this country and on the issue of withholding tax on savings?

The Prime Minister: I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman's purpose was probably more to attack the previous Government's record on Europe than ours.

It is extraordinary of Conservatives to come after us on duty free. In 1991, they agreed to the abolition. That abolition can be overturned only if all the other European Union countries agree to overturn it, and the majority have indicated that there is no prospect of their supporting such a move. It would be dishonest of us to pretend that we can get something changed when, as a result of a measure agreed by the previous Government, which the hon. Gentleman supported—well, more or less—we cannot. That is the truthful position. If the hon. Gentleman wants to make any proper complaint, I am afraid that he will have to direct it at the previous Government.

Q7.[43531] **Mr. Bill Rammell** (Harlow): Last Wednesday, we heard a good deal in the Chamber about

corruption in local government. Will the Prime Minister confirm that this Government will take tough action to stamp out corruption wherever it occurs, and whichever party is in power?

Does the Prime Minister recall the former leader of the Conservative party saying, in May 1995, that the party would condemn proven cases of malpractice and individuals found guilty in courts of law? In spite of that, when, six months ago, Dame Shirley Porter was found to have lied to the High Court and to the district auditor, we heard not a word from the Leader of the Opposition. Is it not about time that the Tories came off the fence, stopped prevaricating and gave us some answers about the scandal in their back yard?

The Prime Minister: We shall be vigilant against corruption, from whatever quarter it comes. I will simply say that, after all the scandals involving Westminster council, we have still heard not one word of condemnation, not one word of apology and not one hint of action from the Conservative party.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): About eight weeks ago, the Secretary of State for Education and Employment told Derbyshire county council that it could have an extra £1 million to spend on reducing class sizes. This week, the Deputy Prime Minister announced that he was capping Derbyshire to the tune of £1 million. It will cost more than £500,000 to re-bill every household in Derbyshire as a result of the Deputy Prime Minister's decision. Can the Prime Minister explain the logic of that?

The Prime Minister: In fact, Derbyshire received £2.9 million more specifically for education, and it is receiving a great deal more than it could possibly have received under the spending plans on which the hon. Gentleman fought the last election. He is the last person who is able to attack the position with any credibility.

Q8.[43532] **Mr. Ben Chapman** (Wirral, South): Is my right hon. Friend aware that in my constituency, as elsewhere, vulnerable witnesses—at least one in 10, according to some estimates—are often subject to harassment and victimisation? Is he aware that that has an adverse effect on the administration of justice? Does he, like me, welcome the publication of a report today and the consultation period that will follow it, while also feeling that what we need is action—and soon?

The Prime Minister: The protection of witnesses is of concern throughout the House. Today, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary published a report containing more than 70 recommendations to improve the way in which vulnerable or intimidated witnesses are treated by the criminal justice system. They include more protection for rape victims, new measures to help child witnesses and greater use of technology such as closed-circuit television to help those who are vulnerable and may be subject to intimidation. I hope that, as a result of the report's recommendations, we shall be able to reduce the intimidation of witnesses. That would play a major part in securing more convictions.

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Beckenham): When does the Prime Minister intend to keep his promise—published in *The Licensee and Morning Advertiser* on 1 May 1997—to conduct a full, comprehensive and independent review of smuggling and illegal cross-border shopping involving tobacco and alcohol?

The Prime Minister: We are carrying out that commitment. Within the European Union, as well as on our own account, we are taking concerted action to try to reduce such activity. We are well aware of the problem, but it can be tackled only if we are prepared to tackle it not just in our own country but across our borders.

Q9.[43533] **Mr. Tony McNulty** (Harrow, East): What would be my right hon. Friend's reaction if a Member on the Government Front Bench advocated the legalisation of crack, heroin or Ecstasy? Is the cause of the war against drugs helped or hindered by the existence of such an advocate on the Opposition Front Bench—in the shadow health team of all areas—or is it time for the Leader of the Opposition to reflect on his lamentable choice of personnel?

The Prime Minister: I am a little in two minds about that since I think it is probably in our interests for the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) to remain on the Opposition Front Bench. It is not the policy of Her Majesty's Government to legalise drugs.

Q10.[43534] **Mrs. Marion Roe** (Broxbourne): Is the Prime Minister aware that serious concerns are being expressed by general practitioners in my constituency and throughout the country about the introduction of primary care groups and the risk to general medical services funds which could devastate the further development of a primary care-led national health service? Will the Prime Minister hold a ballot of GPs on this issue and take lessons from the previous Conservative Government on giving GPs the opportunity to put the best interests of their patients first?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady must forgive me if I am a little hesitant about taking lessons on the NHS from the Conservative Government. There are concerns among GPs, including concerns about their budgets, and they are being discussed actively with them by the Health Minister. In the end, it is important to take decisions about the health service working, of course, in partnership with doctors and nurses and others who work in the national health service. Those decisions should be taken in the interests of the national health service as a whole to ensure that it delivers the best service for people. The purpose of the primary care groups is to ensure that we do not have a two-tier system, as we had under the Government the hon. Lady supported. We are also making the best use of the resources that go into the national health service—which, of course, have been increased under this Government, not cut.

Points of Order

3.31 pm

Mr. Francis Maude (Horsham): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I wish to raise the issue of resources for the office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, especially in relation to the burden that has been placed on it by the Paymaster General's affairs.

You will know, Madam Speaker, that the commissioner has already completed one investigation into the Paymaster General's offshore Orion trust and its dealings in the shares of Coventry City football club. There are two further investigations: one into his undeclared directorship of Swiss EDM Ltd., and one into his apparently undeclared directorships of three companies in the Robert Maxwell empire. To those three investigations has been added today a fourth complaint about two Italian property companies that are owned by the Paymaster General and of which he has been a director. It is clear that that level of activity was not envisaged when Sir Gordon Downey's office was set up. I raise this point of order to ensure that sufficient resources are available to the commissioner to enable him to carry out his investigations thoroughly and with expedition. The investigations that are already under way have so far taken three months—

Madam Speaker: Order. I regret having to interrupt the right hon. Gentleman, but, for a number of days, I have taken points of order that have become speeches, and I am not prepared to listen to long speeches any more. I think that I have the gist of the issue that the right hon. Gentleman raises. The matter is for the Committee on Standards and Privileges. It has always been clear that it is open to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards to seek additional resources when, in his judgment, that is necessary to enable him to carry out his duties. If he needs more resources, all that he has to do is to apply to me, and I shall see that he has the resources to carry out his job correctly.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. Is it not the custom in the House that when individual Members are to be named by others they should be given written notification?

Madam Speaker: The hon. Lady is quite correct. May I inquire whether the right hon. Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude) gave the Minister notice?

Mr. Maude: I did not, Madam Speaker. *[Interruption.]* If I should have done so I apologise.

Madam Speaker: Let me make it quite clear that all Members—Front Benchers, Ministers, whoever they are—must notify an hon. Member when they intend to refer to him or her. Thank you, Mrs. Dunwoody, for reminding me of that.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. On Monday, the Government announced that they were to cap Derbyshire county council. They also said in the press announcement that a Committee would meet on Thursday—tomorrow—to consider the matter.

The Committee of Selection has not yet appointed any Members to that Committee, because it has not met. Indeed, the capping order was not included on the Committee of Selection's original agenda. The Committee of Selection is not due to meet until this afternoon. That means that any Members appointed by it will not be notified of their appointment until tomorrow morning, when the Committee considering the capping order is due to meet.

As a result of the Deputy Prime Minister's statement, I have tabled some written questions which will be important to facilitating the debate. Unfortunately, the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions has not yet answered them. Is that really fair? Does the Government's taking of such a measure in Committee in the same week as the measure is announced allow for scrutiny? This is the first time in memory and on record that capping matters have not been debated on the Floor of the House.

Madam Speaker: I was very pleased to be able to call the hon. Gentleman during Prime Minister's Question Time this afternoon, when he was quite rightly able to raise matters that concern his area. He may seek to catch my eye tomorrow to put a question to the Leader of the House when she answers questions on the progress of parliamentary business. I understand that no Standing Orders have been breached by what he has described, although I have some sympathy for him. He may, of course, wish to pursue the matter through the usual channels—of which he is himself a member, I believe.

BILL PRESENTED

PREVENTATIVE HEALTH CARE AND HOME INSULATION

Mr. Simon Hughes presented a Bill to require certain health bodies to draw up reports on the ways in which home insulation may assist persons living in fuel poverty to heat their homes, in order to reduce ill-health and unnecessary demand for health services; and for related purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 3 July, and to be printed [Bill 200].

Restoration of Damage to Sites of Special Scientific Interest

3.36 pm

Ms Candy Atherton (Falmouth and Camborne): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to amend the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 to require the owners and occupiers of land notified as sites of special scientific interest who commit an offence under section 28 of the Act to restore that interest of the site lost, damaged or degraded as a result of the offence or offences.

Sites of special scientific interest are the foundations of wildlife protection in Great Britain. Introduced in their present form by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, their purpose is to give special safeguard to the most valuable parts of our much reduced, but still rich, natural heritage. I am sorry to have to tell the House that they are failing adequately to protect Britain's finest wildlife sites.

SSSIs contain Britain's finest and most precious examples of wildlife habitats, landscape and geological features. English Nature describes them as the core of our nation's national heritage. There are about 6,000 sites in Britain today. I had the good fortune to visit an SSSI in Cornwall two weeks ago. Marazion marshes is a reserve of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, and home to 1,314 species of plants and animals. In fact, it is the largest remaining reed swamp in Cornwall, and, as such, a key area of biodiversity. Apart from plants and birds, more than half the British species of dragonflies are recorded there.

It concerns me greatly that that site is one of the lucky ones. When the RSPB took over management of the reserve, the reed bed had dried out and wildlife interest was being lost. The site is now voluntarily managed, with the co-operation of a sympathetic landowner. Other sites are not managed so sympathetically and are allowed to degenerate, with the resulting loss of wildlife interest.

Statutory nature conservation bodies have to date reported a total of more than 2,120 cases of loss or damage of SSSIs in England and Wales in the past six years alone; yet there have been very few prosecutions. When there have been prosecutions, the fines levied have been disproportionately low.

Kernick and Ottery meadows—which is also in Cornwall—is a grassland area which was notified as an SSSI in 1992. Although part of the site had been ploughed, English Nature believed that it was capable of recovery. Nevertheless, despite SSSI notification, the ploughed area was drained, reseeded and planted with linseed for fibre flax production. English Nature took no action. Protection of the remainder of the site under a nature conservation order has not prevented considerable damage—such as drain installation, damage to hedge banks and grubbing of valuable scrub. Again, English Nature took no action.

If I had more time for this motion, I could detail horror stories from across the country.

The problem is that penalties for damaging SSSIs are painfully lacking and do not constitute any real deterrent. Currently, a landowner planning to conduct a potentially damaging operation must give four months' notice, giving the conservation agency a chance to persuade and to negotiate a voluntary management agreement. Agencies also can offer payment to compensate landowners for any profit lost by not developing a site.

If a landowner does not give due notice and damages a site, he or she is liable to a fine of up to £2,000. However, in practice, fines have varied from only £200—for lime spreading—to £1,500, for extraction of sand and shingles. It is notable that, despite many offences, there have been very few convictions for damaging SSSIs. Fines do not provide an adequate deterrent.

Understandably, statutory nature conservation bodies see little point in pursuing expensive court cases. If they win a conviction, damage to the site remains, and the bodies have little means to repair the damage. In contrast, contravention of a tree preservation order can result in a fine of up to £12,000; and damage to a listed building is punishable with a maximum 12 months' prison sentence and a fine that takes into account any benefit accrued to the offender because of the damage. Clearly, unscrupulous landowners have merely to consider the risk and to take their chances. Many landowners are effectively smashing and grabbing.

Legislation must be strengthened if the SSSI network is to have any real chance of safeguarding our most precious wildlife resources. Landowners who damage an SSSI should be made to restore the site at their own expense. That is the aim of my Bill.

Currently, only in limited circumstances do courts have power to compel a landowner to undertake restorative measures on an SSSI that he or she is found guilty of damaging. Experience has shown that issuing a nature conservation order—creating what has been termed a "super-SSSI"—is of limited practical use. Although such orders allow courts to order an offender to take restorative action to reinstate a site's interests, such action is not commonplace. Since the 1981 Act was passed, the power to impose such orders has been invoked in England on only 26 occasions. Moreover, no restoration orders have ever been issued.

My Bill would give courts the power, under section 28 of the Act, to place restoration orders on offenders who damage standard SSSIs. I believe that that would be a just power to give to the courts. Such power would provide a better deterrent—avoiding damage in the first place—as the cost of restoring sites can be extremely expensive, and an incentive to statutory nature conservation bodies to pursue offences through the courts. It would also be consistent with the "polluter pays" principle.

I realise that it may not always be reasonable or practicable to restore a site to its former condition. My Bill proposes that, in such cases, courts should be given discretion in requiring restoration of sites to an appropriate specified condition.

I am delighted to be able to inform the House that yesterday, with the RSPB, I met the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Angela Eagle), and she has promised that the aim of my Bill has been drafted into the Government's planned consultation document on the environment.

I want our children and our children's children to have the same opportunities that I had two weeks ago to visit and experience areas of great natural beauty. Of the cases that I have mentioned, Marazion marshes were lucky; Kernick and Ottery meadows were not. We must not leave the future of those recognised sites to the haphazard and uncertain hand of fate.

[Ms Candy Atherton]

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Ms Candy Atherton, Jackie Ballard, Mr. Cynog Dafis, Mr. David Drew, Ms Julia Drown, Ms Tess Kingham, Mr. David Prior, Mr. John Randall, Dr. Phyllis Starkey and Mr. John Austin.

RESTORATION OF DAMAGE TO SITES OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST

Ms Candy Atherton accordingly presented a Bill to amend the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 to require the owners and occupiers of land notified as sites of special scientific interest who commit an offence under section 28 of the Act to restore that interest of the site lost, damaged or degraded as a result of the offence or offences: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 3 July, and to be printed [Bill 201].

Orders of the Day

Northern Ireland (Sentences) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

3.45 pm

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Marjorie Mowlam): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The aim of the Bill is to bring into effect proposals in the Good Friday agreement dealing with prisoners. Prisoner issues are part of that agreement—the commitment given by both Governments was to put in place mechanisms for an accelerated programme of prisoner release. In our case, that applies to prisoners convicted of scheduled offences—that is, offences connected with paramilitary activity in Northern Ireland and those outside Northern Ireland convicted of similar offences. We gave a commitment in the agreement that we would seek to enact the appropriate legislation by the end of June.

The agreement is a package, supported by parties and the people, and it is a whole and not to be cherry-picked. The package won the support of more than 71 per cent. of the people of Northern Ireland on 22 May, in both communities. As we discussed in the House on Monday last week, I know that there is much concern among those who voted yes and those who voted no about the actual details. We have a duty to people to implement the people's wishes, but, at the same time, to do our best to address those concerns.

I believe that the agreement is the best chance that we have to bring an end to the vicious cycle of violence and murder in Northern Ireland and to ensure that new generations do not continue to suffer all the grief and pain of the past.

On 20 April, I placed in the Library of the House a paper that set out in detail how the Government intended to implement our commitment in relation to prisoners. That paper set out the rigorous safeguards for the protection of the public. Those safeguards are now on the face of the Bill. For example, prisoners who support terrorist groups that continue to engage in violence or return to violence will not be released. Prisoners will be released on licence and immediately recalled if they engage in any terrorist activity.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): The Bill actually states that prisoners will be released if they are not likely to be

"concerned in the commission, preparation or instigation of acts of terrorism connected with the affairs of Northern Ireland."

Given the international nature of terrorism—Sean O'Callaghan's recent book shows the links between the IRA and ETA—will the Secretary of State amend the Bill so that it covers, as she just stated, any acts of terrorism, rather than those solely relating to Northern Ireland?

Marjorie Mowlam: I will take note of the hon. Gentleman's point, but the Bill relates specifically to terrorist activity in Northern Ireland. If there is any question about the interpretation, we shall certainly check it with the draftspeople.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): In Scotland, when a prisoner is released under licence,

he or she has to be of good behaviour, and can be put back in prison if convicted of a criminal offence. Should not the same hold in these circumstances?

Marjorie Mowlam: It does. Many safeguards are built in and, as we go through the Bill, we will see that it is robust. If released prisoners break the licence in any way, they will be taken back and will serve their full sentence. As a further safeguard, if circumstances deteriorate in Northern Ireland, the programme of release will be stopped and no prisoners will be released.

If an organisation has returned to violence, licensed prisoners who continue to support that organisation can be recalled. The Government's commitments have been made in the context of a lasting peaceful settlement. In his speech at Balmoral on 14 May, during the referendum campaign, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said that if parties are to benefit from accelerated release, their commitment to democratic, non-violent means must be established in an objective, meaningful and verifiable way.

The Prime Minister said that in clarifying whether the terms and spirit of the agreement had been met and violence had genuinely been given up for good, a range of factors had to be taken into account: whether an organisation is committed to the use, now and in future, of only democratic and peaceful means of achieving its objectives; whether it has ceased to be involved in any acts of violence or preparations for violence and is not directing or promoting such acts committed by other organisations; and whether it is co-operating fully with the decommissioning body. Those factors are all in the Bill.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): What was the result of the Prime Minister's representations to my right hon. Friend about the cases of Guardsmen Fisher and Wright? Representations were also made by such careful lawyers as Lord Ackner, who does not make statements wildly.

Marjorie Mowlam: The Prime Minister made a statement to the House, and we have discussed the cases before. At the moment, I am responding to the judicial review of the decision that I took some months ago. When the review is complete, I shall report back to my hon. Friend and to the House. I assure him that I am taking the matter seriously and that it will be dealt with as quickly as possible.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Hull, North): Would I be wrong in interpreting the Bill to mean that the early release scheme would include members of the armed forces who have been convicted of scheduled offences?

Marjorie Mowlam: Members of the armed forces, if they so choose, can apply as anyone else would.

Mr. Andrew Hunter (Basingstoke): The Bill explicitly refers to membership of terrorist organisations and defines such organisations. It has nothing whatever to do with members of the armed services.

Marjorie Mowlam: As I said, it is up to those concerned whether they want to apply. The provisions relate to scheduled offences and, although members of the armed forces, not being part of a terrorist organisation, are not referred to specifically, I presume that, if they want to go to the commission, they can present their case; as the hon. Gentleman suggested, they may not choose to do so. The guardsmen's sentence is up for review before the Life Sentence Review Board in October, and that is the state of play.

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): The right hon. Lady mentioned what the Prime Minister said when he was in Northern Ireland. He also said that violence had to be given up and that decommissioning is part of that. Is decommissioning part of her definition of violence being given up—so that these people can be let out of prison?

Marjorie Mowlam: The four factors that the Prime Minister outlined in his speech in Belfast on 14 May are central to deciding whether an organisation is on a ceasefire and committed to establishing and maintaining a complete and unequivocal ceasefire. The Prime Minister outlined four criteria covering a commitment to democratic peaceful means; involvement in any acts of violence or preparation of acts of violence; the use of proxy organisations; and full co-operation with the independent body on decommissioning. Those are the criteria on which I will judge whether a group is on a ceasefire.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): I am grateful to the right hon. Lady, who has been generous with her time. This issue is particularly important. She talks about the judgment that she must make about terrorist organisations or political parties involved with terrorist organisations and violence. She knows that punishment beatings, and some murders, have continued throughout the process. Two people were kneecapped, an easy term for a brutal event, in west Belfast last week, probably by IRA-linked, Sinn Fein-linked terrorists. In her judgment, will she take that, and punishment beatings by loyalists, into account?

Marjorie Mowlam: It is clear that I will make a judgment on the four factors, in which are included punishment beatings and the instigation of paramilitary activity. That is one of the factors that, in the round, will be part of that judgment. Like the hon. Gentleman, I find punishment beatings obscene. He mentioned two people. The weekend before that, three weeks ago, a 72-year-old man had both his legs taken out. A week ago, a Protestant man was so badly beaten that people were unsure that he would not bleed to death. They are obscene acts which must stop if we are serious about the process moving forward. They went on under all previous Governments. We have reached a new point where we have the consent of the people on the agreement. We should go forward in a positive way to build trust and confidence on both sides so that decommissioning and the other aspects of the agreement can move in parallel.

If the House will permit me, I should like to make some progress. In answer to a question, I listed the four factors that will be taken into account in an overall judgment on whether a complete and unequivocal ceasefire is actually happening.

Early prisoner releases are not new in Northern Ireland. There already exist arrangements for early prisoner release, set up at the end of 1995 by the previous Government. They entitle fixed-sentence prisoners to be released halfway

[Marjorie Mowlam]

through their sentences. Under those arrangements, approximately 240 prisoners have been released early. Of those, only two have had to be recalled for breach of their licences. The previous Government continued the policy despite the breakdown of the IRA ceasefire between February 1996 and July 1997. Even if there were no change in the law, about half the remaining prisoners covered by the new scheme would be free within the next two years.

There is no doubt that the prisoner issue has long been an important part of the search for peace in Northern Ireland. Successive British Governments have recognised that fact. When passing the legislation that is the forerunner of the Bill in 1995, my predecessor, Lord Mayhew, said:

"It is desirable that, in the light of the changed situation brought about by the ceasefires, the Government, in this field as in others, should not seem reluctant to respond in a positive manner".—[*Official Report*, 30 October 1995; Vol. 265, c. 23.]

I agree. We supported and aided the swift passage of that legislation because we considered that it was a proportionate response to the ceasefire at the time.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): May I make something clear so that there is no misunderstanding? Completely unintentionally, I think that the right hon. Lady has misled the House. The previous Government's legislation that altered the time at which prisoners were released was merely to bring Northern Ireland back into line with the rest of the United Kingdom, so it would be wrong to define it as early release.

Marjorie Mowlam: In quoting my predecessor, so that I would not mislead the House, I was pointing out that there was an acknowledgement that changes in prison sentencing were needed as part of the overall agreement. As the previous Government tried to move the process forward, even when there was no decommissioning or ceasefire, they kept the scheme in place. I am not attempting to mislead the House in any way. I am trying to say that prisoner releases are not necessarily a terribly new process and that we are continuing some of the procedures that were already in place.

I should like to move on. Some people argue that we should never release any prisoners—under the previous scheme or under this one. I have to say that this is a difficult issue. In the past couple of weeks, I have heard from many people in Northern Ireland, including many families of victims, who have said that they find it deeply difficult and disturbing to cope with what is happening. That is true for them and very, very difficult. It is harder for them because, as we face change, they are worried that the deaths of their loved ones will be forgotten. We have done all that we can to listen to them and take into account their views. Some of them will never be able to come to terms with what is happening.

Other people who have written to me or come to see me say that, yes, they find it difficult, but that if it means that others do not have to go through what they have gone through, they will not come out against what the Government are trying to achieve.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): As one of the Members of Parliament in the Secretary of State's region, may I pay tribute to the work that she has done? One of the worst tragedies on the mainland was the murder some years ago of Special Constable Glen Goodman by the IRA terrorist Paul Magee, who was transferred recently from Full Sutton prison, where he was serving a life sentence for murder, not to Northern Ireland but to the Republic of Ireland. I understand that the Bill does not deal with Republic of Ireland prisoners. Nor could it. Can she reassure the North Yorkshire community that someone whom the Home Secretary said ought to serve a minimum of 30 years will not be released? The community has still not come to terms with the atrocity of what happened five years ago, let alone the prospect that Paul Magee could be let out early.

Marjorie Mowlam: Paul Magee was transferred, as the hon. Gentleman rightly said, in line with the policy adopted by the Conservative Government and mine that prisoners should be close to their families so that their families can see them, and their children do not suffer unnecessarily. Before the Home Secretary transferred Magee and others, he obtained an agreement from the Minister of Justice in the Republic that the sentence would remain as it was. That commitment was made to the Home Secretary, and I repeat it here for the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): The hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) has raised an important matter. Would that convicted terrorist be allowed under the Bill and the arrangements to be transferred to a prison in Northern Ireland in order to qualify for release?

Marjorie Mowlam: He is a prisoner in the Republic. He could apply for transfer, but it is unlikely that the movement would take place. We accept transfers on the basis that they bring the prisoner closer to his family. Paul Magee is a prime example of someone whose family is not in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Robert McCartney (North Down): The Secretary of State will be aware that if a Metropolitan policeman is murdered in the course of a felony, the murderer has to serve a minimum sentence of 26 years. In the Republic of Ireland, someone who murders a Garda Siochana in the same circumstances serves a minimum of 40 years. As 299 members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary have been murdered in the course of their duties, can she explain why the Bill should provide for the release of some of the murderers, even within the terms of the 12 to 16 years that murderers commonly serve in Northern Ireland? Will she also confirm—

Madam Speaker: Order. This is an enormously long intervention, and many Members are seeking to catch my eye. I would ask now for a response from the Minister.

Marjorie Mowlam: Cases being considered under this legislation will go to the independent commissioners, who will look at them carefully, assess them in detail and be given additional information. Prisoners will be let out only on licence, and very clear conditions will attach to the releases.

All we are doing is implementing the agreement, which gained the support of 71 per cent. of the people of Northern Ireland in the vote.

Under the Bill, prisoners may apply to the commissioners for a declaration that they are entitled to be released on licence. The Bill sets out criteria that prisoners must satisfy to be eligible for release.

The Bill requires that I appoint commissioners and have regard to the desirability of the commissioners as a group commanding widespread acceptance throughout the community in Northern Ireland. In addition, I am required so far as is reasonably practicable to ensure that at least one commissioner is a lawyer and at least one is a psychiatrist or psychologist.

I would intend to appoint a psychiatrist or psychologist with expertise in risk assessment in criminal cases. In the rules of procedure that I may make under the Bill, I will require that a commissioner with such expertise would sit on panels considering applications from life sentence prisoners.

The commissioners will consider each application on its merits against the criteria set out in the Bill. If those criteria are met, the commissioners will declare that a prisoner is eligible under the scheme. The criteria are as follows: prisoners in Northern Ireland must have been convicted of a scheduled offence committed before 10 April 1998 and sentenced to five years or more or life imprisonment. Only prisoners serving their sentence in Northern Ireland are eligible for release under the Bill.

A prisoner must not be a supporter of a terrorist organisation of the kind specified in the Bill, which means organisations that

"have not established or are not maintaining a complete and unequivocal cease-fire".

That test follows directly from the words of the agreement, which exclude prisoners affiliated to such organisations.

This legislation will not remove the ban on organisations that are proscribed under our anti-terrorist laws. The IRA or UDA, for example, will continue to be proscribed, and membership of such organisations will continue to be a criminal offence.

A prisoner may not be declared eligible for early release if the commissioners consider that, if released immediately, he or she would be likely to become a supporter of a terrorist organisation or become concerned in the initiation, preparation or instigation of acts of terrorism. That means that no prisoner who the commissioners believe will return to violence may be released under the Bill.

Prisoners sentenced to life imprisonment would not be released if they would be considered a danger to the public. That maintains the protection that applies in respect of the release of all life sentence prisoners throughout the UK.

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Marjorie Mowlam: Two other hon. Members have indicated that they wish to intervene, but I want to make a little more progress before giving way.

I shall keep under review the list of organisations identified under the Bill and add or remove organisations as appropriate. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said in his speech of 14 May, considering whether a ceasefire is being maintained is

"a judgment which will necessarily become more rigorous over time"—

and it will.

Mr. William Ross (East Londonderry): Will the right hon. Lady give an undertaking that all the lawyers appointed to be commissioners will be United Kingdom lawyers and not those from other jurisdictions?

Marjorie Mowlam: With respect to the hon. Gentleman, I do not want to tie myself down in that way. We want to appoint, as clause 1 of the Bill states, a psychiatrist or psychologist and a lawyer with expertise. It is 99 per cent. likely that a lawyer with expertise in our criminal legal system would be of UK origin, so I can give the hon. Gentleman that much reassurance. However, I am more keen to ensure that we have a balanced, independent body, including a lawyer and a psychiatrist or psychologist, which people can trust and respect. The body has not yet been selected and, as the hon. Gentleman well knows, all the parties in Northern Ireland can submit nominations for bodies of that nature; I look forward to receiving the nominations from his party.

If the commissioners declare that a fixed-term prisoner meets the criteria set out in the legislation, the prisoner will be required to serve one third of his sentence in custody before being released on licence.

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Marjorie Mowlam: To be fair, I shall take the intervention from the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) before that of the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson).

Mr. Grieve: I am much obliged to the right hon. Lady. I wanted clarification of a point relating to the transfer of prisoners to the Republic. Some of those transferred to the Republic, such as the Balcombe street gang, had full life tariffs, because it was considered that they were so dangerous that they should never be released. Am I correct in my understanding of the effect of transferring them to the Republic, which is that they escape completely the criteria under the legislation for consideration as to the likely danger they pose to the public, and that they will simply be released in two years' time, pursuant to the agreement?

Marjorie Mowlam: As I said in answer to the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway), the Republic has its own criteria; however, when the Home Secretary transferred prisoners to the Republic, he made it clear that he would do so only if the Minister of Justice gave an assurance that the full tariffs would be served. That is my understanding of what has happened.

Mr. Peter Robinson: The Secretary of State was explaining to the House that a prisoner belonging to a proscribed organisation, for example the Provisional IRA, could openly inform the commission that he or she is a member of the Provisional IRA. However, if the Secretary of State has not listed the Provisional IRA as a

[Mr. Peter Robinson]

terrorist organisation as specified under the legislation, that person will be entitled to release, even though that person is committing an offence by being a member of a terrorist organisation.

Marjorie Mowlam: The important distinction to bear in mind is that the Bill is concerned with organisations that are unequivocally committed to establishing and maintaining a ceasefire and those belonging to such organisations; proscription is concerned with the long-term purpose of an organisation. The emergency provisions Acts will still apply in respect of proscription.

Mr. McNamara: I think that my right hon. Friend may be inadvertently misleading the House. Section 1 of the agreement on prisoners reads:

"Both Governments will put in place mechanisms to provide for an accelerated programme for the release of prisoners, including transferred prisoners, convicted of scheduled offences in Northern Ireland or, in the case of those sentenced outside Northern Ireland, similar offences (referred to hereafter as qualifying prisoners). Any such arrangements will protect the rights of individual prisoners".

The agreement was made after the transfer of the prisoners.

Marjorie Mowlam: If I am in any way misleading the House, I shall clarify the matter in writing to the hon. Members who have asked questions. My understanding, having discussed the matter with my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, is that the law was changed in relation to the transfers that were made. For the reasons highlighted by the Opposition, the Home Secretary was concerned that those prisoners should not be let out. He has a commitment from the Republic's Minister of Justice that they will serve their full tariff.

Mr. MacKay *rose—*

Marjorie Mowlam: This will be the last intervention.

Mr. MacKay: I apologise to the Secretary of State. It is essential that, before the House reaches a conclusion on the Bill, everyone should know the facts. As someone who will vote for the Bill on Second Reading, I want other hon. Members to be absolutely clear.

The Bill states that there will be accelerated release of prisoners who fulfil the criteria that the Secretary of State mentioned. Any prisoner who is transferred to the Republic of Ireland, such as the one whom my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) mentioned, will fulfil those criteria.

The Irish have agreed that the sentence will be the same in Ireland as it is in England. The Bill will change the sentence in England so that the prisoner can be out within two years; therefore it will be possible to release him in Ireland in two years. We should be clear about that.

Marjorie Mowlam: If the situation is different from that which I have described, as I said to my hon. Friend the Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara), I shall correct myself.

I say categorically to the House that the Bill applies to Northern Ireland. It is the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Bill, and it applies in that jurisdiction only. The Republic has its jurisdiction, and we have a commitment from the Minister of Justice that that is a different jurisdiction and its rules will apply. That is my categorical answer.

Mr. Grieve *rose—*

Marjorie Mowlam: No, I will take no more interventions. However, I shall make sure that when the Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office, my hon. Friend the Member for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram), winds up, he will support the view that I have taken, because I believe that it is right. If I am wrong, I shall fully acknowledge that to the House. I do not think that I am wrong.

Mr. Roger Stott (Wigan) *rose—*

Marjorie Mowlam: No, I am sorry. I am trying to be fair. I cannot take any more interventions, or it would be unfair to those whom I have already refused.

The Bill applies to Northern Ireland, not to the Republic, or to Scotland or Wales.

All prisoners released under the Bill will be released on licence. For fixed-sentence prisoners, the licence will continue until their sentence expires. Life sentences do not expire, so prisoners sentenced to life imprisonment who are released under the Bill will remain on licence for the rest of their lives.

Prisoners on licence need to continue to meet the criteria for release set out under the legislation. That means that they must not become a supporter of a terrorist organisation, and that they must not become concerned in the commission, preparation or instigation of acts of terrorism concerned with the affairs of Northern Ireland.

If I consider that those licence conditions are breached in any case, I am empowered to suspend the licence and recall the prisoner to prison. If a licence is suspended, it will then be for the commissioners to decide whether the licence should be revoked.

Mr. Hunter *rose—*

Marjorie Mowlam: No, I am sorry.

Under the agreement, both Governments gave commitments that

"should the circumstances allow it, any qualifying prisoners who remained in custody two years after the commencement of the scheme would be released at that point."

The Bill provides that prisoners in respect of whom the commissioners have made a declaration, who remain in custody two years from the commencement of the legislation, shall be released at that time.

I am empowered under the Bill to bring that date forward or to put it back, depending, as stated in the paper that I placed in the Library on 20 April,

"on the circumstances and progress towards the creation of a more peaceful society".

In considering whether that progress has been made, I shall take account of matters such as those identified by the Prime Minister and included in the text of the legislation.

As I said, and as is stated in the agreement, the arrangements will apply to prisoners convicted of similar offences committed in Great Britain and transferred to Northern Ireland. Such prisoners are not convicted of

scheduled offences, which is a concept unique to Northern Ireland. The Bill gives me an order-making power in respect of transferred prisoners to bring them within the terms of the legislation. In such cases, the Attorney-General or Lord Advocate, as appropriate, will say whether the offence committed would, if committed in Northern Ireland, have been a scheduled offence under the emergency provisions Act.

The British and Irish Governments and the Northern Ireland parties have worked for years to bring about agreement on the future for Northern Ireland. We have before us powers to implement one aspect of that agreement. The Bill is the first stage in building what I hope will be a better future for Northern Ireland based on fairness, consent, peace and reconciliation. I commend it to the House.

4.20 pm

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): While we are grateful to the Secretary of State for outlining the main provisions of the Bill before the House and the reasons why it is necessary, I must press her again on a particular matter. I genuinely believe that she has misled the House totally inadvertently and I ask the Minister of State to set the record straight in his winding-up speech. We have absolutely no doubt that anyone who has been convicted of a terrorist offence on the mainland, who has been imprisoned on the mainland and who is then transferred legitimately to Dublin will be eligible under the Act. The authorities in Dublin will have to respond to that.

Mr. McNamara: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. MacKay: No.

I thank the Secretary of State sincerely for the way in which she and her officials have co-operated with the Opposition in drafting the legislation. That has been truly appreciated and I think that it has made a difference to the legislation.

Mr. McNamara: How can an Act of the United Kingdom Parliament possibly apply to the Republic of Ireland? The agreement applies to the Republic of Ireland, not the legislation.

Mr. MacKay: I shall explain it simply to the hon. Gentleman. As the Secretary of State pointed out, the Minister of Justice in the Republic of Ireland gave assurances to the British Home Secretary that sentences in the Irish Republic would be the same as on the mainland. If the legislation changes sentences on the mainland, the Irish Government will be obliged to observe those changes—whether they like it or not.

Marjorie Mowlam: That reassurance was given before the Bill was drafted when the transfers were made months ago. I have tried to be reasonable and open with the House because this is difficult, detailed and complicated legislation. It applies only to Northern Ireland and the transfers made do not relate to the Bill. I shall ask my hon. Friend the Minister to reassure the House because I do not wish that misunderstanding to continue.

Mr. MacKay: We disagree fundamentally and we look forward to hearing the Minister's explanation. It is best to leave the matter at present, as I think that the Minister will have to clarify the situation with his officials.

Mr. Stott: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. MacKay: No, I must proceed as many hon. Members wish to speak in the debate.

The Bill incorporates some, but by no means all, of the safeguards sought by my party. For that reason, we shall not seek to divide the House this evening. However, there remain some areas of deep concern where we believe that the proposed legislation is either too weak or ill defined. I shall refer to those areas—and one in particular—during my speech.

Unlike the Bill giving effect to the referendum, we do not intend to allow this legislation to be fast-tracked through Parliament. It is far too important for that, as I am sure the Secretary of State acknowledges. We intend to examine the Bill thoroughly and subject it to the fullest possible scrutiny as it passes through Committee on the Floor of the House. We shall not shirk from tabling amendments where they are necessary to strengthen the Bill's provisions.

We owe the people of Northern Ireland, especially the victims of terrorist violence, many of whom are understandably hostile to the Bill, to get it right. For many people, myself included, the prospect of prisoners—many of whom have committed unspeakable acts of cold-blooded murder—being released is sickening. They feel that the Bill undermines the rule of law and is a concession to terror. That is not confined to Northern Ireland. In Great Britain, too, we have suffered appalling acts of terrorism. The House will remember former colleagues who have been murdered by republican terrorists.

I do not necessarily agree, especially in the context of an overall political settlement, with those who oppose the Bill. However, I certainly understand and sympathise with their arguments, as I did with the chairman of the Northern Ireland Police Federation a fortnight ago. Many of his members have been at the forefront of the fight against terrorism for nearly 30 years. We must always ensure that the sensitivities of the victims are at the forefront of our minds. I was grateful to the Secretary of State for making that clear.

The Bill is necessary to give effect to the key element of the Belfast agreement, which was reached in the multi-party talks on 10 April. I have no hesitation in repeating the opinion of the Conservative party that the agreement and the results of the referendum on 23 May were truly momentous events. We all hope that they will be seen to have marked a turning point in the history of Northern Ireland when the principles of democracy and consent finally triumphed over violence and terror.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): I fully endorse what the hon. Gentleman has said about the agreement. Will he take it on board that the horror that is felt as a result of the crimes and atrocities committed, not only by

[Mr. David Winnick]

the IRA but certainly by the IRA and the loyalist murder gangs, is felt throughout the House and is not the monopoly of the present Opposition? We all feel the same about the terrible crimes that have been committed. That is so of our feelings towards the victims and their close relatives. That should always be borne in mind.

Mr. MacKay: I readily acknowledge that and in no sense implied otherwise, as the hon. Gentleman will confirm.

It is surely incumbent on us all, even the members of those parties who campaigned for a no vote in the referendum, to try to build upon what has been achieved and try to make the agreement and the new institutions work.

The people of Northern Ireland have spoken overwhelmingly. More than 71 per cent. of them voted in favour of the agreement.

Mr. Desmond Browne (Kilmarnock and Loudoun): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. MacKay: No. I think that it is important that we make progress.

There is no doubt that the vast majority of people in Northern Ireland are anxious to show their democratic credentials and yearn for a lasting settlement and an end to the troubles. By any reasonable statistical judgment there was a clear yes vote in both communities for the agreement. We must never let critics of the agreement say anything else for that would be a plain untruth.

So a democratic verdict was clear. The prospects of failure now are far too horrific to contemplate. We in the Conservative party share the judgment of the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) that the agreement strengthens the Union of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. It is clearly a partitionist settlement. The Act of Union, the bedrock of Northern Ireland's position within the United Kingdom, remains firmly in place. As a result of the referendum in the Irish Republic, the territorial claim over Northern Ireland has at long last gone, and not a moment too soon.

Mr. Browne: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. MacKay: No. I have just said that I will not give way to the hon. Gentleman.

All the parties that signed up to the agreement signed up also to the principle that there can be no change in the status of Northern Ireland without the consent of the majority of its people. I believe that these arguments were well understood by the majority of the Unionist community in the referendum campaign. However, many Unionists found harder to accept the provisions of the agreement dealing with prisoner release and decommissioning. That is why the Opposition pressed for substantial decommissioning to take place before the early release of prisoners, and for this to be incorporated in the proposed legislation that is before us.

Those of us who were in the Province campaigning for a yes vote in the final few days of the referendum campaign were left in no doubt that a significant number of moderate people in both communities finally decided to vote yes only when the Prime Minister had given them a clear and unequivocal assurance that decommissioning and the renunciation of violence would be incorporated in the legislation on early prisoner release and the setting up of the assembly.

In the Opposition's view, the Bill goes only some of the way to satisfying those assurances and will, therefore, require amendment in Committee next week. The most serious omission is that it does not establish a clear legislative linkage between some actual decommissioning having taken place and the accelerated release of prisoners.

To put it simply, the Bill merely states that

"the Secretary of State shall in particular take into account whether an organisation . . . is co-operating fully with"

the commission, whereas what the people of Northern Ireland and elsewhere expect is that the Secretary of State should release prisoners early only if such organisations are fully co-operating with the commission.

Incidentally, as the Prime Minister stated in his Balmoral speech on 14 May, such co-operation is implementing provisions within the agreement. Therefore, let us have no talk that amending the Bill will be in breach of the agreement; it strengthens the agreement.

Rev. Ian Paisley: The hon. Gentleman will have heard me put to the Secretary of State the words of the Prime Minister's pledge:

"Violence has to be given up and decommissioning is part of that."

As I understand the Bill, those who are eligible for release must declare that violence has been given up. Whether it has been given up or not, or whether they have left the organisation, they must convince the Secretary of State that that is so. But the Bill is in no way linked with decommissioning. The hon. Gentleman is aware that the decommissioning commission has no power to make people decommission; it has power only when people are mutually prepared to decommission their weapons.

Mr. MacKay: The hon. Gentleman makes precisely the point that I am making. The amendment that we shall table next week insists that there is linkage between decommissioning and the earlier release of prisoners.

On precisely that point, I quote an exchange at Prime Minister's Question Time on Wednesday 6 May when my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition told the Prime Minister:

"Opposition Members will argue strongly that the IRA cannot have prisoners released if it does not give up its guns and explosives."

The Prime Minister replied:

"Again, I agree with the right hon. Gentleman. It is essential that organisations that want to benefit from the early release of prisoners should give up violence. Decommissioning is part of that".—[*Official Report*, 6 May 1998; Vol. 311, c. 711.]

Mr. Peter Robinson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. MacKay: No, I am at an important part of my speech. This is the key to ensuring that we get the Bill right.

Those remarks of the Prime Minister neatly summarise why many people in Northern Ireland were finally persuaded to support the agreement in the referendum vote. They must now not be let down by anything less being incorporated in the legislation.

We trust that the Government will be prepared to look again at the wording when we examine the Bill more closely in Committee. I have some confidence that they will because I know from my conversations with the Secretary of State that she is sympathetic to the points that I am making. But there is absolutely no possibility that the people of Northern Ireland who voted in the referendum can now be let down.

That quotation from the Prime Minister that I have just given the House is absolutely clear. It is not open to any possible misinterpretation. It is on the basis of that quotation and other remarks during the referendum campaign, and legitimate spin doctoring in the newspapers of the Province, that a large number of people voted yes. The Opposition intend to make sure that the Government stick to that assurance given by the Prime Minister from the Dispatch Box.

Mr. Hunter: Can my hon. Friend not strengthen his argument by pointing to the Prime Minister's letter, which appeared in the *Irish News* and the *News Letter* on referendum day when he repeated that pledge in the context of Sinn Fein-IRA participation in the Executive?

Mr. MacKay: My hon. Friend is right. I am giving only one example; fortunately, there are numerous. I am delighted that there are, because the Prime Minister helped to achieve a yes vote with those assurances. We pressed him to give the assurances and we are entirely on his side. We now simply want to ensure that the assurances are implemented. I hope that there is nothing between us and that the Government will accept the amendments which my right hon. Friends and I shall move on Monday.

Mr. Robert McCartney: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, for members of Sinn Fein to be placed in executive posts in government before the organisation with which they are acknowledged to be inextricably, and therefore inseparably, linked has decommissioned would be a travesty of all principles of democracy?

Mr. MacKay: I entirely agree with the hon. and learned Gentleman. Once we have before us the legislation setting up the assembly, I shall wish to move similar amendments if need be. The hon. and learned Gentleman and I sincerely trust that we will not need to do so because, if we are successful in having our amendments accepted next week, I hope that those who draft the subsequent Bill will incorporate them straight away. There is no difference between the two Bills, and the Prime Minister's assurances, both on the assembly and Ministers taking their place in the Executive and on the early release of prisoners, were identical. I therefore agree whole-heartedly with the hon. and learned Gentleman.

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. Adam Ingram): The hon. Gentleman is trying to take the high moral ground. Can he confirm that the previous Administration put in place legislation, which resulted in the release of a large number of terrorist-related prisoners, and not one ounce of Semtex was handed in, not one bullet was handed in, and not one gun was decommissioned? Can he explain what was happening in his Government at that time if the linkage that he is now trying to establish is such an important and key issue?

Mr. MacKay: I hope that I am not trying to establish a linkage, because the linkage clearly and irrefutably exists, as shown by the Prime Minister's remarks. I believe what the Prime Minister tells us at the Dispatch Box; it is a pity that the Minister does not. I have confidence that the Prime Minister will not let down the people of this country. The simple truth is that there would not have been a substantial yes vote—the sort that the Minister and I wanted, which showed the majority of the Unionist community voting yes as well—had the Prime Minister not given those assurances. Those assurances must now be turned into legislation, and I hope that when the Minister winds up the debate he will confirm that that will happen.

I would be failing in my duty as Opposition spokesman if I did not also mention the cases of Guardsmen Fisher and Wright. People will find it hard to understand how the House is considering legislation that allows the early release of terrorist murderers while those two soldiers continue to languish in prison. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition was speaking for the British people when he demanded a review of their case last Wednesday. Although we were naturally pleased with the Prime Minister's response that the Secretary of State was carrying out a review, the answer was news to everybody—probably including the Secretary of State.

The House would be interested to know from the Secretary of State when the review started, given that the latest court judgment took place as far back as 22 May.

Marjorie Mowlam: The decision took place on 22 and 23 May. I received the papers on 2 June and have been considering them since. I was aware of the Prime Minister's views.

Mr. MacKay: I am grateful to the Secretary of State. It is most unusual for this spin-doctoring Government not to pass on good news to our friends in the media. It came out only at Prime Minister's Question Time. Naturally, I accept the Secretary of State's response, as I always do.

This Bill is easily the most difficult and controversial of the legislation arising from the Belfast agreement. We cannot afford to get it wrong simply for the sake of speedy passage through the House. There can be no halfway house or fudge between democracy and terrorism, nor can we tolerate a situation whereby republicans or loyalists wield Executive power in one hand and an Armalite in the other. The changes that we want strengthen the commitment to democratic and peaceful methods and establish a clear link between early release and decommissioning. We look to the Government to take them on board.

4.39 pm

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): As hon. Members have said, the Bill gives effect to part of the Stormont agreement. We must take the Stormont agreement as a

[Mr. David Trimble]

whole, and should not pick and choose. Although this issue has caused great concern, nevertheless it is part of that agreement.

On that Good Friday afternoon, this aspect of the agreement caused us considerable difficulties. It was clear during the referendum campaign that the concept of early release caused considerable difficulties to the community in Northern Ireland and throughout the United Kingdom. It is clearly an interference with the normal judicial process for political reasons, so it is, in principle, undesirable. It also appears to many people, with justification, as a concession granted to terrorists, so it is distasteful. It also strikes many people that to approve, tolerate or acquiesce in these arrangements in some way dishonours the memory of those who have suffered as a result of terrorism. There is considerable difficulty with this measure.

People would not find this concept acceptable unless they knew that, as a result of the agreement as a whole, there was to be a genuine ending of violence and a genuine peace. What might be tolerable in the context of a genuine and permanent end to violence would not be tolerable otherwise. That must be understood.

In the discussions that led up to the agreement, when we entered reservations about the concept of early release, people said to us that such measures had been taken after previous emergencies. Indeed, there were releases after the emergencies in Northern Ireland in the 1920s, 1940s and 1960s, when the terrorist campaign had ended. Most of those releases were of persons who had been interned, so the problem of people who had been convicted did not arise. However, a limited number of persons who had been convicted of terrorist offences were released after previous emergencies had ended. In those cases, the releases occurred when it was clear that terrorism had ended and been defeated. That marks a distinction from the present situation. We are asked to approve provisions for release when it is not clear that terrorism has ended or been defeated.

We hope that terrorism will end and that there will be a genuine peace, but, because it is not at this moment absolutely clear that that is the position, it is essential to ensure that the tests and conditions written into the Bill are firm and watertight and are adhered to in practice. Like the hon. Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay), we shall focus on the tests in the legislation. It is essential that those tests are in a satisfactory form and that we can have some confidence that the Government will stick to them in practice.

The Government will have great difficulty with the people of Northern Ireland on this matter. The Secretary of State will have to establish credibility with the community. That credibility does not at present exist, and she will have to tackle that problem in what she says and in what she does in the coming weeks and months. She will have to create that confidence, so she has an awesome task in front of her.

Will there be a genuine peace? That is the crucial question. The decommissioning of terrorist weapons has been and continues to be an important litmus test of sincerity. It must be dealt with if there is to be genuine peace. No one in his right mind would want those weapons to be left lying around to fall into who knows whose hands and be available for use by who knows who in the future.

Mr. Robert McCartney: The right hon. Gentleman mentioned credibility. Decommissioning is one of the essential features required to give credibility to these pledges. Does he agree that this Government and their predecessors have resiled from all the positions that they have taken on decommissioning, and that that is the basis for the lack of credibility to which he refers?

Mr. Trimble: As I said earlier, there is a lack of confidence in the community on some of these matters. The Government must act in such a way as to give confidence, particularly as the agreement contains a clear provision on the decommissioning of weapons. There is a clear and unequivocal obligation, which has been accepted by all the parties, that decommissioning shall be completed within a two-year period. That is significant progress on the unsatisfactory positions of the past.

It is no coincidence that the two-year period for actual decommissioning to be completed parallels the two-year period under which the early release scheme is to operate. There is a clear link between those two measures in the agreement, and there has to be a similar link in the legislation between the two-year period for early release of prisoners and the two-year period for decommissioning. It is essential that the Government insist on that.

This is not the time to allow any flexibility or fudge, whatever siren voices may be heard from some quarters. If the Government do not insist on that point at this stage, the necessary requirement of decommissioning will never be achieved, and society in Northern Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland will be left in a similar situation to that in South Africa, where far too many weapons were left sloshing around, available for any petty crook or organisation to use time and again.

When Mr. de Klerk addressed people in Dublin and in Belfast on this issue, I was struck by what he said. When asked whether he had any regrets about the peace process in South Africa, he identified decommissioning as an issue to which they did not give sufficient attention. Society in that country has suffered a high price as a result. We must ensure that this time decommissioning is carried out.

Reference has been made to the speech that the Prime Minister gave in Balmoral in Belfast during the referendum campaign. I believe that his speech had a crucial effect on public opinion. He spelled out certain criteria. I am glad that clause 3(9) includes those criteria, because they are essential. However, it is a little disappointing that the speech was more emphatic than the legislation. We must examine these criteria.

The first criterion that the Prime Minister mentioned was

"an end to violence for good".

He referred to a commitment that

"the so-called war is finished, done with, gone".

He used clear, emphatic language, but the legislation refers to whether an organisation is

"committed to the use now and in the future"

of peaceful means. It has lost a little in the translation.

More has been lost in the translation of the next requirement. The Bill refers to whether an organisation

"has ceased to be involved in any acts of violence or of preparation for violence".

In the Balmoral speech, the Prime Minister was much more precise. He talked about

"an end to bombings, killings and beatings . . . an end to targeting and procurement of weapons; progressive abandonment and dismantling of paramilitary structures actively directing and promoting violence".

It might be argued that the term "acts of violence" includes beatings, and I hope that the Secretary of State will interpret and apply it in that way. The Prime Minister's speech, however, refers to the

"progressive abandonment and dismantling of paramilitary structures".

That must take place. If there is to be a genuine commitment to peaceful means and a permanent renunciation of violence, there can be no reason for the retention of private armies.

Mr. Hunter: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that one dimension is missing in the Bill? It makes no reference to racketeering, profiteering and other quasi-economic fundraising activities of terrorism. Should not those activities also be proscribed in relation to early release?

Mr. Trimble: The hon. Gentleman makes a valuable point. Such organised crime has indeed been a feature of parallel terrorism, and there is reason to believe that quite a few of those who have been involved in terrorism in the past will now move into racketeering. I believe it has been said that the Mafia began, many centuries ago, as a so-called liberation movement. That is very much in our minds at present.

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead): The right hon. Gentleman has spoken movingly about the circumstances governing the Bill. I commend him on all the work that he has done in seeking to establish peace in the Province, but is he not now setting the conditions a little too high?

We know that there is not a complete end to terrorism. Every society has some murderous elements, and some organisations, such as the Irish National Liberation Army and the Loyalist Volunteer Force, may still be interested in continuing a terrorist war. An end to all terrorism is a condition that we know has not yet been met. What we want to do is remove a large number of the components of terrorism, and I think that the Bill goes a long way toward doing that.

Mr. Trimble: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point. Life is not as cut and dried as we would like it to be, in many respects. I return, however, to my earlier point. There must be a clear insistence on a commitment to peaceful means, properly meant and carried out in practice, along with a clear change in the nature of the organisations with which we are dealing. Of course there will be splinter groups, but we are not focusing on splinter groups here; we are focusing on mainstream organisations that must change. If we do not insist on that now, the opportunity to bring about change will be lost. Weakness at this stage will result in more problems in the future. I am sure that that is not what the hon. Gentleman intends.

Let me return to my comparison between the Balmoral criteria and those in the Bill. The third Balmoral criterion appears as the fourth in the Bill, and refers to

"co-operating fully with any Commission of the kind referred to in . . . the . . . Decommissioning Act".

The Balmoral speech refers to

"full co-operation with the Independent Commission on decommissioning, to implement the provisions of the Agreement."

The phrase

"to implement the provisions of the Agreement"

is missing from the Bill—the "provisions" being for actual decommissioning within a specific period.

We need to know how the Secretary of State interprets the phrase "co-operating fully". Regrettably, we did not hear that in her opening speech, so we look to the Minister of State to make clear what is meant by the phrase when he winds up the debate. We also look to him to make clear what is meant by "take into account". We need to know that the criteria spelled out by the Prime Minister, and referred to in the Bill, will be applied in practice and that there will be no slippage. It is essential for the Government to carry with them conviction and credibility.

We must also focus on the provision for accelerated release at a point in the future, which the Bill currently specifies as two years hence. We need to know that that is linked to the implementation of the agreement, particularly with regard to decommissioning. We should look closely at clause 10(7), which gives the Secretary of State power to vary the accelerated release date. I think that it may be necessary for the Secretary of State to be able to vary it with regard to particular organisations, rather than generally.

I raised that point when I was consulted on the Bill by officials. I thank the Secretary of State for that consultation, and for the opportunity to discuss these matters. It was pointed out to me that the objective could be achieved in a roundabout way, in that the criteria in clause 3(8) and (9) could be used to remove organisations from the list. Power would then exist, under clause 8, to revoke declarations that had been made. If we are to proceed in that roundabout way, however, clause 8 needs to be strengthened. In particular, an obligation should be imposed to seek revocation if the conditions in clause 3(8) have not been satisfied. Moreover, the commissioners should have a duty to revoke declarations if the conditions in clause 3 are no longer met. We shall want to pursue that point.

There are other problems. I am concerned about what has been said about transferred prisoners. It is a complex matter; I am inclined to agree with what was said by the hon. Member for Bracknell, and I am keen to hear what the Minister of State says. If the provisions for early release apply to people who are transferred from England to Northern Ireland, it is difficult to argue that, when sentences imposed in England are varied by virtue of the legislation, the Irish Government must continue to be bound by undertakings given before the agreement and before the legislation. We need to hear more about that. We need to know what undertakings the Irish Government have given since the agreement, and what discussions have taken place with the Irish Government since then.

[Mr. Trimble]

If the position is as the Secretary of State has said, that will give us concern, just as the statements made by the Irish Government about those who murdered Garda McCabe have given us concern. If the official view of the Irish and British Governments is that the murder of policemen outside Northern Ireland is quite different from the murder of policemen inside Northern Ireland, and that the lives of Northern Ireland policemen are not valued in the same way as the lives of policemen in North Yorkshire or Limerick, that is deeply offensive to society in Northern Ireland as a whole, particularly to the families of policemen who have been murdered in Northern Ireland. It is a very sensitive issue.

We shall need to focus on the period in respect of which the legislation operates, and how it applies to persons who have not been convicted before 10 April or who are charged subsequently. I see that there is an express provision with regard to accelerated release, but I see no equivalent provision with regard to declarations for early release in the earlier clauses. I should have thought that it would be best to apply the legislation simply to those who have been charged before 10 April—that would be a clean cut-off—but we shall want to examine the issue closely in Committee.

Finally, I should like to return to decommissioning and to draw attention to an interesting expression of opinion on the issue that reinforces the need for insistence on this matter. It also shows the way in which opinion elsewhere has changed. The opinion is contained in a recent editorial in *The Washington Post* which, I think, was written to time with the arrival in Washington of the person who was returned to serve as the Member for Belfast, West. The editorial stated:

"It was always evident that decommissioning . . . would be the toughest issues of peace to enforce. Optimists . . . have suggested relying on a strategy of 'trust and rust' . . . counting on the gunmen simply to throw their weapons into a bog. But this is not what the agreement said. It promised not only the security flowing from disarmament but the confidence flowing from the spectacle of orderly, verified disarmament."

The editorial concluded:

"Any hints of a departure from its specific terms, especially on the 'indispensable' issue of disarming, can bring no good."

I have expressed that opinion in more robust terms. It is significant that opinion elsewhere, and particularly what seems to be a change of opinion elsewhere on this matter, shows the Government the international support that there will be if they robustly insist on all terrorist organisations in Northern Ireland demonstrating clearly and unequivocally that the war is over and stating that they must be irrevocably committed to peaceful means before they can benefit from early releases or from other aspects of the agreement.

5.1 pm

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): The legislation is unique. One could search the record books to find legislation to do what this Bill does and have little success. It is unique because it deals with a unique agreement that was reached to deal with unique circumstances that have culminated in 28 years of almost unremitting violence. There can be no perfect legislation in relation to that because it is not a legislative matter: it is a political matter. At the heart of the argument is the fact that the legislation, with its legalities and legislative quirks, is political. We should not lose sight of the fact that it is designed for a political agreement that will help to bring about circumstances that nothing else has been able to achieve over almost 30 years. We should consistently measure that political element against our views of bits and pieces of the legislation.

What is the political element? The accelerated release of prisoners is a cold, harsh fact for all of us in the north of Ireland, but it is an inevitable and inescapable necessity for a lasting agreement. It rankles with me, with Opposition Members and with people throughout the north of Ireland, but we cannot escape the fact that that is the Bill's political content. It is inevitable and inescapable if we are to make the Good Friday agreement work and build permanent peace. It could enable us to achieve the almost impossible, which is to bind the deep wounds of a community that have been caused by violence on both sides and heal the bitterness and hatred.

I ask right hon. and hon. Members to measure the legalistic niceties of parts of the Bill against the political imperative that we all face and knew that we faced when we signed the Good Friday agreement. It is ironic that from that agreement the bitter pill comes first because the first legislative element of the agreement has to do with the release of prisoners. The community's first experience of the agreement will be the legislation for that necessary process. I know that that is in the minds of people throughout the north of Ireland. I ask people to understand that we are dealing not just with sensitivity in the Unionist community. There is sensitivity throughout the community, not just in relation to prisoners but in relation to victims.

Mr. Robert McCartney: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will appreciate that successive Governments have said that there are no political prisoners in Northern Ireland or, indeed, in any part of the United Kingdom, but that only those who have been convicted after due process and beyond any reasonable doubt of crimes that are viewed as such in any civilised society are in gaol. I am sure he will agree that the real issue is the early release not of prisoners but of duly convicted criminals, many of them of the worst conceivable kind.

Mr. Mallon: I note what the hon. and learned Gentleman says. I wish that I had the luxury of the pedantry of judging everything in the terms that he uses. I do not have the luxury of measuring these matters in legalistic terms: I leave that to those who have. I do not engage in the luxury of trying to create arguments that can be won and lost on both sides. The political dimension could evaporate and we could lose all in the process. The hon. and learned Gentleman should realise that, to win an argument, one must convince people of the rightness of what one is doing. I do not question the legal expertise that the hon. and learned Gentleman brought to his intervention and that he will bring to this and other debates. However, I question his political awareness.

Political reality has conditioned the community in the north of Ireland to acceptance of the fact that early release is part of the solution to the problem. It is a unique act of good faith by people in the north of Ireland, in Britain and in the Republic of Ireland. However introverted we may be in the north of Ireland, we should remember that

it is mostly three groups of people who suffer from the violence. They are the people of this country, those of the Republic of Ireland and those in the north of Ireland. Through their Governments and their representatives, those people will make that act of faith when they pass the legislation. It is, indeed, an act of generosity and of vision. That vision will carry us through the most difficult parts of the post-agreement period—and difficult they will be. It is an experience. Indeed, I would go further and call it an act of compassion. For many, perhaps, it is even an act of forgiveness, which, at some time or other, must be faced in life in the north of Ireland.

By a quirk of history, our generation must undergo this experience so that our children and other generations will not have to do so. It is part of our custodianship of the agreement that we signed that we see it through in respect of its integrity and in the terms in which it was written.

The Bill will be very difficult for many in the House. I do not confine that remark to representatives of the Unionist community. I gently remind the House that, following the referendum, when we talk about the people of the north of Ireland, we are surely talking about all the people of the north of Ireland. The community that my party and I represent comprises 42 per cent. and more of the people of the north of Ireland. Let us not get into a habit of dismissing a sizeable section of the community. That will not happen; those days are over. Indeed, with all due respect, we will not let it happen. That is what partnership is about.

When talking about yes votes and no votes, to which reference has been made, let us not forget the section of the community that, by and large, voted yes. Let us not forget as well the people of the Republic of Ireland, who took an enormous step in amending their constitution to ensure that it would not be perceived as presenting a threat either to the people of the north of Ireland or to peace.

In dealing with such legislation, we are treading on eggs; there is no question or doubt about that. It will be easy for people to win a little battle on a small legalistic point, but it will be much more difficult to achieve the totality of requirement through the Bill and other factors, and to gauge and view things in terms of that totality, which will have to be done.

I repeat, I understand the feelings of people here. I repeat, I sat in talks for two years in rooms with people who had murdered a close colleague of mine and had served their sentence for it. I live in the north of Ireland; I always have. Since 1985—I cannot be precise about the figure—between 400 and 500 terrorists' sentences have been reviewed. Those people are walking on the streets of the north of Ireland as a result of a review procedure that is similar to the one in the Bill. I hope that that process will add to the potential success of the agreement.

More than anything else, the Bill places a debt of honour on the shoulders of all organisations that are connected to paramilitary activity. It takes the initiative, it puts them in a position where they owe it to the communities in the north and south of Ireland, the people living here, the two Governments who signed the agreement and all political parties, to ensure that there are no tricks, no games, no strokes. We are playing for the future, and that debt of honour will have to be honoured.

In just the same way, we must honour our own word. This legislation represents the first part of the agreement to go through the House. We must remember that the agreement was overwhelmingly endorsed by the people of Ireland—north and south. This debate has particular significance. It is essential that we send the strongest signal to everyone of our determination to implement the agreement completely and in strict conformity with its terms. In passing this Bill, we will place a debt of honour on parties connected with paramilitary organisations. This Government, the Irish Government, my party and the other political parties signed the agreement, and we must honour our word not just to the House or our parties but to the people who gave their mandate in the referendum. None of us can break our word to the people of the north of Ireland who gave theirs so readily in the referendum. We cannot take the little bits that we do not like and try to change them to what we would prefer. If the terms of the agreement are altered in any significant way, the faith of all those who voted for the agreement will be breached.

Creating peace is one of the great challenges. There has been a remarkable prisoner culture in Ireland down through the centuries. One of the elements of hope, which I think the Secretary of State has recognised on several occasions, is the development of thinking in the—now—political parties which stemmed from inside the prisons. We should recognise that. I speak as someone who has no prisoners, no guns and no Semtex and who does not threaten people or violence. I gently remind everyone that that does not mean either that the integrity of arguments does not stand up or that those arguments can be ignored.

I appreciate everything that the Prime Minister has done in trying to ensure the endorsement of the agreement in the referendum. I again ask that we always remember that there are two sections of the community. Both want peace; both want—and have said so—the agreement to work. Let us do what we did in reaching the agreement. As people of honour, we signed it; as people of honour, we should deliver it.

I ask that the agreement be adhered to. My party will insist that it will be. There can be no question of introducing new elements or of imposing preconditions which were considered and rejected during negotiation between the parties and the Governments. It is also important that implementation of the legislation takes fully into account the context in which the agreement was negotiated and the timetable on which its various aspects must be implemented. That especially applies to clause 3(9)(d), to which reference has been made. Subsections (9) and (8) must not be used as a means to rewrite any party's understanding of what constitutes a "complete and unequivocal" ceasefire.

It is worth remembering that, on 5 March, both the British and Irish Governments recognised that

"a complete, unqualified and unequivocal IRA ceasefire was being fully and continuously observed."

The definition of ceasefire applying in that statement cannot now be changed to suit the changing mood in any section of the community. If the definition applies, we should proceed on that basis. If it does not, let the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State come to the House and tell us how it has changed. If we proceed on that basis, we can proceed honourably in implementing that which was honourably signed on Good Friday.

One of the strengths of the north of Ireland has been the generosity, humanity and spirit of those who have been victims. I have often questioned my own capacity, if any of my family had been killed or seriously injured, to show the generosity and magnanimity demonstrated by those who have been victims.

[Mr. Mallon]

When we pass the Bill, we should therefore not engage in an emotional binge on the suffering of victims and their bereaved. We should remember their compassion and generosity in supporting the agreement. They are making a major sacrifice in overcoming their prejudices. We should approach passing the Bill in the same manner. If we do, we will be able to make a unique piece of legislation into something that is crucial for the future.

If we niggle at the Bill—going for little victories over a word or two, and the little legalisms—when we know that we are taking a political decision, we will only be adding fuel to the fire of controversy and bitterness, of which we already have plenty.

Surely our job as legislators, and as people who are trying to lead in the north of Ireland, is to say again to people, "Good Friday was a good Friday. The referendum result was your decision. Now we assume our responsibilities and implement your wishes in full and in their complete integrity."

5.22 pm

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): On behalf of Liberal Democrat Members, I thank the Secretary of State and her officials for welcoming us, helping us to understand the Bill, and consulting us fully on it. We are very grateful to her for that.

It is now exactly two months since Good Friday and the historic agreement in Belfast. In those two months, we have witnessed a hard-fought referendum campaign, and, in referendums in Northern Ireland and the Republic, overwhelming support for the settlement. We are now well on the way to the first elections to the new assembly.

Liberal Democrat Members whole-heartedly support the agreement, and we will be whole-heartedly supporting the legislation. It is as simple as that. Some hon. Members may suggest that the Bill has been born of compromised principles. Liberal Democrats say that the overall agreement is a principled compromise, and that the legislation flows straight out of the agreement. We cannot have the agreement without the legislation. If one picks and chooses which parts of the agreement are implemented and which are ignored, the agreement would not have been worth making with that person in the first place.

We should do well to consider the legislation in context—the context not only of the agreement signed in Belfast, but of earlier legislation. The Northern Ireland (Remission of Sentences) Act 1995, which was initiated by the previous Government, set a precedent on the issue. We must recognise and accept that precedent.

The 1995 Act was passed by Parliament only a few months after the first republican and loyalist ceasefire, and increased from one third to one half the amount of remission that prisoners convicted of scheduled offences could expect. The Act has led to about 240 prisoners being released on licence earlier than they otherwise would have been. Subsequently, only two of those prisoners' licences have been revoked. The House united behind the pioneering 1995 legislation, and I hope that it will today unite behind the Act's successor.

The Bill, if closely considered, suggests that it will affect a similar number of prisoners as the 1995 Act. The effect of the legislation will be that about four out of every five prisoners currently serving a sentence for scheduled offences will be released within two years. However, even without the legislation, about 45 per cent. of those prisoners would have been released within two years. Putting together those two facts, and applying some elementary arithmetic, the fact emerges that most of the prisoners who will be released on licence because of the Bill would, without it, have been set free entirely.

The legislation is not—as some people would have us believe—a swinging open of the prison doors, allowing a flood of prisoners to run amok, but a jarring open of those doors, little by little, so that inmates might smell the fresh breath of a society at peace, which we hope will stay at peace. The Bill will allow them to come out of prison on a very tight and secure leash.

Such legislation must, of course, have some very carefully constructed safeguards. Perhaps some of the most important safeguards are stated in clause 9, which deals with the terms of the licence under which prisoners will be released. If the terms are broken, prisoners can again be locked up, and their sentences can be reimposed. We have to recognise that provision. If we put ourselves in the position of the prisoners, we might realise how strongly that provision will act to deter reoffending.

Liberal Democrat Members welcome the independent element in the process that will be provided by the sentence review board, and we welcome specifically the independent commissioners. I hope that their independence will give the process added credibility, and ensure that not only the spirit of the Good Friday agreement but its detail—which is embodied in the legislation's detail—are put into practice.

We welcome the fact that all prisoners will have to have served a certain amount of their sentence, depending on the length of their sentence. Anyone who thought that the Bill was a "get out of gaol free" card will be disappointed.

We welcome also the flexibility inherent in the legislation. The anticipated two-year time frame is amendable. Clause 14 allows the Secretary of State to suspend and revive the entire process, depending on how well the agreement is working.

Despite the legislation's virtues, it has some flaws of omission—the most important of which centres on the issue of victim notification. In the light of the comprehensive Bloomfield report on the victims of the violence of the past 30 years, it is important that victims are not overlooked in the legislation. Victims are as essential as prisoners to the process working.

I ask the House to imagine how upset victims would be if confronted unexpectedly by the person who harmed them or killed their relative. A victim may have spent years trying to put behind them their horrible and painful memories, only to have those memories ripped open by a chance encounter. If anyone thinks that such chance encounters are unlikely, think of those who might go out of their way to make them happen—such as tabloid journalists; the agreement's opponents; or anyone who might wish simply to rekindle the troubles.

There are victims not only in Northern Ireland. Victims on the mainland will have to be protected, and their feelings considered.

Mr. Hunter: I take exception to a comment made by the hon. Gentleman. To oppose the agreement is not to

want a return to violence; many people genuinely and sincerely believe that the agreement is flawed. May I invite him to reconsider those words?

Mr. Willis: I am more than pleased not only to reconsider those words, but to make it absolutely clear—as I did last week, in a question to the Secretary of State—that, after speaking at a meeting in Londonderry, to people from both north and south of the border who had voted no in the referendum, I share that concern. It was certainly a concern of our party that we should not make the mistake of thinking that people who voted no in the referendum wanted a continuation of the warfare that has gone on in Northern Ireland. I accept the hon. Gentleman's rebuke, and am glad to put the matter straight.

The deep concern of families in Northern Ireland is mirrored in my area of North Yorkshire by that of the family of Special Constable Glen Goodman, who was shot when he and his fellow officer Sandy Kelly stopped a car carrying the IRA killer Paul Magee in June 1992. It will be difficult to persuade the parents, friends and colleagues of Special Constable Goodman that Paul Magee should be released from prison without serving 30 years, which is why the recognition of the position of victims and the need to support them through this process must be one of the most important components of the Bill.

The provision should include prisoners who have been transferred to prisons in the Republic of Ireland. When we get a definitive answer from the Secretary of State, which I am sure we will in due course, it is also important that she deals with whether the Government of the Republic of Ireland are contemplating similar legislation. The hon. Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) is right to say that we cannot pass legislation in a British Parliament that would be binding on the Republic, but there is nothing to stop the Republic passing similar legislation to mirror the agreement.

Mr. McNamara: May I repeat what is contained within the agreement under the heading, "Prisoners"? It states:

"1. Both Governments will put in place mechanisms to provide for an accelerated programme for the release of prisoners, including transferred prisoners, convicted of scheduled offences in Northern Ireland or, in the case of those sentenced outside Northern Ireland"—

which would include the Republic of Ireland as well as this island—

"similar offences (referred to hereafter as qualifying prisoners)."

Mr. Willis: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for pointing that out. That is at the heart of the confusion. Clearly the agreement intends that arrangements will be made in Northern Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland. This Bill refers to the arrangements in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Robert McCartney *rose—*

Mr. Willis: I will certainly give way when I have finished this point.

The reality—this is why I mentioned Special Constable Goodman and his family—is that their relationship as victims is to a prisoner who is now held in a Republic of Ireland gaol. When the legislation—or arrangements—is produced, it is imperative on our Government to ensure that we use our best offices with the Republic of Ireland Government to see that similar support is given, irrespective of whether the prisoner is released in the south or the north, whatever the arrangements. That is the heart of the confusion, which I have no doubt will be sorted out.

Mr. McCartney: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. His subsequent remarks have clarified the point that I was about to make. However, do I understand him correctly to be saying that he feels that, if qualified prisoners are released in Northern Ireland, someone who has committed a crime on the United Kingdom mainland and has been transferred to the Republic of Ireland should have the benefit of exactly similar provisions and should be released in exactly the same way? In other words, Mr. Magee would be entitled to be released within a similar two-year scheme, as the hon. Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) properly and correctly pointed out.

Mr. Willis: My understanding from the terms of the agreement is that that will be the case. That is the difficulty that the family, friends and colleagues of Special Constable Goodman have, and it is a problem that all victims will have when a prisoner is released, no matter what the sentence. Clearly, that problem must be dealt with. Our plea from the Liberal Democrat Benches is that the legislation should support the victims, and we shall table an amendment to that effect in Committee.

Mr. William Thompson (West Tyrone): Does the hon. Gentleman not consider it an insult to the relatives of those who have been murdered to let the person who committed the crime out, and then express regret to the relative that they have been let out?

Mr. Willis: If I have in any way given that impression—indeed, if the Secretary of State or any other hon. Member has done so—it would be wholly wrong. Such an arrangement would be incomprehensible in a civilised society. Clearly, whether the hon. Gentleman agrees with the principle behind the Bill and embedded in the Belfast agreement that the release of prisoners is an essential part of the peace process is up to him to decide.

I am arguing that the needs of victims have to be taken into consideration. We also argue that, before any prisoner is released—rather than after release—we should deal with the victim in the most sympathetic manner. Without a basic provision to safeguard the dignity of victims, this legislation would be a lopsided enactment of the Good Friday agreement, giving prisoners their due while snubbing their victims, and perhaps even making victims suffer twice.

The Northern Ireland Office, or, indeed, the partners in the peace process, may well be powerless to act, but scenes of triumphal behaviour by released prisoners could do more to destabilise the process than almost anything else, and we have to work to avoid it. We must continue to emphasise that the only winner in this process must be peace for all the people of Northern Ireland. This Bill is before Parliament for them, and it is for a lasting peace that the victims have made such huge sacrifices, which we must not forget.

[Mr. Willis]

I understand that our sister party, the Alliance party, in Northern Ireland has led the way in that area, making victim notification a central part of its post-agreement platform. Just as the views of nationalists and Unionists need to be reconciled, so too do the differences between prisoners and their victims. Victims and their families deserve recognition and respect. Unlike prisoners, victims have no political wing. We all have a responsibility to ensure that they are not ignored in the process.

The simplest remedy to the problem is a basic courtesy. Victims of terrorist acts should be notified when the perpetrator of an act from which they have suffered is released. Victims should have the right not to be informed—some may want to put the whole business behind them, and that should be their right. Other victims may be difficult to identify, but every effort should be made to trace them. As the Bloomfield report has made clear, difficulty in tracing victims should not be used to justify the legislation being enacted unamended. If it is not amended, we will consider it a lopsided enactment of the agreement, honouring commitments to prisoners but not to victims.

Therefore, will the Government amend the legislation before it reaches Committee, to ensure that victims are notified of the release of prisoners who made them victims? The Secretary of State or the Minister will undoubtedly respond to that question in winding up.

One omission that probably does not require an amendment to the legislation—a ministerial assurance will suffice—is: when is a ceasefire not a ceasefire? The political process that led to the Good Friday agreement was littered with a wonderland of semantics. Some phrases were used by different people to mean totally different things, and some phrases were even used by the same people to mean different things. When I heard some of the language, I wondered whether we were at a mad hatter's tea party, and I am glad to see that we are finally climbing out of the rabbit hole. The tightening of what constitutes a ceasefire is welcome, and absolutely necessary.

I am glad that persisting with punishment beatings now constitutes an infringement of the ceasefire, and that the notion of an acceptable level of violence has gone the way of the no campaign in last month's referendum. Will the Secretary of State assure us that she will consult the Chief Constable and the General Officer Commanding before deciding whether the ceasefire has been broken, or whether it remains worthy of the name and the entitlement that that name bestows? I am sure that she would hold such consultations as a matter of course, but it would good to hear an assurance in the House.

The greatest impact of the legislation will be on those organisations to be listed under the definitions in clause 3(8)—terrorist organisations that have not enacted a ceasefire. Because of the legislation, any prisoner belonging to those organisations will plead for a ceasefire to be declared. Because of the agreement, and the fact that most paramilitary groups seem to be abiding by it, those organisations will feel the strength of the security forces concentrated against them; and because of the referendum, in which 71 per cent. voted for the agreement, there will be nothing to gain and everything to lose by pursuing an armed struggle.

The legislation will be a vital element in bringing lasting peace in Northern Ireland, and the Liberal Democrats will support it tonight.

5.40 pm

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Hull, North): I welcome the speed with which the Government have introduced this difficult, sensitive and emotional piece of legislation. It is difficult for all parties in the House and for all the people of these islands, because we rightly speak of the pain suffered by the people in Northern Ireland—although the worst atrocity was perpetrated in the Republic of Ireland—but many people here in Britain have also suffered the pain and anger that flow from terrorist violence. People have been victims of loyalist as well as republican violence, and have also suffered at the hands of the security forces, even if the pain was sometimes inflicted inadvertently.

The Bill is important and necessary, and we must be very careful indeed with it. We must reject all calls for amendments that introduce new preconditions to the agreement and seek to rewrite it.

Mr. Peter Robinson: Does the hon. Gentleman consider any of the undertakings given by the Prime Minister in the referendum campaign to amount to what he describes as new preconditions?

Mr. McNamara: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, the statements from my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister are built into the Bill, and do not necessarily amount to any rewriting of the agreement.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has shown considerable courage and skill. She is right to say that the Bill applies only to prisoners in Northern Ireland: it is a Northern Irish Bill. What applies in the Republic of Ireland depends on what the Government there do to implement the agreement, to which they have also put their hand. I presume that people in the Northern Ireland Office will hear from people in the Department of Foreign Affairs in Dublin precisely what is happening there, and I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will be able to give that information to the House later today.

My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) made a point that was echoed by the hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter), but if they read the Bill carefully, they will see that the Scots Guardsmen are covered by it, and that it is up to them whether they want to take advantage of it. One does not have to be a member of a paramilitary organisation to be eligible for early release under the Bill; one need only have been accused and convicted of a scheduled offence.

Mr. Robert McCartney: I believe that the hon. Gentleman's interpretation is correct, but the point was that an accelerated release was being contended for for the two Scots Guardsmen, rather than an application under the Bill, and therein lies the difference between the two cases.

Mr. McNamara: Given the time scale that is being considered, the legislation could be on the stocks before the consultations on the case have been concluded.

Dr. Godman: Whatever the merits of the case for the early release of the two Scots Guardsmen, as a west of

Scotland Member I can tell my hon. Friend and the House that rarely does a surgery go by without someone coming along to say that the lads deserve a break. I have mixed feelings on the matter, but I make the point because, even though my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) could not be described as a west of Scotland Member, I would bet my bottom dollar that he receives similar representations at his surgeries.

Mr. McNamara: My hon. Friend is right. When the soldier from Yorkshire was in a similar situation, we also received such representations. In all the cases, the soldiers had been found guilty, and had, on occasions, concocted stories that the courts were not prepared to accept and that tended to cloud any claims of innocence that they might have made. I make no stronger point than that.

Mr. Robathan: It is true that, in the case of Private Clegg, a story was concocted, but Guardsmen Fisher and Wright throughout told precisely what they believed to be the truth. In my view, they committed a grievous error that led to a fatality. I make no criticism of the court, but they did not concoct a story. Perhaps the most iniquitous aspect of the matter is that they are serving their sentence whereas people who deliberately set out to commit murder are to be released.

Mr. McNamara: As the hon. Gentleman said, they committed a grievous offence, and they are therefore covered by the Bill. The previous Government, whom he supported, failed lamentably to find a suitable offence, less than murder but more than mere manslaughter, to cover members of the security forces in that position, despite the fact that the then Opposition made many efforts to get them to consider the matter seriously.

My next point concerns the sentence review commissioners, one of whom "shall be appointed chairman". The relevant clause refers to people

"commanding widespread acceptance throughout the community in Northern Ireland."

There were unhappy words and experiences between representatives of the two communities over appointment of members of Mr. Patten's commission on the Royal Ulster Constabulary. I hope that that can be avoided this time and that there will be more careful consideration of community recommendations, so that the commissioners will be seen to have widespread support in all sections of the community.

I now turn to the main burden of my speech. The South African experience shows that, in the search for truth and reconciliation, the healing process for individuals and their communities requires considerable long-term care and attention, but that the release of prisoners is also an essential ingredient of conflict resolution. It is right that the matter should be tackled early, so that deeper sources of pain and hurt can be addressed.

The Bill provides for the inclusion of all prisoners whose convictions are conflict-related. That would include members of the armed forces. It would also include individuals who are, or who may claim to be, victims of miscarriages of justice. Some prisoners on paramilitary wings may have chosen to remain silent about their wrongful convictions. Some who have protested their innocence may have associated with paramilitary prisoners; others will not have.

I should like the Minister of State to say that the access of prisoners to the Criminal Cases Review Commission and their right of appeal in either jurisdiction will not be limited or forfeited as a result of their transfer to another jurisdiction or by accelerated release. People who fulfil the criteria and obtain accelerated release but who claim to have been victims of miscarriages of justice, or who have had their cases referred to the CCRC, should not have their position prejudiced by applying for early release.

I should also like the Minister to say that, where prisoners have declared and maintained their innocence, it will not be held against them, as it is in some cases in the rest of the United Kingdom when prisoners appeal for parole: because they claim that they never committed the offence in the first place, they have to stay in prison because they are not showing remorse.

The next matter to which I wish to refer is the integration of former prisoners. Prisoners have played a key role in this peace process. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State showed when she visited the Maze prison at Christmas, it was essential that the prisoners understood the Government's intentions and what their representatives outside were seeking to achieve. The prisoners who have been released and those who are still inside will be critical in making all aspects of the agreement work and in helping the search for reconciliation.

I therefore welcome the specific commitment by the Government in the agreement, to which the parties participating have signed up:

"The Governments continue to recognise the importance of measures to facilitate the reintegration of prisoners into the community by providing support both prior to and after release, including assistance directed towards availing of employment opportunities, re-training and/or re-skilling, and further education."

The prisoners' organisations must be recognised as part of the consultative process in trying to achieve that, as must the Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders and appropriate voluntary agencies, to develop proper resettlement and retraining plans for each prisoner.

We do not know precisely how many prisoners are involved. In answering a written question, my hon. Friend the Minister of State could not give me the number of people who regard themselves as politically motivated and who have been through the system. The figure may be around 10,000, although republicans claim that it may be as high as 20,000. If there are that many people, making a new start for them will be difficult.

All prisoners, whatever plaudits they receive at their party conferences, have disadvantages, and some will face discrimination in gaining employment. In the light of the agreement and optimism for the future, we should consider how long people released from prison after serving time for scheduled offences should keep criminal records.

A criminal record can bar someone from entering professions. It bars entry to the law, social work, teaching, banking, insurance, policing and the civil service. It may affect a person's ability to apply for a licence to drive a public carriage vehicle or taxi. It may affect access to education and eligibility for grants and other forms of assistance. Security vetting can affect great areas of employment. The operation of section 42 of the Fair

[Mr. McNamara]

Employment Act, which the Government are reviewing, may discourage companies from employing former prisoners.

There are different aspects to the problem, and different ways have been sought to deal with it. In South Africa, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission proposed an indemnification Bill to expunge the records of political prisoners. In Canada, where there were problems in the Yukon with reintegrating the disproportionate number of former prisoners from the indigenous native American population, there is a specific clause in the Bill of Rights preventing discrimination on grounds of a criminal record. I know that the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights is examining that, but reintegration of prisoners into the community merits careful consideration.

Prison officers also face an uncertain future. The inevitable reorganisation of the Northern Ireland Prison Service is likely to result in the permanent closure of the Maze prison. That will have consequences for job security and career development among the officers and staff of the Northern Ireland Prison Service. That must be carefully addressed. They will lose their jobs, when they have long served the community and been exposed to dangerous positions. How do we protect and compensate them, and give them retraining and resettlement? Downsizing will follow naturally from this legislation, and we cannot ignore our responsibilities to former prison officers.

The closures will affect local communities and their economies. I am happy to say that the Government have started such a dialogue with the Northern Ireland Prison Officers Association and the people involved. That is welcome, because, unless we start creating some confidence, we could have prison incidents, unacceptable risks might be taken, and we could get political flashpoints.

If we are making changes in preparation for prisoners going out into the free world, it would be well also to consider how prison regimes might be altered so that matters such as grounds for compassionate leave, parole and weekend leave can be handled more quickly, effectively and efficiently. I suggest that we should consider carefully whether strip searching, especially of women prisoners, cannot be brought to an end.

The major point made by the hon. Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay) was on whether there should be some tightening up in the legislation, or whether prisoner release should be directly associated with decommissioning in one way or another. I would reject associating releases with decommissioning. I believe that the terms suggested by the hon. Gentleman would constitute a rewriting of the terms of the Good Friday agreement. He was trying to revisit matters raised during the negotiations and rejected. It was an attempt to rewrite something that the parties to the negotiations accepted could not be done in that particular way. I believe, as does my hon. Friend the Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon), in the integrity of the agreement.

I draw the attention of the House to a letter that some may have received from the Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders, an organisation with considerable experience in dealing with released prisoners from both sides of the community who have been sentenced for scheduled offences. NIACRO said:

> "An essential part of that Agreement was the commitment that the majority of politically motivated prisoners would, if the peace held, be released within two years. It is our view, based on our experience and knowledge of prisoners, their organisations and the communities from which they come, that, if the commitment to release is altered, or if new conditions are put upon it, the Agreement will fail and large scale violence will return."

I ask people who seek to alter the agreement to listen to that letter. The organisation is experienced in this matter. It would be wrong for Members of Parliament not to hear the expression of the opinion of experienced people, no matter how unpalatable it may be to them.

NIACRO continues:

> "Specifically—if a new condition is laid down in legislation, that decommissioning of weapons must occur before, or in some other way be concretely linked to, prisoner release, that would represent a breach of the terms of the Agreement and would be seen as the failure of peaceful means and a reason for a return to violence."

That is not my opinion, or what I want to see. It is the considered judgment of what will happen if the agreement is altered.

NIACRO goes on:

> "The Draft Northern Ireland (Sentences) Bill provides that the Secretary of State shall take into account whether an organisation is fully co-operating with the Decommissioning Body in assessing the state of their ceasefire . . . That, in itself, represents an interpretation of the Agreement rather than its actual words; to go any further could be disastrous."

Those are NIACRO's words, not mine. I ask the House to bear that opinion carefully in mind.

Mr. Jeffrey Donaldson (Lagan Valley): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that implicit in that statement is the threat of renewed violence, and that organisations are not really committed to peaceful and democratic means but are engaged in a tactical ceasefire, and will revert to violence if they do not get their way? Is he aware of another memorandum circulated by NIACRO to its staff officers, which says that the next argument to be pursued is that for an amnesty for those terrorists who have not yet been brought to justice for offences that they have committed? Does he agree with NIACRO that it should pursue such an amnesty? What does that say about NIACRO?

Mr. McNamara: On the first point, there is a real chance of an increase in violence if the terms of the agreement are not honoured and if people seek to change it. That does not mean that I approve of an increase in violence or want it. God knows, I have seen enough of terrorism. It has touched people in our families just as much as it has touched other people's. We know what it is about. I do not want to see an increase in violence. I am telling hon. Members what an organisation supported by the Government and working specifically to resettle prisoners of all sorts feels about the situation.

On the second point, about an amnesty, I have not seen the memorandum. Until I have seen its contents, I will not make a judgment on it, but it seems to me that, in whatever scheme is created, offences committed before the declaration of the second ceasefire and the signing of

the agreement are a different kettle of fish from offences committed after the ceasefire and the signing of the agreement.

Mr. Robert McCartney: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that the terms of the agreement are what all the parties have agreed to and that they cannot be altered, amended or varied by any party, including the Government. Is it not the case that the Prime Minister has led other participants in the negotiations and those who voted yes in the referendum to believe that the agreement could be altered by legislation passed in this House to meet some of the points that would certainly have caused them to vote no had he not given those pledges?

Mr. McNamara: I do not accept that. I do not find anything contained in the agreement, on decommissioning or other matters such as the membership of the Executive, that goes beyond what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said. What my right hon. Friend said is contained in the agreement. I believe that he acquitted himself well on the issue, and that he and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State deserve merit for their sterling work to ensure that an agreement was reached by which so many of the parties could feel themselves bound.

Mr. Grieve: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the wording of clause 3(9)(b)—

"has ceased to be involved in any acts of violence or of preparation for violence"—

means that preparation for violence and a failure to decommission must go hand in hand? If there is no decommissioning, under the terms of the agreement that must amount to a preparation for the renewal of violence.

Mr. McNamara: That is not so. Her Majesty's Government have an Army, a Navy and an Air Force. They are not preparing for aggression: they are at peace. If someone has a gun at home—that is allowed in Northern Ireland—that does not necessarily mean that he will go out and kill people with it. If I am asked whether there should be immediate decommissioning and whether all illegal arms should be surrendered, I answer yes. But if I am asked whether I think that will happen, I answer no.

I agreed strongly with the point about victims stressed by the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis). Whether this is a matter for the legislation is a point that can be considered when we see the hon. Gentleman's amendment. It was the Bloomfield report which dealt humanely and compassionately with the victims of violence. What matters more than the legislation is that the spirit of Bloomfield's recommendations should be put into operation.

This is an important Bill. The House is perhaps unhappy with it because of what it implies and what it means. It is nevertheless significant, and it should go through the House without alteration.

6.11 pm

Mr. Andrew Hunter (Basingstoke): I shall begin with an historical footnote. In 1996, after the IRA abandoned the first so-called ceasefire, there was an appreciable apprehension that the loyalist terrorist organisations might resume full-scale violence. I was a fringe participant in a number of meetings and discussions with Ministers at which, among other things, the option of early release for terrorist prisoners was considered as an inducement to prevent loyalist terrorists from returning to violence. Although I had some misgivings, I thought that the option should at least be considered seriously and purposefully. Indeed, I wrote a paper suggesting certain mechanisms and procedures that would allow the early release of loyalist terrorist prisoners to be implemented. My suggestions were not entirely dissimilar to some aspects of the Bill.

My proposals were warmly received in Dublin because the Irish Government were anxious for any movement on the prisoner issue; but the Secretary of State rejected them out of hand. He argued strongly against the details of my proposals and against any further relaxation of the sentences of loyalist prisoners.

In the course of the subsequent discussions I became increasingly aware of the terrifying implications of going down the road that has ultimately led us to the early release provisions of the Belfast agreement and of this Bill. For the time being my view may be a minority and unpopular one, but I shall state it nevertheless. I oppose the Bill in absolute terms as a matter of principle, and on pragmatic grounds as well.

I oppose the Bill in principle because there is no moral justification for the early release of prisoners. When we pursue policies in a moral vacuum, we run the risk of courting trouble. I do not accept that crimes of violence are less serious, or that their perpetrators can be treated more leniently, if they have been committed for political motives. The Bill therefore sets a dangerous precedent. It is incompatible with the rule of law; it marks the triumph of terror. The argument is morally wrong, and if we give the Bill a Second Reading tonight we shall be deeply mistaken.

The early release of prisoners is a scandalous affront to the victims of terror. Justice for them should not be cast aside lightly in the pursuit of political expediency. Early release is an intolerable pay-off for the bravery and sacrifices of the security forces—not least the past and present officers of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, 300 of whom have lost their lives and many more of whom have suffered dreadful injuries while protecting their fellow citizens from the monstrous evil of terrorist violence.

Many people voted yes in the referendum in the hope of a better future for themselves and their children. But let us consider the sort of values on which this new Northern Ireland is to be built. The hon. and learned Member for North Down (Mr. McCartney) has made the point eloquently; I hope that he will forgive me for quoting him:

"It will be a society which bends morality and justice for political expediency . . . a society governed by those whose supporters elevate killers into media celebrities . . . and homicidal maniacs into heroes and role models".

This is not the way to build a just and stable society in Northern Ireland. I oppose the early release of terrorist prisoners on those absolute grounds.

There is another reason why I dislike the Bill. Unless it is amended in Committee, it will be an abiding monument to a broken promise. Many Unionists voted yes in the referendum because they understood that the Prime Minister had promised a direct link in legislation between decommissioning and Sinn Fein's participation in the Executive, and between decommissioning and the

[Mr. Andrew Hunter]

early release of terrorist prisoners—what the hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Donaldson) has called the precondition of actual and on-going decommissioning.

Unionists believed that the Prime Minister had made that promise because the media told them that he had. The media had also told them that the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble), my hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay) and others had welcomed the fact that the Prime Minister made that promise. The Northern Ireland Office will have known of those media reports; to the best of my knowledge it issued no correction or denial. We can therefore assume that the reports were accurate. They were, after all, consistent with what the Prime Minister told the House on 6 May, which was that decommissioning was part of the giving up of violence essential for the early release of prisoners. He repeated the pledge in respect of Sinn Fein's participation in government in his referendum day letter, which appeared in the *Irish News* and *News Letter*:

"Representatives of parties linked to paramilitary groups can only be in a future Northern Ireland Government if it is clear that there is to be no more violence and the threat of violence has gone. That doesn't mean just decommissioning".

There followed the catalogue of other measures that we have heard a number of times.

On the release of prisoners, as the Bill stands and unless it is amended, the Prime Minister has broken his promise and the people of Northern Ireland will know it. The Bill contains no direct linkage between the actual and on-going decommissioning and early release. The relevant requirement, stated in clause 3(9)(d), is that an organisation

"is co-operating fully with any Commission of the kind referred to in section 7 of the Northern Ireland Arms Decommissioning Act 1997."

Nothing in that Act or in the Bill demands actual and on-going decommissioning as a precondition for early release, or for participation in the government of Northern Ireland. The Bill as it stands points to a Prime Minister who has gone back on his word and taken the people of Northern Ireland for a ride. He duped many Unionists into voting yes with a promise that he has not fulfilled.

If one promise has been broken, how can the people of Northern Ireland be sure that others will not be broken? What about the promises of a secure future for the RUC and about terrorists not becoming members of a new police force? Those count for nothing, especially now that we know of the Secretary of State's private dealings with the IRA on those matters. Unless the Bill is amended, the issue of early release will prove to be another obscene landmark on what was intended to be a peace process, but which, in reality, long ago became a shameful process of appeasement.

6.21 pm

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): I reject utterly the observations made by the hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter). Far from being an obscenity, the Bill is a political inevitability, as my hon. Friend the Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) said in his quite remarkable speech.

I hesitate to involve myself in debates of this sort because I do not live in Northern Ireland, although I am a frequent visitor and like to think of myself as a friend of Northern Ireland. Many of the Northern Ireland Members sitting opposite know my constituency well—especially the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth). When we speak of violence and of the victims of violence and their families, we in Scotland know that we have been enormously lucky because, over the past 30 years, there has been only a handful of violence incidents. For some strange pan-Celtic reason, the General Army Council of the Provisional IRA decided not to extend its so-called military campaign to Scotland. I recall—I was teaching in Edinburgh at the time—a bomb being detonated in the ladies lavatory in Edinburgh castle in 1971 and the father of the infamous Jason Campbell bombing a Catholic pub in Glasgow not far from where my wife was born and raised, but such isolated incidents apart we in Scotland have been lucky.

However, we have lost constituents who, when serving with the security forces, have been murdered in Northern Ireland. I remember a young lad from Port Glasgow—a married man with a very young family—being murdered while out on patrol in Northern Ireland. Only two months ago, I was in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Newry and Armagh and saw teenage soldiers, members of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, on patrol. As an ex-service man, I had the good sense not to go over and ask, "Which constituency are you from?" I left them to their military activities, but I would have bet my last pound that one or two members of that patrol were constituents of mine, because the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders recruit widely in the west of Scotland. Nevertheless, as an individual, I am nothing more and nothing less than a frequent visitor to Northern Ireland.

Mr. Winnick: Speaking of atrocities, 25 people were butchered on 21 November 1974 in Birmingham, very near my constituency; we are never likely to forget that, or all the other atrocities. Regarding the unfortunate and negative speech made by the hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter), does my hon. Friend recall the Northern Ireland (Remission of Sentences) Act 1995, which was introduced by the previous Government and in effect stated, on the basis of an IRA ceasefire, that prisoners would be released without any qualification whatsoever? We are to a large extent following what the previous Government did in this respect; moreover, we are laying down qualifications, which are stated in the Bill.

Dr. Godman: I recall that legislation going through the House, but I do not recall the hon. Member for Basingstoke offering the observation that it was obscene.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): When the hon. Gentleman said that he was an infrequent participant in debates on Northern Ireland I was rather amazed, because we welcome his participation and the records of the House show that he has, quite rightly, participated well. We recognise the sacrifice of people from Great Britain—soldiers and civilians—resulting from the IRA campaign. That is in part why we are concerned that there has not been the mettle in this place to face down terrorism instead of encourage it.

Dr. Godman: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his kind remarks. There is a tangled historical relationship

between Scotland and Ireland and I am proud to participate in debates such as this, but I have not experienced the violence at first hand and nor has any member of my family. I believe that the Bill, along with other measures taken by the Labour Government, will lead to those young soldier constituents of mine either coming home or serving elsewhere, perhaps as United Nations peacekeepers.

Mr. McNamara: My hon. Friend welcomed the statement made by the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth), but I am sure that he does not accept the last sentence; that the House has encouraged terrorism and has not had the mettle to face up to it.

Dr. Godman: My honourable and old Friend's attention must have lapsed for a second. I did not say that I welcomed the statement made by the hon. Member for Belfast, South; I said that I welcomed what he said about my involvement in debates. The hon. Gentleman knows only too well where I stand vis-a-vis his perspective on these issues.

I should like to put the Bill in the context of what was recently described to me as the "constitutional helter-skelter" in which we are involved. This has been a remarkable year for Northern Ireland. My right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State and Northern Ireland Ministers have played a remarkable role. In particular, I congratulate the Minister of State, my hon. Friend the Member for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram), on being in the Chamber this afternoon when both of us would have liked to see the Scotland-Brazil game. I blame the usual channels for not putting the debate back a day, or for not postponing the opening of the World cup until tomorrow.

There have been remarkable developments. As one who has been involved with the families of those killed on Bloody Sunday, I think that the decision to initiate a commission of inquiry into that dreadful affair is a courageous one for the Government, especially my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister, to take. Looking across at Northern Ireland over the years, I never thought that within my time in Parliament we would get as far as the Belfast agreement takes us. We in Scotland got a superb result in our referendum and a similarly dramatic result was achieved in the Northern Ireland referendum. Now, Northern Ireland is to hold elections to an assembly, although I happen to think that they are being held too early and that a period of reflection is needed—*[Interruption.]* I thought that that remark would get a reaction from Northern Ireland Members. I base my remarks on my experience of Scotland's preparations for our elections, although the Scottish National party might thank us for being so deliberate. The Bill is part of the overall change that is taking place under the Government's direction. I am not an uncritical supporter of the Government on these matters and I shall make one or two comments to which I hope my hon. Friend the Minister of State will respond.

I share the repugnance felt by many over the early release of people who have committed violent crimes. Just before and after I entered the House, I was part of the Parole Board system in Scotland. I had to interview many men who had committed dreadful crimes and who were being assessed for release under licence—murderers and others, some of whom had been caught up in the troubles in Northern Ireland. I remember over a period of six months interviewing three men who had received heavy sentences for running arms and explosives to paramilitary loyalist groups. It was my task to interview them and express an opinion as to whether they should be released under licence, so I have some experience at the coal face.

I reject the argument, advanced by some on the left, that such people have been engaged in some kind of military campaign. It is absurd and obscene to speak of people waging a military campaign in a mature parliamentary democracy. They have committed acts of terrorism. They are not military campaigners in my view. My sympathy, along with everyone else's, is with the families of those who have been murdered and with those who have suffered severe, crippling injuries.

At the same time, I share the view of Dave Wall, the chief executive of the Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders, who stated in a letter that many of us have received:

"Prisoner release is not an easy matter for the people of Northern Ireland or of Britain."

That is an understatement. The letter continues:

"It does involve recognising that the violence of the past thirty years was politically motivated, however repugnant that violence was . . . It is, however, a necessary part of a negotiated political settlement to the violent conflict."

That was the sentiment expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Newry and Armagh in his eloquent speech. We know that this is a political Bill, but the circumstances demand such a response from the Government.

Mr. Robert McCartney: Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that morality, justice and the rule of law can be sacrificed because it is politically expedient to reach some sort of agreement and that the emphasis on the word political cures all? Does he believe that this is a political expedient, so all the principles on which a civilised democracy is based can be set aside to deliver what expediency requires?

Dr. Godman: On political morality, I think that I can stand shoulder to shoulder with the hon. and learned Gentleman. There are moments when unpalatable decisions must be made in the interests of the greater good of communities that we in this place seek to represent.

Mr. McCartney *indicated dissent.*

Dr. Godman: The hon. and learned Gentleman shakes his head. We part company on most issues. On the rule of law, he is a lawyer and a Queen's Counsel. I am not a lawyer. I have an interest in Scots law, but I am not sure that my knowledge would get me past the first year of an undergraduate course.

In terms of the sociology of law and law making, mature parliamentary democracies must enact laws that some people find difficult to stomach—such as the hon. Member for Basingstoke and, presumably, the hon. and learned Member for North Down (Mr. McCartney). The circumstances demand that we respond in the way that the Government have responded, no matter how great our sense of repugnance at the acts of some people.

When I interviewed prisoners for possible release under licence, I thought that some of them should stay in those prisons—Edinburgh, Peterhead, Shotts and elsewhere—

[Dr. Godman]

for the rest of their natural lives, but we had to consider whether such people could, after a period in prison, serve useful lives in the community. As I said earlier, I understand some of the serious reservations that Opposition Members hold, but to earn the trust of the overwhelming majority of the people of Northern Ireland the Bill is inevitable and necessary, even though, as has been acknowledged, it is a political Bill.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) asked about prisoners in the Irish Republic. In my view it is almost inevitable that the Dail will pass legislation that will make the procedures compatible. We are fellow member states of the Council of Europe and I cannot see that a discrepancy in procedures could continue for long.

I have some questions about specific details of the Bill, to which I hope my hon. Friend the Minister of State will respond in his winding-up speech.

Mr. William Ross: The hon. Gentleman referred to changes in the law that he believes will be necessary in the Irish Republic. Does he think that the Dail will pass legislation that would release the murderer of Garda McCabe within two years?

Dr. Godman: I need hardly remind the hon. Gentleman that under the agreement such developments will take place. What the Deputies in the Dail choose to do is a matter for them, but whatever they do must take cognisance of the terms of the agreement.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State mentioned the possible engagement of a psychiatrist or psychologist. My hon. Friend the Minister may consider this an esoteric point, but I suggest that it might be more useful to employ the services of a consultant psychiatrist who has experience of forensic psychiatry, rather than a psychologist. When referring to a psychologist, does the Secretary of State mean a clinical psychologist with experience in the Prison Service? I do not wish to diminish the talents of psychologists in Northern Ireland and elsewhere, but in the circumstances, serious consideration should be given to my suggestion, offered immodestly, that a consultant psychiatrist with forensic psychiatric experience should be appointed, rather than a clinical or other psychologist.

It is proposed in clause 1(2)(a) that one of the commissioners should be a lawyer. I believe that that lawyer, male or female, should have practised in Northern Ireland. Similarly, I think that civic society should be represented in the ranks of the commissioners—I am not sure how many there will be. I suggest—with my characteristic modesty—that perhaps a senior academic specialising in conflict resolution or an academic with considerable and recent experience of analysing the communities and recent developments in Northern Ireland should be appointed. I support whole heartedly clause 1(3), which states:

> "In making appointments the Secretary of State shall have regard to the desirability of the Commissioners, as a group, commanding widespread acceptance throughout the community in Northern Ireland."

That is a categorical imperative.

I must offer a word or two on the subject of Scots Guardsmen Wright and Fisher. Several hon. Members have referred to their case and one said that they had committed a grievous error. In my view they committed a grievous offence for which they were convicted in a court of law. Nevertheless, I believe that after five or six years in prison they should be given some sympathetic consideration. I suggested in an earlier debate that it might help them and their families if they were transferred to a prison in Scotland, but I understand that they have made no such request. It might be in their best interests to remain within the jurisdiction of Northern Ireland—I know that there have been no complaints recently about their treatment.

I reject what the hon. Member for Basingstoke said about the Bill. His remarks were disgraceful and inflammatory, but utterly typical of him. The Bill must be supported by hon. Members on both sides of the House—I know that Liberal Democrat Members will and I hope that many Conservative Members, after examining it, will do likewise. It is a political Bill, but I believe that it is necessary in terms of the agreement and the expectations, needs and concerns of the people of Northern Ireland.

6.42 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): We are discussing a proposition that one would have thought would never be discussed in the House—the mother of Parliaments and the defender of democracy and law and order. It seems amazing that we are considering how we can let out of prison people who have committed the vilest and most terrible atrocities. It is right to say that all parties to the agreement accepted that.

It is also correct to say that I cannot find in the agreement any linkage between prisoner releases and decommissioning or anything else. I have read the agreement many times—I have analysed it—but I cannot find a rule that decommissioning must occur in 24 months. People should not try, for their own ends, to read into the agreement what is not there.

The hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Dr. Godman) accused the hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) of making an inflammatory speech. I assure him that people in Northern Ireland feel deeply about this matter. The Liberal Democrat spokesman, the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis), talked forcefully and with passion about what happened in his area. That feeling is multiplied thousands of times in Northern Ireland. We cannot expect people simply to stand by as if this were an unimportant matter about which they have no feelings.

Feelings in Northern Ireland run very deep. People claim that they will approach these matters with great sensitivity, but the victims of violence whom I know resent that. They say, "They tell us that they will approach these matters sensitively, but how can they say that when I will receive a letter announcing that the person who murdered my father has been released when he should have been incarcerated for another 10 or 15 years?"

The people who say how deeply they feel, how much they weep and how sensitive they are should stop, because that is much resented by those who have suffered the most. I have attended more funerals—on both sides of the divide—than any other Northern Ireland Member, and I know how people feel. I make it absolutely clear to the House that people's feelings are not alleviated by the promises made by anyone in high places.

The Secretary of State has argued—I have listened to her on television and in this place—that there is a package and that, although people may not like the prisoner releases, we must take the whole package. Why is there a package? There is a package because the IRA had a gun and that gun was pointed at the two Governments and at those who were prepared to bow their knee to it. This House has debated before a treaty for peace: the famous treaty between Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The House was told then that if it decided to accept the treaty, all would be well: everything would be normal, the gun would be out of Irish politics and it would be wonderful. Northern Ireland's founding father, Lord Carson, speaking in a debate in the House of Lords on that occasion, said:

"One thing the noble Marquess entirely forgot to tell us was how the Government came to the conclusion that these Articles of Treaty were so much for the benefit of the country. The difficulty I have in commenting upon them at all is that, unless as a matter of mere pretence, when we are seeming to be very dignified and concerned, there is not a noble Lord in this House who believes for a moment that these terms were passed upon the merits. Not at all. They were passed with a revolver pointed at your head. And you know it. You know you passed them because you were beaten. You know you passed them because Sinn Fein with its Army in Ireland has beaten you. Why do you not say so?"

The House should acknowledge tonight that the IRA beat the Governments and beat into submission those who were foolish enough to put their hands to this document. Lord Carson continued:

"ought Unionist leaders to have been parties to that—Unionist leaders who had undertaken to defend Unionist policy? . . . the truth of the matter is that if you go on like this, if you have men in high positions stating today that A is white, and tomorrow arguing that it is certainly black, you will destroy the confidence of the democracy of this country in its rulers and in its institutions."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 14 December 1921; Vol. 48, c. 40-43.]

We have heard and had surprising things happen in Northern Ireland. The Prime Minister came to Northern Ireland three times, and on each occasion he was giving undertaking after undertaking. One of his undertakings—I have already mentioned this in the debate to the Secretary of State and the Opposition spokesman—was reported widely in the Northern Ireland press. The right hon. Gentleman said that violence had to be given up, and that decommissioning was part of that. That was a clear statement. If violence is to be given up—one of the terms of the Bill is that violence must have been given up—how is that to happen if the second part of the approach is not applied?

Right hon. and hon. Members have been frank and said that the Prime Minister swayed many people. No doubt he did. He came to Northern Ireland and gave us many promises. The right hon. Gentleman promised that the IRA would never be in government until it had decommissioned. There is nothing in the agreement to that effect.

We heard a moving speech from the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon), but he went on to tell us that we have a debt of honour to put the Bill through the House. I have no debt of honour to men—

Mr. Mallon: I must accept that the hon. Gentleman did not hear clearly what I said. I said that the Bill places a debt of honour on the shoulders of those parties associated with paramilitary groupings never again to threaten or use violence. That is the debt of honour to which I referred.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I am sorry. I misunderstood the hon. Gentleman. He knows that. I accept what he says, and withdraw what I said.

I am saying that we in Northern Ireland have a debt of honour not to the paramilitarists but to their victims, including the people they killed. I believe that there is forgiveness, but not until there is repentance. I have never heard an IRA paramilitarist express remorse for his deeds. I have listened carefully, and when paramilitarists have been pushed on television and radio, or in a public place, not one of them has ever expressed remorse. Not one of them has said, "I regret that I did that act." There is no forgiveness until there is repentance. If someone expresses remorse, we may challenge his motives, but we cannot challenge the fact that that is what he has said.

I am hearing only more and more threats from the IRA. Undertakings were given by the Prime Minister and we were told that when legislation was introduced those undertakings would be incorporated within it. That has not happened. Indeed, the argument advanced from the Government Benches is that that should not happen. It is argued that the Prime Minister was not saying, when he did say, that decommissioning was an essential part of the end of violence.

Who in Northern Ireland believes that there is an end of it? Who believes that violence has ended? I have the statistics for the first quarter of this year. They relate to the operation of the prevention of terrorism legislation and of the emergency provisions Acts. Anyone reading these statistics would not think there was any peace in the country. They tell us that 177 persons were detained in Northern Ireland under the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989. There were 48 applications for extension of detention, all of which were granted. Those applications related to 37 individuals, 11 being subject to more than one extension. No exclusion orders were made. In addition, 125 persons were detained for 48 hours or less, 52 for more than 48 hours. Apparently, 36 persons were charged with 62 offences, including 12 of murder and 19 firearm offences—and so on.

With these statistics, can we really say that peace has broken out? Go to Royal avenue and tell the business community that an incendiary bombing was peace. Go to those people whom the Secretary of State rightly described as having their kneecaps shot off in obscene circumstances. Go to the families that have come under terrible attack in the past days. Against that background, how can it be said that there is peace?

If that is the basis for peace, what is the peace? If the Bill passes through the House tonight and subsequently passes through the other place, and the circumstances in Northern Ireland remain the same, will the Secretary of State tell me that there is a state of peace and she can continue releasing prisoners? There is no state of peace at present.

We have heard from the hon. Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) about the activities of a certain organisation that helps prisoners. However, we have only to note what such people have said in the past and what

[Rev. Ian Paisley]

they will continue to say. To say that the House should realise that there will be serious and terrible trouble if this matter is proceeded with is, of course, a threat.

We know that the Bill will be enacted. We know from the Conservative spokesman that the Opposition will not go too tough at the Bill. They will vote for it, and give it its first blessing. When it comes to consideration in Committee, they will find some excuse not to press amendments hard. We know what happened with the Police Bill, as it was then was, and other Bills. We know that the Bill will pass through the House.

Mr. MacKay: I give the hon. Gentleman an assurance that we shall be tabling amendments tomorrow for the Committee stage of the Bill. They will be exactly along the lines that I set out earlier. If the amendments are not accepted by the Government or if the Government do not come up with suitable options, we shall most certainly be pressing them to Divisions. We shall be expecting the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues to join us in supporting our amendments.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I invite the hon. Gentleman to join me in the Division Lobby tonight to vote against the Bill. This is a bad Bill and it should not be before us. The hon. Member for Basingstoke is right. However, the Tory party has told us what it will do, and it will do it. The Bill will become law. There will be no change in terms of decommissioning. Similarly, there will be no change in terms of terrorists getting into government. The Bill will go through and everybody knows it. The Secretary of State and the Minister of State know that that is the position. I have been long enough in the House to know whether a Bill will be rejected. The Bill will sail through the House.

However, at the end of the day, it will not be Members who represent constituencies outwith Northern Ireland who will be suffering. The ordinary people on the streets of Northern Ireland will suffer. It is wrong to suggest that the overwhelming majority in Northern Ireland are in favour of the Bill. Let me disillusion those who say that. The hon. Member for Newry and Armagh told us that more than 42 per cent. of those who voted in the referendum were nationalists and republicans. I think I have quoted the hon. Gentleman correctly this time. If that is so, that is more than half of the 71 per cent. Who were the other people who voted?

There are people in Northern Ireland who said no because they have convictions about the future. Others said yes because they were foolish enough to believe the Prime Minister; foolish enough to believe that all his promises would be honoured. His promises cannot be honoured, for the simple reason that the agreement must be taken as it is—all of it. If one wants to change the agreement, one does not do so here. One changes it by recalling the talks so that everyone who agreed it will have a say. That is the only way in which it can be changed, so the House is held captive to the agreement.

The legislation will go through, and the people of Northern Ireland will have sad and terrible happenings coming to them. Think of the gunmen released on the streets and the caches of arms still available for them to use. Think of the police force that there will be moves to disarm—

Marjorie Mowlam: No.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Well, the right hon. Lady should read the agreement. Perhaps she has not read that part of the agreement. It refers to working towards the disarming of the police.

Marjorie Mowlam: Yes.

Rev. Ian Paisley: That will happen within a certain period and will start within a year. We could have police disarming, gunmen on the streets with caches of arms available to them, and the gun at our head again. If the IRA then says that something more has to be done, we will bow to it again. Those are the facts which the people of Northern Ireland face.

The good thing is that we are having an election, and that people have time to reflect. A lot of people who voted yes have reflected and they are no longer saying yes. When we have the results of the election, and when we see the real representation of the people reflected in the assembly, what will the House do? Will it want to change the rules and say that it no longer goes by consensus?

First, we were told that we had to have a majority of the Unionist people and a majority of the nationalist people before there could be an agreement. When we mentioned that during the referendum, the Government hit the ceiling and said that it should be 50 per cent. plus one. There was no consensus in regard to that. With 50 per cent. plus one, we could be taken into a united Ireland.

What will happen when we have an assembly representing the real ideas? There will be no Prime Minister writing graffiti on the wall and saying, "Here are my pledges." We will vote on the issue. The Government are out of it. The big money that so liberally flowed to condition people, with the spin doctors working overtime and being well paid for it, will go, and we will have an ordinary Ulster election. What will happen then? If there are 30 Unionists, they might claim to have a strong voice. The percentage was to help the nationalists, but it will help the Unionists.

I was rather surprised, yet I should not be, that the right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor) said that if, in the assembly, the republicans fail to deliver decommissioning, as is required—according to my reading of the document, it is not required, but the right hon. Gentleman says that it is—the Unionists will exercise their majority position to end the assembly. He went on to say—this makes me laugh—that the world will support the Unionists and reject the republicans. That is utter nonsense. I have heard it all before.

I was told by the Prime Minister that if the ceasefire was ever broken the IRA would be wiped out. What happened? Within a few hours of Canary Wharf being blown up, the Government were talking to the IRA. That will be tested now. The Prime Minister and the Government will be tested. Will they change? Can these changes be made? If not, what will happen when we have an assembly which mirrors the real views of the people of Northern Ireland?

The debate is not over; it is only starting. All I can say is that it is sad that, when we have so many other pressing issues to take care of, we are discussing how to let felons, criminals and murderers out of prison before they have served the time that was given to them in a court of law acting according to the laws of the United Kingdom.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. Before I call the next speaker, I should say that the debate so far has been characterised by extremely long speeches. Many hon. Members are seeking to catch my eye, and, unless contributions are shorter, many hon. Members will be disappointed.

7.5 pm

Ms Margaret Moran (Luton, South): I shall attempt to be brief. I support the Bill and add my congratulations to all those who were involved in the Northern Ireland agreement. As many hon. Members have said, this is an extraordinary and historic Bill. It is the first piece of legislation after the historic agreement and the overwhelming yes vote in Northern Ireland.

Listening to the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley), I almost felt that the Northern Ireland agreement and the overwhelming yes vote—the voice of the people of Northern Ireland—had not happened. It appears that some hon. Members—we hope this is not translated into the New Northern Ireland Assembly—wish to rewrite history at every turn. As a new hon. Member, while acknowledging that I do not have the length and depth of experience on Northern Ireland issues that others may have, I simply say to those hon. Members who constantly seek to rewrite history that that has got us nowhere, but we are now making progress, so please take that progress and let us move on.

It is worth reminding ourselves of the overwhelming euphoria after the democratic decision of the people of Northern Ireland to vote yes to the Good Friday agreement. But after every good party comes the hangover—in the case of that particular party, the pause for thought. It was inevitable that the first decision after the yes vote would be the tough one which would implement the agreement and translate it into effective legislation. The toughest one is inevitably the decision concerning the early release of prisoners. That was an inevitable decision which everyone who signed the agreement and everyone in the House recognised was the linchpin of the agreement and any future peace deal for Northern Ireland. It was always going to be a fraught and sensitive decision.

In making our decisions tonight, it is important that we commend the courage of all those who were involved in taking the political risk that was involved in the Northern Ireland agreement—the risk for peace which entailed taking the decisions that we are translating into legislation tonight.

It is important, too, that we all retain the courage, when tough decisions such as this are being made, to follow them through and not attempt to rewrite them when the going gets rough. The going will get rough, as we know from our postbags and from the media's translation of the decisions we will be making tonight. It is important that we stand firm and retain our courage, knowing that what we are doing is delivering the decision democratically made by the people of Northern Ireland—their long-held desire for peace.

It is also important to emphasise that the criteria in the Bill are tough. Contrary to the assertions of some hon. Members, they unequivocally translate and incorporate the Prime Minister's words into legislation. There can be no doubt whatever that the Prime Minister's commitment to end violence is translated into the Bill. I refer hon. Members to clause 3. To ensure that there is no doubt about that, will my hon. Friend the Minister of State tell the House when he replies to the debate why, under clause 3(5), the third condition that the commissioners will apply is relevant only to someone who would be released immediately, and not to prisoners who might not be released for some time? It is important that the House hears the strength of that criterion.

As other hon. Members have emphasised, this is not a pick-and-mix package. One cannot pull out the sweeties and throw away the liquorice. We must take tough decisions now if we are to have peace in Northern Ireland. It is important to remember the strength of the yes vote: 71 per cent. in agreement; and, significantly, 75 per cent. of women in Northern Ireland voting for peace and an end to the boys with toys and the men with guns—[HON. MEMBERS: "Nonsense."] It is far from nonsense. It is a democratic decision and it shows that the old politics of Northern Ireland—predominantly male politics—are long overdue for change. I hope that we shall see that change in the new assembly.

All parties who signed up to the Northern Ireland agreement knew at the outset that compromises would have to be made. They also knew that the Bill was of fundamental importance to the political settlement and that prisoners would have an important influence on the outcome of the agreement.

As I said earlier, I do not have the experience of other hon. Members in respect of prisoners' issues. However, I remember a poignant visit which I and other new Members made soon after the election last May to discuss the Northern Ireland peace process with all political parties and a number of relatives' organisations. The memory that will stay with me is of a meeting with former prisoners who, for a long time, had been at the forefront of discussions about peace. Their burning ambition to see an end to violence and a successful conclusion to the agreement was overwhelming. We shall do those prisoners an honour in ensuring that we not only pass the Bill but recognise the need to deal with issues in respect of their victims.

Other hon. Members have also emphasised the importance, in passing the Bill, of acknowledging the suffering of victims. That is not to say that we should trade suffering—far from it. I welcome the measures that I understand will be taken to address victims' needs. I hope that considerable measures will be taken in future legislation or elsewhere to deal with victims' on-going needs.

We must also ensure that victims are notified of the release of prisoners. Although it may not be appropriate to encompass that in the Bill, it is a significant issue for victims. They must at least be allowed the courtesy of knowing when the prisoner relevant to their experience is to be released. That request has been made by the Northern Ireland Victim Support group, and I hope that the Secretary of State and her team will take it on board.

[Ms Margaret Moran]

It is important that steps are taken to reintegrate prisoners into the community. For good or ill, throughout the process prisoners have had a significant influence on the outcome, and they will continue to have a significant influence on the sustaining of peace in Northern Ireland. Prisoners must be afforded opportunities that will enable them to play a positive role in long-term peace in their communities.

It ill behoves Members to attempt to whip up hysteria with headlines about murderers being released and prisoners being given the key to prison doors. That is not what the Bill is about, and it does not help to secure long-term and sustainable peace in Northern Ireland. I remind hon. Members that this is not a new scheme. The House will recall the Northern Ireland (Remission of Sentences) Bill introduced in 1995 by the previous Government. That Bill made possible the early release of prisoners in Northern Ireland, in response to the IRA ceasefire at that time. The House may also recall that the programme of early releases, which, unlike this Bill, set no licence conditions on those released, continued against a background of on-going IRA violence, with the bombing of Canary Wharf and the Lisburn barracks, despite the fact that no arms were surrendered. The early release of prisoners has been part of the response of successive Governments—Conservative and Labour—to positive developments in Northern Ireland, which is why the Bill must be seen in that context.

The Bill is a linchpin. It is an historical and important part of translating the positive decision of the people of Northern Ireland into practice, and I commend it to the House.

7.16 pm

Mr. Jeffrey Donaldson (Lagan Valley): For me, this is a night of regret. The hon. Member for Luton, South (Ms Moran) talked about hysteria. I live in Northern Ireland and my family has suffered at the hands of terrorists. I have watched hysteria in England recently when paedophiles and child murderers have been released into the community: I have seen people riot and destroy property. There has not been a single riot in Northern Ireland as a result of this Bill. There is no hysteria. People very much regret the Bill because they do not like the fact that prisoners and murderers will be released—so let us not talk about hysteria. People object to the Bill on a point of principle, not because they want to whip up hysteria.

Those who oppose the Bill—I am one of them—want to see justice done in Northern Ireland. We want justice for the victims of terrorism. If the Home Secretary announced today the release of Myra Hindley, I wonder how many hon. Members would stand up and welcome it—yet they welcome the release of people who have committed far more serious crimes, perhaps multiple murders. It is another case of double standards being applied to Northern Ireland.

May I quote the words of resident magistrate Mr. Tom Travers, who was a victim of terrorism and whose daughter Mary was murdered by the IRA? He said:

"Almost 3,000 persons, men, women and children, have been murdered by terrorist criminals.

If we remind ourselves of the circumstances surrounding any one of these deaths we will, if we have even a shred of morality or compassion, shudder in horror at the special treatment now proposed for them."

The Bill differentiates between terrorist murderers and so-called ordinary criminals. What is the difference between the value of the life of an RUC constable and the value of the life of a woman who has been murdered by her husband? What difference in the value of the life of that police officer warrants the release of the person who murdered him, while the husband who murdered his wife stays in prison? What does the Bill do for the value of the lives of the victims of violence?

The Bill concedes the status of political prisoner to members of terrorist organisations. It differentiates between the crimes committed by a terrorist in Northern Ireland and the crimes committed by so-called ordinary criminals, and accords to those terrorist crimes a different status. It accords them the very status that the terrorist organisations have been seeking for years: political status. The Bill creates a dangerous precedent. Terrorism is still with us in Northern Ireland. The threat of terrorist violence remains. If we concede a special status to the crimes committed by those terrorists, we shall create a precedent that will haunt us in years to come.

One of the conditions to be met by a prisoner seeking release under this scheme is that he

"is not a supporter of a terrorist organisation."

I have been inside the Maze prison and have seen the regime there. The terrorist organisations in the Maze prison are grouped together by the prison authorities in different H blocks and are given status as terrorist organisations.

Under the Bill, to qualify for early release, a prisoner is required not to be a supporter of a terrorist organisation. The Bill defines a terrorist organisation. That is interesting, because part I of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 contains provisions on proscribed organisations and also defines a terrorist organisation. It states:

"The Secretary of State may by order made by statutory instrument . . . add to Schedule 1 to this Act any organisation that appears to him to be concerned in, or in promoting or encouraging, terrorism occurring in the United Kingdom and connected with the affairs of Northern Ireland".

That definition is repeated almost word for word in the Bill before us.

The Secretary of State told us that she will not be removing the IRA, the UVF and the UDA from the list of proscribed organisations because she still regards them as terrorist organisations. Yet members of those organisations who are prisoners and who apply for release under this scheme will no longer be deemed to be members of a terrorist organisation. How can that be? Surely the provisions of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 conflict with those in the Bill. When is a terrorist organisation not a terrorist organisation? We need to know the answers to those questions, but the Secretary of State's remarks were unconvincing.

A member of the IRA may come before the courts charged with membership of the IRA, as it is a proscribed organisation. He will be able to argue that the provisions of the Bill that allow members of the IRA to be released from prison as they are not deemed to be members of a terrorist organisation conflict with the provisions in the 1989 Act. The Secretary of State must consider carefully the implications and impact of this legislation. The IRA and other organisations will want the Secretary of State

to remove them from the list of proscribed organisations if she deems them no longer to be terrorist organisations for the purposes of the release of prisoners. If my reading of the Bill is correct, how can a person be a terrorist inside the Maze prison and a member of the IRA, and not be a terrorist outside the Maze prison and a member of the IRA? That requires clarification.

Mr. McWalter: Nelson Mandela was once deemed to be a terrorist and is now honoured as the President of South Africa. People may have one status at one time and a different status at another.

Mr. Donaldson: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I accept that terrorists can reform, but that is not my point. How can someone be a terrorist inside the Maze prison and not be a terrorist the minute he steps outside the door of the prison? How can it be illegal for someone to be a member of the IRA when he is inside the Maze prison, if, the minute he steps outside as a freed prisoner, he is no longer committing an offence even though he is still a member of the IRA?

Mr. William Ross: As my hon. Friend has explained so clearly to the House, surely the implication of the Bill is that the Secretary of State intends to remove all these terrorist organisations from the proscribed list. It cannot be otherwise.

Mr. Donaldson: I am grateful for that intervention. That is what I need to know, and it is what the people of Northern Ireland want to know. If the officer commanding the Provisional IRA in the Maze prison is released from prison and is still a member of the IRA, how can he no longer be a terrorist when his colleagues in the IRA outside the prison are deemed to be terrorists under the 1989 Act? Many people in Northern Ireland will want to know the answers to those questions.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Hysteria and misunderstanding have been referred to this evening. Journalists, who wrote objectively in the national papers at the weekend, touched on that point and suggested that in two years' time the IRA will be like the Salvation Army and the Boys Brigade. I raised that issue with people at a Boys Brigade function on Saturday and they said that it would be a wonderful tribute if that were to happen—although none of us think it will.

Mr. Donaldson: I am grateful for that intervention, which brings me on to the issue of decommissioning. Under the Bill, decommissioning is only one of a range of factors that the Secretary of State will take into account in determining whether a terrorist organisation is no longer a terrorist organisation. There is considerable ambiguity in the wording of the provision. What does the Bill mean by "co-operating fully" with the commission? Is there a requirement for actual and on-going decommissioning by the terrorist organisations? If not, can we have that spelt out please?

I intend to table amendments in Committee to require actual and on-going decommissioning of paramilitary weapons by terrorist organisations, because I believe that such a test is necessary to show their commitment to the democratic process. I do not see such a provision in the Bill.

Mr. Mallon: Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that that was the previous Government's policy—known as Washington 3—and that they were glad to drop it when the report of the international commission was produced? Will he also confirm that the issue that he has declared he will table as an amendment was debated at length in the talks process and was not included in the agreement? Is he saying that he will table amendments contrary to the terms of the agreement that his party has signed?

Mr. Donaldson: I remind the hon. Gentleman that the agreement talks about full decommissioning of terrorist weapons within two years. How else will we get decommissioning if we do not require the terrorist organisations to decommission? That is the reality. I need to know, and the House is entitled to know, how the Secretary of State will interpret the provision that refers to organisations' fully co-operating with the decommissioning body. Will the right hon. Lady interpret it as a requirement for actual and on-going decommissioning? If "co-operating fully" merely means that those concerned will go and talk to the body without delivering any guns, I think that that constitutes a breach of the agreement.

Mr. Robert McCartney: Is the hon. Gentleman correct in asserting that the agreement provides for full decommissioning within two years? Is it not more correct to say that the agreement suggests that parties fronting paramilitary organisations retaining weapons will use such influence as they may have to persuade them to decommission within two years, although there is neither a sanction nor a requirement in that regard?

Mr. Donaldson: The hon. and learned Gentleman is right. That is one of the reasons why I voted against the agreement: I did not think that it required the terrorist organisations to deliver on decommissioning. We heard from the IRA, in its statement following the agreement, that it would not decommission its weapons. I think it was one Danny Morrison who said recently, "We won't even decommission the rust, never mind the rifles." The House is entitled to know whether the Government will hold the terrorist organisations to their requirements. Will the Prime Minister deliver on the pledge that he gave the people of Northern Ireland that he would require the decommissioning of terrorist weapons? If he does not, he will have broken that pledge to the people of Northern Ireland.

Another question arising from the Bill is that of the extradition of fugitives from justice. I wonder whether the Secretary of State has engaged in discussions with the Irish Government about extradition procedures in the event of a released prisoner's breaching the terms of his licence under the legislation, and seeking refuge in the Irish Republic. If a prisoner who is released breaches his licence and seeks refuge in the Republic, will we be faced with the same old charade of having to wait two or three years for the Irish courts to decide that he committed a political offence and that he will not be extradited, or will the Government seek a commitment from the Irish Government that, if such prisoners breach their licences and seek refuge in the Irish Republic, they will be returned forthwith to the jurisdiction of the United Kingdom to complete their full sentence? I hope that the Government will seek and obtain such an assurance from the Irish Government, in the spirit of the new co-operation that is breaking out under the agreement between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic.

[Mr. Donaldson]

Will the Secretary of State seek an assurance from the Irish Government that they will introduce an effective fast-track procedure to deal with the extradition of such individuals? Will she give us an assurance that the Government will pursue the extradition of fugitives from justice who currently reside in both the United States and the Irish Republic? Among their number, of course, are some of the terrorists who escaped from the Maze prison in the early 1980s. I think the people of Northern Ireland will want an assurance that the Government will continue to press for their extradition, and that they will not qualify for the early release provisions in the Bill for as long as they are outside the jurisdiction of the United Kingdom.

Rev. Martin Smyth: I am sorry to interrupt again, but my intervention relates to that very point. The hon. Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) suggested that there should be an amnesty for those whose offences were committed before the signing of the agreement. Is that already happening? Is it the case that recently a fugitive from justice in Northern Ireland, one Owen Carron, was stopped in County Fermanagh, and that, after he had telephoned someone—in this wonderful age of the mobile phone—the patrol that had stopped him was ordered to release him?

Mr. Donaldson: I understand that nowadays all leading members of Sinn Fein have a direct line to the Secretary of State. I understand that, when they are stopped by the security forces, they simply make a telephone call, following which they are speedily sent on their way.

Many of the provisions in the Bill relate to powers given to the Secretary of State. If the House passes the legislation, it will be placing considerable trust in the Secretary of State and her successors. Many people will be watching the Secretary of State: they will be watching to see how she implements the Bill, and, in particular, how she intends to implement the provisions that make her responsible for determining whether a terrorist organisation is a terrorist organisation for the purposes of the release of prisoners.

Many victims of violence will also be watching the Secretary of State. They will want to know whether she will hold the terrorists to account. The Secretary of State must ensure that the terrorists deliver, and end the violence—which includes the decommissioning of weapons. Otherwise, the prisoners should stay in prison. I think that that is the message that the victims of violence would want to give the Secretary of State. Many will doubt her determination. If she fails to hold the terrorists to account, she will have failed the victims of violence and their families.

Let me again quote the words of Tom Travers:

> "As a victim of terrorism the provisions for the release of those qualifying prisoners underlines something of which I have been aware for a very long time, namely, that society in general, and the Government in particular, does not cherish victims at all."

The Secretary of State has a responsibility to prove that the feeling that Tom Travers and many other victims have is wrong. She has a responsibility to ensure that the Government deliver on the commitments that have been given, and to hold terrorist organisations to account by ensuring that they deliver an end to violence and decommission their weapons. If they do not, the prisoners should stay where they belong: in prison. Justice must be seen to be done.

7.36 pm

Mr. Eddie McGrady (South Down): When we debate the release, or early release, of prisoners, we must be aware that we are touching every nerve and every emotion of those who have been victims of violence for the past 30 years or so. We must be conscious of the hurt that we can so easily cause such people through unwarranted and inappropriate remarks.

That struck me as an aspect of the referendum campaign. The "no" campaign cleverly latched on to the three emotive issues in the agreement: prisoner release, decommissioning and policing. By the very nature of the subject matter, some of the issues are transient—for instance, the issue of prisoners, whom time or the law will release in one way or another. The general debate failed to focus on the permanency of the core issues—issues of the institutions that were established, or could be established, by the agreement. It is a pity that the debate has not focused on that.

I agree with the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) in one respect. He said that a letter sent to victims announcing the release of a prisoner connected with their sorrow would not greatly ameliorate their suffering. I accept that. Contrary to the experiences of the hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Donaldson), many of my constituents who are victims—nationalists, Unionists or members of no party—have sent me the most generous messages that I have ever received. I am talking about those who have experienced a tragic death in their families, who have themselves been maimed or have been victims of some other atrocity. I was humbled by the generosity and, if you like, the Christianity, of the sentiments that were expressed, and I resented the fact that, during political campaigns, those people's emotions were played on and used in a political way.

On 18 June 1994, within 10 miles of where I live, seven men, ranging from a 17-year-old boy to an 84-year-old man, were gunned down in a pub, slaughtered while they were watching a football match. Two months later a reserve constable was gunned down while serving customers in his shop. Presumably, the first killings were carried out by the Loyalist Volunteer Force and the second was carried out by the IRA. On 31 August 1994, on the eve of the ceasefire, my home town was subjected to a massive mortar attack that was aimed at the police station. The trajectory was over a children's playground and on that fine summer night the children were out enjoying their playtime. Just 10 months ago in July, a young person who lives near me was brutally murdered, presumably by the LVF, and his body was grossly and horribly mutilated and buried in a pit under cattle.

Those four incidents have one thing in common, apart from the fact that they all occurred in my locality: not one person has been made amenable to the law. That means that the people who perpetrated those atrocities and carried out horrible acts on a body are somewhere in the community, either in my area or in the neighbouring area, and are walking about to this day.

To play on people's fears about the release of those who have been brought to justice, found guilty and sentenced to a fixed term in prison or to a life sentence is

to miss the point altogether. We are engaged in implementing one of the processes in an historic agreement which, as many hon. Members have said, has been endorsed by the vast majority of people in the north of Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland. The Bill is part of that agreement, and I resent being accused by hon. Members, some of whom are not in their places, of somehow lacking morality and principle because I support the legislation. We have put together a delicate package with inevitable pros and cons—some of it I do not like and some of it my political opponents do not like. But together we have forged a sensitive agreement and—more important—it has been endorsed by the people of the north of Ireland and of the Republic of Ireland.

The hon. Member for North Antrim, who is not now in his place, quoted at length from what Lord Carson said some 80 years ago. Time has passed; our society has evolved. Politics has moved a million miles since that time, and this is our opportunity to lay to rest once and for all the violence in Irish politics. There is no guarantee that we will do so, but we have an opportunity to reach the holy grail that has evaded us not just for decades but for centuries.

I ask those who oppose the legislation—and especially those who do not live in my community and who have not suffered as my people, whether Unionist or nationalist, have suffered over the years—to try to understand that we are trying to put together an acceptable arrangement. It is not perfect by any means and it requires some matters to be dealt with in a way that will enable the agreement to get widespread support, and that is what the legislation is about. I shall not debate the nuts and bolts and the paragraphs in the Bill. I simply say that those who oppose it oppose the will of the people of Northern Ireland, and that is fundamentally undemocratic.

7.44 pm

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): I shall try to be brief. No doubt, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you will remind me if I am still speaking at the end of 10 minutes.

I agree with the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) that we should look to the future and not to the past. It is distressing that Irish politics is so often discussed in terms of the past. I do not feel responsible for the potato famine, but it is often brought up by Irish nationalists when they discuss the relationship between the United Kingdom and the south of Ireland.

I shall deal first with the case of Guardsman Fisher and Guardsman Wright to which hon. Members referred. Those two young men committed a grievous error. They were found guilty of murder and, technically, I am sure that that was right. However, they were sent to Northern Ireland by this United Kingdom Parliament—by the British state, as I am sure the IRA would say—not to do their own will but to do their duty in preserving public order in Northern Ireland. As I said, they made a grievous error which resulted in a regrettable death and they were found guilty of murder.

To compare two young men who went out to do their duty to this country with some of the people whose release from prison we are discussing is quite wrong. As every hon. Member knows, some of those people were guilty of the most unspeakable acts of barbarism and torture in both communities. We should view the case of Fisher and Wright with a great deal more sympathy than has been shown so far. I was first contacted about the case about four years ago during the judicial process. Four years later, they are still in gaol, and most hon. Members and the Government would agree that they should be released forthwith or as soon as possible.

The Bill as a whole is rotten, but I am not minded to oppose it. It is about freeing people who have been involved in all sorts of barbaric acts. As the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) rightly said, those people are not political prisoners: they have all been convicted of crimes. I do not live in Northern Ireland, but I spent a long time there. Too many of my Northern Ireland friends have died and I have been to too many funerals not to feel strongly about this issue. However, we must put aside our personal feelings and look to the future. I should like to quote a resolution with which I am entirely in agreement:

"Conference believes that progress can only be made towards a lasting political solution in Northern Ireland when the gun has been removed completely from Irish politics."

That is a sensible resolution, because a political solution must have no reference to the gun. That resolution was passed by the Labour party at its annual conference in 1994.

Getting rid of the gun and agreeing to the Bill are part of the peace process. However, as the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) said, there is not yet peace in Northern Ireland. There are punishment beatings: there were two last week in west Belfast. The punishments involve knee-cappings and weapons and they are extremely bloody affairs. A Mr. Knocker was murdered recently in Fermanagh, and the perpetrators were almost certainly people who were connected to the IRA. There were murders by the IRA and, I think, the UVF before Christmas. They happened during the peace process and people were briefly removed from the talks, but those organisations may be given legitimacy in the assembly.

Has the Minister or the RUC any information or intelligence to the effect that the Sinn Fein information centre in west Belfast has been co-ordinating some of the intimidation, threats and punishment beatings? My intelligence is that the Sinn Fein information centre has been responsible for warnings that were given to people to leave the Province. That has been going on for years.

As the Prime Minister said, the release of prisoners must be linked to decommissioning. I was not present to hear him say so, and cannot therefore comment on the exact words. However, nobody has denied them and what he said appears to be so. In 1996, when giving the John Smith memorial lecture in Antrim, the present Secretary of State said:

"These fears can only be addressed, to my mind, by all parties signing up to the six Mitchell principles—which includes a commitment to the total disarmament of all paramilitary organisations".

I agree with her entirely.

In April, the Prime Minister said:

"We said that we want the total disarmament of all paramilitary organisations . . . Meanwhile, it would obviously be a travesty of democracy if parties associated with paramilitary organisations held Executive office in the assembly while they continued to be engaged in or to threaten terrorism."—[*Official Report*, 22 April 1998; Vol. 310, c. 811-12.]

In 1993, the former Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major), said that "all" weapons must be handed in before talks could go on. Later, as an article of good faith, that demand was reduced to "some" weapons.

[Mr. Andrew Robathan]

I should like to quote from the Mitchell principles, because some people may have forgotten them. The document states:

"parties to such negotiations affirm their total and absolute commitment:

To the total disarmament of all paramilitary organisations;

To agree that such disarmament must be verifiable to the satisfaction of an independent commission;

To renounce unto themselves, and to oppose any effort by others, to use force, or threaten to use force . . .

To urge that 'punishment' killings and beatings stop and to take effective steps to prevent such actions."

We have had negotiations, the agreement, the referendum and now this Bill, but there has been no decommissioning of weapons and punishment beatings and violence continue. What does this peace mean? Does it mean merely a ceasefire, which may be temporary, like others? The Bill assumes lasting peace. I fully understand that prisoner releases are of enormous importance to both sides of the peace process, but so is decommissioning. The two must be clearly linked. Sinn Fein will be standing in the assembly elections and thinks that it can be part of the process, yet it is inextricably linked to the IRA, which has said, no, it will not decommission its weapons.

All hon. Members understand that, to achieve peace, there must be compromise. Many compromises have been unpalatable to people on all sides of the argument. I have seen this Government, the previous Government and the Unionists make compromises, but I have yet to see the IRA make any compromise at all.

The Secretary of State said that she wanted to see decommissioning, as do we all. She also said that, as the Bill states, prisoners would not be released if they were found to be supporters of terrorist organisations. If Sinn Fein is inextricably linked to the IRA, which is not laying down weapons and is to remain a proscribed organisation, how can IRA prisoners be released and Sinn Fein take part in the peace process? That does not add up. The time for compromise and fudge is past.

Under the Bill, prisoners will not be released until their parent organisation is "co-operating fully" with the decommissioning body. The problem is that we do not know enough about that body. We do not know its terms of reference, powers or responsibilities. More than anything else, we do not know what "co-operating fully" means. That leaves a sense of fudge, misrepresentation and misunderstanding, which gives a very dangerous impression and may be regarded as the first step toward betrayal of the undertakings so clearly given by the Prime Minister in the lead-up to the referendum. The Bill must define clearly, explicitly and beyond any reasonable doubt exactly what "co-operating fully" means.

I should like to pick up a point made by the right hon. Member for Upper Bann, the leader of the Ulster Unionist party. There is already a fear of gangster war and of turf wars in Northern Ireland. There is a huge stock of weapons, and there are many people who are able to use such weapons. A front organisation for the IRA, Direct Action Against Drugs, has been carrying out barbarous attacks on people in west Belfast. There was the death of Mr. Knocker, who was alleged to have been—I have no idea whether it is true—a drugs dealer. I understand that IRA terrorists have done rather well out of this conflict, and that some of them used to retire to villas on the Costa del Sol.

I am concerned that, given the large stock of weapons in circulation, a Russian-style Mafia will develop. If those weapons are not removed, there will be no real peace in the Province. The Government must ensure decommissioning; the release of prisoners must be the best lever by which to achieve that. The requirement of decommissioning should be stated clearly in the Bill, and I hope that it will be by Third Reading.

At the moment, the Bill is a mess; there is too much fudge in it. As I have said before, lasting peace in Northern Ireland cannot be built on sand or fudge. It must be achieved on the understanding and with the backing of everybody. The referendum result went the way that I wished, but, if the Bill is not clear and unequivocal, stating that prisoners are released only when decommissioning has taken place, it is unlikely that it will achieve lasting peace in Northern Ireland.

7.55 pm

Mr. Desmond Browne (Kilmarnock and Loudoun): I am grateful for the opportunity to make a short contribution to this very important debate. Although I was present for the beginning of the debate, I apologise to right hon. and hon. Members for not having heard all the speeches. I think that I missed only two or three.

I have listened with care to the speeches of those who oppose the Bill. Although I respect the honesty and sincerity of their contributions, I cannot help but comment that those who are fundamentally opposed to the release of prisoners are failing to listen to what the people of Northern Ireland are telling them. To that extent, I agree with the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) and others. Undoubtedly, the decision taken by the people in the referendum on 22 May was overwhelmingly in favour of the Good Friday agreement.

In the presence of Unionist Members of Parliament, I feel, strangely, that I have somehow to justify my contribution to Northern Ireland debates by establishing my credentials; otherwise, as I have heard in sedentary remarks, one's comments are merely dismissed as if they are uninformed.

Since I was elected last year, I have spent some considerable time acquainting myself with the politics and the people of Northern Ireland, although, before that, I knew them well because my mother was born in Northern Ireland and I spent a great deal of my childhood there—quite apart from time spent there as an adult with my family and extended family. I know the problems well. I have made a point of spending time speaking to the people of Northern Ireland, particularly through these important times. I have also been a member of the Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs.

From recent contact with people in Northern Ireland and discussion about politics, it is clear to me that those who voted for the agreement did not seek to pick and choose which parts to support—nor should politicians. The Northern Ireland electorate are sophisticated; they understand the issues involved in their politics. They recognise that parts of the agreement could be interpreted as perpetrating injustices on either community, or, indeed, parts of communities, but they bravely chose the agreement as the only way forward.

An essential part of the agreement is the early release of the majority of politically motivated prisoners, against certain conditions. The agreement requires the British and Irish Governments to put in place mechanisms to provide for an accelerated programme for the release of qualifying prisoners. It goes on to express the intention that all such prisoners will be released, should circumstances allow it, within two years of the programme coming into effect. The Bill is designed to fulfil that requirement on the part of the British Government. I am clear in my mind that that part of the agreement is supported by a large majority of the people of Northern Ireland, and therefore feel obliged to support the Bill.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) is entirely correct: any transferred prisoners who are serving their sentences in the Republic of Ireland are subject to the jurisdiction of that country. That is why, on the prisoners' transfer, it was necessary for an undertaking to be given ensuring that their tariffs would be served. They were to be subject to the jurisdiction of that country, and control of their release could not be determined by this country.

Paragraph 1 of the agreement's provisions on prisoners requires the Government of the Republic of Ireland to establish in that country a mechanism for the accelerated release of prisoners. Accordingly, one should expect that, eventually, all qualifying prisoners imprisoned in the Republic of Ireland will qualify for accelerated release under the Republic of Ireland's programme. Under the agreement, it is appropriate that they should be so released. Had they not been transferred, this legislation would have covered them, and they would have qualified for accelerated release under its mechanisms.

There is therefore no injustice, or distortion of justice, in the agreement. Had those prisoners who have been mentioned in this debate remained in prisons in the United Kingdom, they would have qualified for release under mechanisms provided in the Bill.

Throughout the past decade, as peace has been discussed in Northern Ireland, it has always been clearly understood that prisoners were a central issue in the peace process. That fact has been conceded in this debate by right hon. and hon. Members, not least by the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan). It has been understood also that prisoners' early release would be crucial to the success of any agreement. Any peace process in Northern Ireland is likely to be successful only if it commands the respect and support of more than only the broad middle ground of society.

It has been estimated—I have recently re-read the estimates, to refresh my memory—that there are more than 10,000 former prisoners in Northern Ireland, many of whom have been convicted of politically motivated crime. If that statistic is true, the extended families of former prisoners must amount to at least 50,000 people, which is a significant proportion of Northern Ireland's total population. No all-inclusive peace process could ignore those people. No all-inclusive process could not deal with the prisoner issue.

It was therefore inevitable that, in settling the prisoner issue, many people would find the solution distasteful and unpalatable. It was also inevitable that, if there were to be a peace process, the issue had to be addressed at some stage.

I realise that application of the amnesty to perpetrators of the awful crimes that have been committed in the past three decades in Northern Ireland is a price that many—but not all—victims and families of victims think is not worth paying. I have heard expressed, and understand, the feelings of some victims and their families. However, in the circumstances, I do not agree with them. I do not want to be mealy-mouthed about that.

Although a society that is emerging from violent conflict should not forget the appalling cost of the intervening years, the needless and senseless loss of life, the pain and suffering of families or the devastation of communities, the only true insurance against further decades of such senseless and needless violence is a strong and lasting peace process that looks forward. That cannot be achieved without the commitment of the communities that bred and nurtured the perpetrators of that violence in the first place. Dealing with the prisoner issue is the key to such a commitment.

Those who oppose the Bill describe the future of society in Northern Ireland as "polluted by freed terrorists". The hon. Member for Blaby suggested that there would be a Russian-style Mafia. The Bill's opponents describe a society dominated by terrorists who make important political decisions while continuing their trade of violence. However, in so doing, they ignore the realities of the immediate history of Northern Ireland. Since 1985, 438 republican, loyalist and other lifers have been freed. Of that total, only 18 former prisoners have had their licence revoked and been recalled to prison, and only two—one from each faction—have been reconvicted of terrorist offences. Moreover, former prisoners and internees have already played a remarkable role in rebuilding the peace process. Others—too numerous to mention—have distinguished themselves as community leaders and visionary politicians in Northern Ireland.

Under the normal remission tariffs which already apply, the great majority of prisoners serving fixed sentences would be free by the agreement's July 2000 deadline. Today, I read statistics suggesting that there were 340 qualifying prisoners, of whom 269—leaving only 71—would be released under current remission tariffs. The legislation will enable about half the prisoners to win accelerated release in coming months, once the new sentence review commissioners get down to considering individual cases. The other half of the prisoners will be released sooner than was scheduled. Those statistics are neither remarkable nor earth shattering.

The number of people who will be affected by the Bill and the agreement is small compared with the numbers who have already been released from prisons in Northern Ireland—most of whom have not reoffended, and the vast majority of whom are playing a major contributory role in society.

Clause 10(7) allows the Secretary of State to vary by order the two-year release period. I invite my hon. Friend the Minister to tell the House in what circumstances the Secretary of State would consider it to be justified to vary the release period.

I should like also to mention a larger issue—with which I trust that the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for North-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Moss), will deal in his reply. About three times in this debate, the hon. Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay) refused to allow me to intervene in his speech—although perhaps, having

[Mr. Desmond Browne]

heard the sedentary remarks that were made, I understand why he did not allow me to do so. I now ask the hon. Member for North–East Cambridgeshire to answer the question that I tried to ask earlier. How can the hon. Member for Bracknell commend the agreement—which he described as "truly momentous", for which, as he told the House, he campaigned, and which he was "delighted" had obtained a yes vote—but describe the Bill as undermining the rule of law? The Bill attempts only to enact in the United Kingdom the Government's commitment, made in an agreement for which he himself had campaigned.

I perceive that, as an hon. Member, it is my duty to respect the will of the people of Northern Ireland, as expressed in their resounding yes in a referendum on the Good Friday agreement. The Bill reflects the agreement, as accepted by the people of Northern Ireland. Accordingly, I commend it to the House.

8.6 pm

Mr. Robert McCartney (North Down): There seems to be a suggestion in the House that those who oppose the agreement and the Bill are somehow wreckers and opponents of peace. All such suggestions are quite untrue. The 275,000 people who voted against the agreement are all in favour of peace. I am certain that all of them desire a permanent end to violence. All of them wish for a secure future for their children.

Mr. Browne: Will the hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. McCartney: No.

Perhaps, like myself, those people feel that a peace or future that is allegedly based on the good will of terrorists is a very poor foundation for the future of their children. They perhaps also fear that an agreement that appears to ignore—because it is not politically expedient to do otherwise—the principles of the rule of law, of morality and of justice does not offer a secure basis for a future permanent and lasting peace in Northern Ireland.

I opposed the agreement, and I oppose the Bill, because I believe in and desire peace. I wish to have a permanent end to violence, and to ensure a secure future for the young people of Northern Ireland. However, I am equally convinced that this agreement will not offer any of those things. Why do I say that? Because the peace process out of which it has been produced was based on terror—it was based on violence and the threat of further violence, if those who had the weapons of violence were not appeased and their desires were not propitiated.

That is exactly what happened in this agreement. It is totally and completely based on the appeasement of terrorism. The Bill, which purports to release the perpetrators of the most horrific and violent crimes back into society, is but one instalment in an on-going process of terrorist appeasement.

History records no example of a minority group using political violence to achieve its purposes which has ceased to use violence while it has continued to be successful in achieving its purposes, until it has either achieved its ultimate aims or been defeated by democracy. Those who have used political violence successfully do not stop using it unless they are defeated by the forces of the rule of law, by morality and the principles of democracy. Sinn Fein-IRA will be no exception to that historical principle.

I say Sinn Fein-IRA, because the Secretary of State on Monday last week and the Prime Minister last Wednesday both confirmed that those two groupings were inextricably linked, which means that they are incapable of being separated. So we have Sinn Fein protesting its democratic potential, and the IRA, with which it is inextricably linked, saying that it will never decommission until its ultimate political aims and ambitions have been achieved.

Where does that leave this much-vaunted agreement and process? At the Sinn Fein Ard Feis, when politically endorsing the Belfast agreement, speaker after speaker stated, to acclamation, that they would continue to adhere to their traditional policies of military violence and political advancement—the twin-track approach. Where does that leave this agreement?

We have heard much about the agreement and how it is the product of the democratic voice of the people of Northern Ireland, but perhaps the House should have some insight into how it was achieved—by subjecting the Northern Ireland electorate to a massive propaganda campaign, the like of which has never been equalled in British constitutional history. Absolutely no stone went unturned. There was an endless stream of the politically famous from all parties and a collection of celebrities, from Richard Branson to Bono of U2, to you name it. All of them afforded compliant media with opportunities for an orgy of publicity for a pro-agreement vote. It was a disgusting exhibition of Government power.

The late Isaiah Berlin wrote 40 years ago that few Governments have much difficulty persuading the people to do what that Government wish. In the 40 intervening years, the techniques of persuasion and the technology for so doing have increased one hundredfold, and every one of them was employed during the agreement.

Furthermore, two weeks into the agreement, I discovered that the Government were paying for detailed focus group reports and private polls at substantial expense, and that they were providing that information to the parties known to be in the yes camp. Only when I threatened to take the matter to court because the information was being produced with public funding, was it handed over to parties in the no camp.

The last lot of opinion polls on the Wednesday before the agreement showed that, if the don't knows had continued to transfer to the noes at the rate that they were doing, the result would have been about 60:40, or perhaps even better than 40 per cent. for the no camp. At that point, when the yes campaign was terrified of the result, Downing street took over, the Prime Minister appeared again in Northern Ireland, and the pledges were given.

I give that background because those pledges are reckoned by all the pollsters to have been central and significant in the result that was ultimately obtained on Friday 22 May—absolutely central. At this point I must say that I entirely agree with the comments of the hon. Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara). The agreement is a multi-party agreement. It was entered into by all the parties and the two Governments, and it cannot be altered, amended or varied except with the agreement of all the parties to it.

What happened was that the Prime Minister realised in the final week of the referendum campaign that the pro-Union electorate were totally unhappy about two

things—the release of prisoners and the fact that, under the terms of the agreement, there was no clear direction that decommissioning would have to take place before representatives of Sinn Fein could take Executive office. On that basis, the Prime Minister attempted to reassure the pro-Union electorate with his pledges, which were all understood in Northern Ireland to mean that there would be decommissioning, and that it would have to take place before Sinn Fein representatives could take their places in any Executive.

Sinn Fein, Mr. Gerry Adams and Mr. McGuinness have repeatedly reasserted—the hon. Member for Hull, North was correct—that this is an agreement and that they are going to hold the Government to its terms. They are going to insist that, if members of their party are returned in sufficient numbers to allow them to have two members in ministerial posts in a Northern Ireland Executive, under the D'Hondt principles they will be entitled to them without that being in any way connected with any obligation to decommission.

The truth is that, because of the desperate circumstances that faced the Prime Minister and the yes vote in the final weeks, he has entered into a truly Faustian bargain. Sinn Fein-IRA will not let him out of that bargain, but he will be called on by the pro-Union community to go back on it, in the form of legislation. That is the crux of the Bill.

I could never understand the position of the Conservative Opposition or that of some Ulster Unionist Members who kept saying that things could be put right by the legislation, because I have never believed that, under the terms of the multi-party agreement, any party, including the British Government, could alter it unilaterally by legislation without the agreement of all the other parties.

The Government will escape from that dilemma by means of deception, fraud and fudge. The Bill is as full of political fudge as a village fete is of the real stuff, but it will have to be dissected and cleared up, because, sooner or later, the people of Northern Ireland, who, we have been told, are athirst for peace, will call on the Prime Minister to fulfil his pledges.

The claims made by the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) about there being no new preconditions, such as linking the Bill to decommissioning, were never made loudly and clearly by his party in the referendum campaign, because that would have blown the whistle on the true situation: that such preconditions could not be secured. The Government are not, and should not be, in a position to link decommissioning with the agreement, which stands on its own feet, but I take issue with the hon. Gentleman, because that was not made abundantly clear in the referendum campaign, as it is now.

Mr. Mallon: Will the hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. McCartney: I will in just a moment.

In furtherance of the plot, the SDLP ran two separate pieces of election propaganda: one, for the soft Unionists, who it hoped would vote yes, was in completely muted colours and talked about partnerships, sharing and all the things that we can do together; the other was a much tougher piece of straightforward nationalist propaganda, talking of the achievements of the SDLP, from 1981 and the totality of relationships up to its final achievement of the agreement en route to its goal of a united Ireland.

When we speak of the democratic views of the people of Northern Ireland, we should bear it in mind that they have yet to make a decision on the promises and assurances that were given to them about what would happen if they voted yes.

Mr. Mallon: Will the hon. and learned Gentleman give way now?

Mr. McCartney: Not just at the moment. I want to talk about the release of prisoners, which is related to decommissioning. [HON. MEMBERS: "Give way."] I do not intend to give way.

Mr. McNamara: You said that you would.

Mr. McCartney: I said that I would, in due time, and I have not yet finished my point.

Several hon. Members have spoken about the victims. There have been victims in Northern Ireland since 1969, and there are now more than 3,000, but until it became necessary to secure their agreement to, or at least acquiescence in, the release of convicted criminals, their feelings were not even considered.

The victims were ignored for the best part of 30 years, but, when it became necessary to assuage their rightful indignation and anger and that of their relatives, suddenly Sir Kenneth Bloomfield was called into operation, and a physical memorial in Londonderry was proposed. Victims became the focus of Government attention only when their good will—and the good will of the community that supported them—was needed to allow convicted criminals and terrorists to be set free.

There has been a great deal of talk about those gentlemen being released and how money should be spent on reintegrating them into the community, and we have heard at length about what NIACRO and others have to say about them. When the Secretary of State went to persuade those people that they should support the ceasefire, the television cameras followed her into the so-called loyalist compound, and some of them were filmed against graffiti and murals. Michael Stone, who is about to be released even though he murdered five people and injured many others, was filmed against a mural that said, "Yabbadabbadoo, any Fenian will do" and, "Kill them all, let God sort them out".

I am speaking about so-called loyalist terrorists, because I want to make it abundantly clear that I despise, loathe and detest terrorists of any kind, serving any claimed cause, be they green, orange or multi-coloured. They are loathsome, despicable people, who should be dealt with regardless of whom they claim to represent.

We are told that, if those people are to be released back into society, they will be required to give up associations with the organisations that spawned them. When the Balcombe street murderers were released from prisons in the Republic to attend the Ard Feis, they arrived as absolute heroes and were given an enormous welcome, because they were seen as violent terrorists, exercising the military strategy of Sinn Fein, which is inextricably linked with them, as they are the cutting edge of its organisation.

Mr. Mallon: I agree with the Prime Minister about new preconditions. A press release on the Bill said:

[Mr. Mallon]

"As the Prime Minister said during the Referendum campaign, the following factors will be taken into account. They are not new preconditions but are essential to help us to reach an overall judgement".

My party opposed the Washington 3 precondition. We oppose it now. We are going to insist that everyone abides by the agreement that we have reached.

On our two sets of literature, there was only one set during the referendum. One person became a little urgent about fighting the assembly election, and that is why our election manifesto went out on the last Sunday. I am not sure that that is a hanging offence.

Mr. McCartney: I never suggested that it was a hanging offence. The two sets of election literature were clearly aimed at two different sets of people, and had two different purposes.

On the release of convicted criminals, the term "prisoner" has overtones of prisoners of war or people fighting according to the rules of the Geneva convention. Let me say something about the connection between these freedom fighters, these released prisoners and what they actually do.

Sinn Fein has 38 candidates for the assembly elections, of whom more than half have criminal convictions of a fairly serious nature. The Sinn Fein candidate in East Londonderry killed three soldiers. Mr. Paul Butler, the Sinn Fein candidate for Lagan Valley, shot a 50-year-old RUC reserve constable in the back of the head. Joe Cahill, aged 78, was once sentenced to death for murder. Gerry Kelly, its representative in Belfast, North, was sentenced to life imprisonment for the Old Bailey bomb, as a result of which one person was killed and 250 injured. In his escape from the Maze, he shot a prison warder in the head.

When I hear hon. Members talk of all the democracy, benefits and peace that the agreement is going to pour forth upon the people of Northern Ireland, I am reminded of a single instance that sums it all up.

My party's candidate in the election in Belfast, North served in the Ulster Defence Regiment for seven years. He have will have among his opponents the following: John White of the Ulster Democratic party, who hacked to death Senator Paddy Wilson and his girl friend, stabbing each of them 54 times; the aforesaid Gerry Kelly of Sinn Fein, who injured 250 people and killed one at the Old Bailey; and another loyalist, Mr. Billy Hutchinson, one of these Progressive Unionists, the radical politicians we heard about earlier. He was involved in the casual killing from a car of two Catholics.

That is the democracy that results from the agreement—three candidates who between them have murdered six people. Is that what democracy and this agreement are about? Is that the true basis upon which there will be lasting peace in Northern Ireland? Those who believe that should buy a few volumes of the Brothers Grimm and Hans Christian Andersen.

8.33 pm

Mr. William Ross (East Londonderry): I have one slight correction for the hon. and learned Member for North Down (Mr. McCartney). The Sinn Fein member who is standing in East Londonderry, or at least one of them, Mr. O'Kane, is a fairly near neighbour of mine. He did not kill three soldiers, but three RAF mechanics. At his trial, he said that, if he got the chance, he would do it all over again. That puts the matter in clear context.

As time is moving on and several hon. Members wish to speak, I shall try to be briefer than usual.

There have been several claims about the number of persons who will be released early under this legislation. The standard excuse, which has been made by many, including some members of my party, is that many of those prisoners would be out in two years in any case. That is true, but it is also a fact that the prisoners are already the beneficiaries of a generous shortening of their sentences. That said, 79 of those who will be out in two years would have had very long periods of imprisonment ahead of them but for the Bill.

I will not weary the House with the details this evening, but they are set out in *Hansard* in response to questions that I have tabled in recent weeks. There is one person whose release date in Great Britain was 2019. Several others would have served nine or 10 years into the next century. They will all be out in a couple of years. Those who are to be transferred to the Irish Republic will no doubt be even more generously treated, unless they happen to have shot a Garda officer in the Republic, in which case they will do their 40 years.

Such people will be released only if the organisation to which they belong is committed to purely peaceful and democratic action. We suffer from a barrage of voices telling us that that is the case with regard to the IRA and the other terrorist groups. In fact, there is a scarcely a day, or more accurately a night, on which acts of violence are not committed by members of those organisations or by their subcontractors to ensure their continuing dominance in some areas of Northern Ireland. That violence has been calmly ignored by the Government and all those who laud the agreement. Given that that is the case, I have no confidence that this Secretary of State will specify any of those organisations as terrorist.

The Bill will impact on existing legislation. My hon. Friend the Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Donaldson) considered in some depth which organisations are terrorist. It seems to me that, if the terrorist organisations simply say the correct soothing words, they will no longer be illegal bodies, and there will be no prosecutions for membership.

That leads to the question of extraditions from the Irish Republic and elsewhere of people sought by the RUC in connection with terrorist acts. I am pleased that the Secretary of State is here, because one example is Rita O'Hare, one of the wanted terrorists with whom she is on speaking terms. I admit that the relationship appears to reach the huggy-feely stage only when they are in the Irish Republic, because the woman concerned is a bail absconder in Northern Ireland.

The Secretary of State no doubt knows that the woman went on the run after recovering from her bullet wounds sufficiently to travel. The wounds were sustained while she was attempting to murder soldiers in Northern Ireland. She did not repent of her activities. Indeed, she continued with them, because she later served three years in the Republic for trying to smuggle explosives inside her body into Portlaoise prison.

Rita O'Hare's defence against extradition to Northern Ireland was upheld by the Irish courts on the ground that the attempted murder charge was a political offence.

thereby illustrating the great difficulty of getting an extradition from the Irish Republic. Her very defence goes a long way to proving that she was guilty of the charge brought against her. Clearly she is ideally qualified to advise the Secretary of State on extradition matters, and will not, I am sure, be slow to offer such advice.

However, I remind the right hon. Lady of section 18 of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989, which states:

"A person is guilty of an offence if he has information which he knows or believes might be of material assistance . . . in securing the apprehension, prosecution or conviction of any other person for an offence involving the commission, preparation or instigation of such an act,

and fails without reasonable excuse to disclose that information as soon as reasonably practicable . . . in Northern Ireland, to a constable or member of Her Majesty's Forces."

I should be interested to hear whether the Secretary of State has complied with that section with regard to her contacts with the loathsome woman with whom she seems to find so much in common. The Secretary of State should also look up the penalties, which I think she will find of interest.

Of course, what applies to the case of Rita O'Hare also applies to the other assorted thugs and murderers who will be released under the provisions of the Bill. We can also expect reoffenders to leave the United Kingdom jurisdiction, and they will never be extradited for trial for any offences.

The Bill also raises concerns about the position of those awaiting trial and sentence, and those who may yet be charged with murders or other crimes committed long ago. Some other neighbours of mine are in the courts in Belfast this week for attempted murder of members of the RUC in Dungiven.

When all has been said and done—a lot has been said today—the bottom line is that a large number of persons who have been found guilty and sentenced for very terrible acts will be out of prison early, long before their sentences would normally be completed. That is nothing short of a blatant corruption and interference with the judicial process, the concept of punishment for crime and the rehabilitation and reform of prisoners.

The passing and application of the Bill will confirm the IRA's claim, certainly in the minds of its members and supporters, that it is engaged in a just war, and that those convicted are not only prisoners of war but political prisoners rather than murderers and thugs. That is a psychological thing with the IRA, its supporters and other terrorist organisations, which so few people in this place seem to understand.

I believe that the consequences of accepting the IRA view of its terrorist campaign are vast, and can only intensify the deep and real contempt felt by many of the law-abiding citizens for those who have conceived and are carrying into effect this policy of abject surrender to the diktats of murderers. That is what the Bill is really about. It is an abject surrender to the diktats of murderers, and we had better realise exactly what we are putting our hand and our votes to.

8.41 pm

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead): I rise partly because a large number of those who have spoken are well qualified to speak on these matters, whereas I feel very under-qualified as I have lived all my life in England and my association with Ireland is through my family—but perhaps someone who is not so well qualified has a role to play in the debate, which is often characterised too much by certainty and not enough by probability, uncertainty and a feeling of trying to tease out new solutions rather than being convinced that one has the solution all along and that all that needs to happen is for everyone else to agree.

Some material points have been made—I think particularly about decommissioning—but I am not sure whether the appropriate place to put firm assurances about decommissioning is in the Bill or in a translation of what is clearly in the Bill into the political process through the good offices of the Secretary of State.

Mr. Grieve: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. McWalter: In a moment. I certainly agree that we have to ensure that the conditions spelt out by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and others are secured by the time we come to release from custody anyone who is guilty of terrible offences.

Mr. Grieve: The hon. Gentleman has answered the question that I was about to ask. I infer from what he says that his reading of the text of the agreement, which I submit is the critical issue, is as one with the Prime Minister's, as expressed to the House in his answers in Prime Minister's questions on 6 May.

Mr. McWalter: Indeed, but I submit to the hon. Gentleman and others that it is not clear whether we need to incorporate those ideas and commitment into statute, or whether the Bill will in the end provide us with a facility for ensuring that those commitments are honoured in the deed.

My feeling of under-qualification for the debate extends to other things, but my experience of Northern Ireland—or as some would call it, the north of Ireland—is characterised by an extraordinary gulf between what I have found there and what I have found in my own England. Although we have heard stirring speeches from, among others, the United Kingdom Unionist Member, the hon. and learned Member for North Down (Mr. McCartney), the fact is that there is a great gulf.

For example, there are not many places in England where there is a huge gap between people in how they describe a town. If I say that I am driving to Londonderry, I seem to be on one side of the fence. If I say that I am driving to Derry, I am on the other side of the fence. I had better make sure which I say when I am in the Shankill road or the Falls road. It is strange for those of us who are English that so much should ride on a word—even our life if we get it wrong in the wrong circumstances.

When I have been to Northern Ireland, I have often encountered phenomena that English people find perplexing. I have been on a bus that never reached Oxford Street bus station because a bomb went off 10 minutes before. I have been in a pub in Castlewellan that had no windows because it had been blown apart by a bomb. However, one of the things that I have not experienced—I understand that this makes a great difference—is how it feels to have a member of my family blown up by a bomb. My uncle lived in Castlewellan, but he was not a victim.

[Mr. McWalter]

I understand that the passion in the debate about victims is vital. I resent the suggestion, made by the hon. and learned Member for North Down, that victims come into the process right at the end. One of the extraordinary things about the debate is that so many of the victims have been prepared to construct a testimonial to their murdered loved ones. They say that there could be no better testament than for them to work in the memory of their loved ones to construct a lasting peace. That is something with which those of us who are debating these matters and who support the agreement must work constructively.

We have in Northern Ireland a society in which many of us have aspirations for radical change because we want our fellow countrymen and British islanders to enjoy a life that the rest of us in these islands usually enjoy.

By way of illustration of the problems in Northern Ireland, I offer the following story. I went for a job at the university of Ulster in Coleraine. Some hon. Members may think that the selection board was wise not to select me. In any case, from a shortlist of three I somehow managed not to get the job—

Mr. William Ross: Two did not.

Mr. McWalter: The hon. Gentleman's pals were probably on the panel.

Mr. Ross: No, they were not.

Mr. McWalter: When I walked into the hotel, a policeman asked me if he could check my bag. Being English and having a strong respect for policemen, I of course agreed. He removed the contents of my bag—Marks and Spencer shirts, and so on. He also asked if he could inspect my toilet bag. It contained razors and a tube of Colgate toothpaste, which the policeman squeezed out to make sure that it was not Semtex. A society in which that can happen is a society in need of radical change. Since 1972, when that incident took place, that society has been at war.

Some people have argued that the answer to war is to strengthen the rule of law. I understand that point of view, but it has not worked—because enough people in Northern Ireland feel alienated from the law and from the Government. At last, with this agreement, we have managed to marginalise a large number of people who still believe in the bullet and the bomb. The right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) was right to say that peace must be a precondition of any change. Admittedly there is still no peace; there are still what he called marginal elements who can kill. Some places are still unsafe and the marginal elements still have the capacity to murder people, but thanks to the agreement they no longer constitute a large minority: they are a shattered and fragmented rump.

I began by saying that I am unqualified to serve on the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, although I do. I do however have one vital qualification: I have seen the future. There is in my constituency a church called St. Paul's, in Highfield. It is shared by Catholics and Anglicans. At 8.30 on Sunday mornings there is a Protestant service conducted by a woman minister, and at 11 o'clock there is a Catholic mass. Such a thing is almost unheard of in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Robert McCartney: The idea that the two communities in Northern Ireland are at daggers drawn is erroneous. I have attended every sort of Catholic service, from nuptial mass to benediction, in almost every Catholic church in Belfast and in many churches in Rome—and I have no hang-ups at all.

Mr. McWalter: I thank the hon. and learned Gentleman, but I did not say that the communities were at daggers drawn. I said that a significant minority felt so alienated that they did not recognise what the hon. and learned Gentleman would call the rule of law. Of course, in my parish there are also a few people who do not respect the rule of law, but where such people form a significant minority the law has to be reconstructed so as to attract their assent.

Mr. Mallon: I was intrigued by the hon. Gentleman's experience with the toothpaste. It is true that we are different, but we are the product of our environment. We have been governed by this Parliament since the Act of Union of 1800. I suggest that that has something to do with our conditioning—that the diversity in the north of Ireland may stem partly from that.

Mr. McWalter: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his remarks. It is extraordinary that a tube of toothpaste can be regarded as a venomous item over the water. I was unfazed by the incident, but I can imagine members of the minority community in Northern Ireland feeling threatened, intimidated and resentful in such circumstances. We in England are used to working constructively with the police authorities.

What we need to foster, following the agreement, is the spirit of St. Paul's church in Highfield. Its experience needs to be etched on the life of Northern Ireland. From now on no one, republican or Unionist, should regard it as strange to work with members of the other community in a spirit of mutual understanding and multicultural exchange.

8.57 pm

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East): There has at least been an acceptance by many who have spoken today that while the roots of the Bill can be found in the Belfast agreement, that agreement has been given significant support by the undertakings, promises and pledges offered by the Prime Minister during the referendum campaign.

I recognise that 71 per cent. of those who voted in the referendum voted in favour of the agreement, but I do not accept the contention that that represents a majority of both our communities. It is clear that a majority of the Unionist community voted against the agreement—*[Interruption.]* The giggling hon. Member for Hemel Hempstead (Mr. McWalter) should take into account some simple statistics: 71 per cent. voted yes; according to the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon), 42 per cent. of those were nationalists but, accepting that perhaps 5 per cent. of the nationalist community voted no—although the exit polls did not show that to be the case—that would represent about 2 per cent. of the overall

community, thereby reducing the figure back down to 40 per cent.; about 8 per cent. of the votes in Northern Ireland come from what are described as others, such as the Alliance party, the Women's Coalition, Labour and other bits and pieces, which gives us 48 per cent.

Mr. Winnick: What a way to describe such groups.

Mr. Robinson: The hon. Gentleman would never identify with Labour in Northern Ireland—it is an entirely different species there. That gives 48 per cent., leaving only 23 per cent. who voted yes from the Unionist community, as opposed to 29 per cent. who voted no from the Unionist community. Therefore, the clear majority of the Unionist community voted against the agreement.

The Government know that; their own polls show that that was the case. Indeed, those polls so alarmed them that they sent the Prime Minister post haste to Northern Ireland to do whatever he could to turn the tide of events. To that end, he gave a series of commitments which, in my view, are as crucial to the future of the Bill as is the agreement. People in Northern Ireland voted not simply on their reading of the Belfast agreement, but on the interpretation of that agreement given by the Prime Minister. When the Prime Minister indicated clearly that there would be a direct linkage between actual decommissioning and any prisoners being released, people were prepared to believe it.

In the House, the Leader of the Opposition asked the Prime Minister:

"Does he agree that prisoners should not be released early until the organisations to which they belong have substantially decommissioned their weapons?"

The Prime Minister replied:

"It is essential that any agreement is signed up to in full."—[*Official Report*, 6 May 1998; Vol. 311, c. 711.]

He said that the answer to the question was yes. He said a lot of other things, but he answered yes to the question, put directly to him by the Leader of the Opposition, which asked for decommissioning prior to any releases taking place. The Prime Minister made a further comment on 13 May:

"Especially after the events at the weekend, it must be clear and demonstrated . . . that if people are to take their places on the Northern Ireland Executive and participate in the provisions on prisoner release, we must be sure that violence is given up for good. We must demonstrate that clearly."—[*Official Report*, 13 May 1998; Vol. 312, c. 365.]

Neither of those pledges has been fulfilled in the Bill. There is no direct linkage between decommissioning and the release of prisoners, nor is there any requirement for decommissioning prior to prisoners being released. All the Bill says is that that is one of the issues that the Secretary of State will take into account, but she is not required to do so even if she finds out that decommissioning has not taken place. There is no requirement in the Bill for decommissioning to have been signed up to, or to have taken place, before prisoners start to be released.

There is no requirement for violence to have ended for good, even though the Bill talks about

"a complete and unequivocal ceasefire."

Those are strange words to use because we had a complete ceasefire announced by the Provisional IRA. But it was broken by the Provisional IRA when it bombed Canary Wharf. A complete ceasefire is not a permanent end to violence, nor does it mean giving up violence for good. That pledge is broken in the Bill—the Prime Minister did not live up to his words.

The Prime Minister came over to Northern Ireland campaigning and gave a further pledge, which was published in the Belfast *News Letter* of Thursday 14 May. He said

"People need to know that if they are sitting down in the room of the executive of the Northern Ireland assembly with other people then they are not sitting there with the guns under the table, outside the door and all the rest of it. That can't happen and we must make it absolutely clear that that can't happen."

Why is it that we in Northern Ireland are not to see the settlement Bill before people go to the polls on 25 June? One would have thought it might be appropriate for that Bill to be published before 25 June so that we could see whether the Prime Minister was keeping his pledges. I am sure that the Secretary of State will want to put right any impression that the people of Northern Ireland might have that the Prime Minister will welsh on those commitments, as he welshed on the commitments on decommissioning and the release of prisoners.

In his last bid, the Prime Minister made a dramatic statement and personally signed his five pledges to the people of Northern Ireland, which were displayed on a large billboard. The same pledge as previously was made on prison releases. Pledge No. 5 stated:

"Prisoners kept in unless violence is given up for good."

That is clearly a requirement for a permanent end to violence—not a tactical cessation of violence, not a pause in violence, not simply giving up violence for a few years, but giving up violence for good.

How is that to be demonstrated? The Prime Minister said in his Balmoral speech that it would be demonstrated by an end to punishment beatings and by standing down the organisation and dismantling it. Those are the key issues, along with decommissioning, that show that violence is being given up for good.

The Prime Minister did not keep his word to the people of Northern Ireland. The pledges are not kept in the Bill. If he broke those pledges, the people of Northern Ireland can be certain that the other four pledges that he signed in Coleraine are unlikely to be kept when the settlement Bill is eventually published.

I agree with the hon. Members for Newry and Armagh and for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) that this Bill probably keeps to the lines of the agreement. It does not keep to the basis of the Prime Minister's pledges, but it is in line with the agreement, because the agreement, as we argued during the campaign, did not require decommissioning. It required only that certain individuals should use their best endeavours and influence to bring about decommissioning. The agreement made it clear that within two years, all the prisoners would get out.

One Labour Back Bencher made the remarkable statement that the Bill is not about letting murderers out on to the streets. What is it about then? Of course it is about letting murderers out on to the streets. That is its whole purpose. The Minister gave figures to journalists to show how many murderers would be allowed out on to the streets.

As soon as the Bill is passed, a contradiction in law will be created. I agree that there is no doubt that the Bill will be passed, given the size of the Labour majority.

[Mr. Robinson]

Under one piece of legislation, the IRA and other terrorist organisations are proscribed, but when the Secretary of State is asked to make a determination under clause 3(8) on whether various organisations are terrorist organisations, she will undoubtedly come to the conclusion that the IRA is, for the purposes of the Bill, not a terrorist organisation.

So certain was I that the Secretary of State would come to that conclusion that I was prepared to stake my political career on it. After 19 years in the House, I made it clear that if the Secretary of State was prepared to come out publicly before last Monday and make a statement giving a clear undertaking that she would list the Provisional IRA as a terrorist organisation under that clause, I would be happy to withdraw. I thought that, offered such a carrot, the Secretary of State, keen to get rid of me, would jump at the opportunity, but she did not take it. I even made sure that she was aware of it by speaking to her private secretary, to ensure that she knew the great possibilities that lay before her.

The Secretary of State could not give such an undertaking publicly because she has no intention of determining that, for the purposes of the Bill, the Provisional IRA is a terrorist organisation. She will determine that it is not.

By doing that, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland will be saying, "You can hold on to 100 tonnes of weapons and enough explosives and guns to carry on waging war for another 20 years, but I will not determine that you are a terrorist organisation." She will say, "You can have all the plans to wreck and ruin the Province, but I will not determine that you are a terrorist organisation. You can have a structure and a terrorist network throughout the Province, but I will not determine that you are a terrorist organisation." That is how Mad Hattered the Bill is. Even though the IRA is proscribed as a terrorist organisation by an Act of Parliament, the Secretary of State has determined that it should not be included in a specified list of terrorist organisations. She will do the same to other terrorist organisations as well.

We also have the nonsense—emphasised by the Secretary of State in her remarks—that it is an offence to be a member of a proscribed terrorist organisation. An IRA man in the Maze prison can declare that he is a member of the Provisional IRA—which is a proscribed organisation—and the Secretary of State may release him from prison because she does not determine that that proscribed organisation should be included in the list of terrorist organisations. That man will be allowed on to the street even though he has admitted that he is a member of an organisation that everyone knows is a terrorist organisation and which is legally proscribed as such by an Act of Parliament. That is an absolute absurdity.

Other factors must be taken into account in terms of the prisoners. I do not think that it is sufficient to allow convicted prisoners to leave gaol if they have not repented or expressed regret for their crimes. Prisoners can get out of gaol without renouncing violence because they will get out on the basis of their organisation's status. However, when those people are out on licence, they will not be put back into prison on the basis of their organisation's status. If their organisation returns to violence, they will still be free because it is their individual behaviour that matters to the Secretary of State and to the commission. That is entirely wrong and the provision must clearly be amended in Committee.

I do not believe that the Bill's criteria for determining a terrorist organisation are sufficient. Clearly, we must take account—we shall seek to amend the Bill to this effect—of the views of the Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, who must believe that an organisation is no longer a threat to the people of Northern Ireland. Such a provision must be inserted into the Bill so that we can hear an independent and impartial view rather than the political views being expressed in the House tonight.

It is probably fairly obvious that I intend to vote against the Bill. I will do so on principle. I believe that sentences may be reduced by a very narrow margin in certain circumstances—on the ground of good behaviour, for example. The review bodies examine a series of factors, such as the likelihood of a prisoner reoffending, but that applies to only a small part of a sentence. The Bill introduces an amnesty in everything but name. The Government know it, and they think that, by calling it something else, they will fool the people. They will not. When the gates open, the prisoners will start to leave. Hundreds of prisoners will get out in that two-year period, and most of them will be murderers.

I shall vote against the Bill on principle. We accept the fact that the Government will pursue the Bill and that it will pass, but we shall seek to amend it in Committee. I know that the Government will not accept the substantial amendments that we shall propose, as they will be contrary to the Government's deal with Sinn Fein-IRA.

Will the Secretary of State assure the House that, when the commission is established, in deciding its composition, she will not feel that it is necessary to telephone an on-the-run terrorist, such as Rita O'Hare, or a former leader of the Provisional IRA and Army Council member, such as Martin McGuinness, seeking their approval? When she establishes the commission, whose advice will the Secretary of State take on the issue of prisoner releases? Will she again have to secure the approval of Sinn Fein-IRA representatives?

9.14 pm

Mr. William Thompson (West Tyrone): It will be no surprise to the House when I say that I was opposed to the agreement and recommended the people of Northern Ireland to vote no in the referendum. As the Bill is a result of that agreement, it will come as no surprise that I am opposed to it.

For 25 years, we have had violence in Northern Ireland with terrorists at their work. We have seen murder and mayhem on many occasions. We have heard many announcements from Governments that they will defeat terrorism. They have said that the terrorists will not get what they want. However, the reality is that, because of American influence, European influence, southern Irish influence and influence from the civil servants in the Foreign Office and the Northern Ireland Office, the British Government never had the guts to beat terrorism.

If we do not beat terrorism, in the end we negotiate with the terrorists and appease them. The agreement that has been signed is not a peace agreement but an appeasement agreement. We can see the result of that in the Bill. It represents appeasement to terrorism. The

terrorists were there to make a deal, and their condition was that they had to get their prisoners out. That applied both to Sinn Fein and to the terrorists from the nationalist side as well as the terrorist organisations from the Unionist side. That was the price that they demanded for the agreement—or part of the price—and, so that the agreement could be reached, they got it. They wanted to get their prisoners out.

The Bill acknowledges something that has always been denied, which is that there were political prisoners in Northern Ireland. They may not have been called political prisoners—they may have been termed special status prisoners—but in reality they have been political prisoners. Men and women who have been involved in terrorism are now to be treated differently from every other criminal who is in prison in Northern Ireland. That is immoral and it discriminates against the ordinary criminal who has to do his full term in prison, even though the offences that he has committed may be much less than some of the terrorist crimes that have been committed by others.

Mr. Winnick: Will the hon. Gentleman explain why the leader and deputy leader of his party have come to a very different conclusion from him about the negotiated agreement? Why has the majority of the governing part of his organisation also decided to back the agreement?

Mr. Thompson: I did not hear exactly all that the hon. Gentleman said, but I know that many parties accept the agreement. Indeed, my own party has accepted it. I accept that. I accept also that the majority of the people of Northern Ireland have accepted it. However, that does not mean that I must accept it. I believe that it is wrong. As I believe that it is wrong, I therefore believe that I have the right to oppose it as it continues to come into development in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Winnick: I was really asking why the hon. Gentleman believes—of course, he has a perfect right to oppose the Bill in a free House of Commons—that the leader and deputy leader of his party, as well as the majority of the governing part of his organisation, take a very different view from him over the negotiated agreement.

Mr. Thompson: The hon. Gentleman asks a question to which I really do not know the answer. I ask him to ask those to whom he refers why they reached such a decision. It is certainly not one with which I agree.

The Bill is a betrayal of all the good men and women from the security forces who gave their lives in the pursuit of the defeat of terrorism. Many of them spent nights patrolling the roads trying to defend the ordinary people of Northern Ireland in order to defeat terrorism. They died in vain, because terrorism has not been defeated. Terrorism is succeeding still in Northern Ireland.

The so-called safeguards in the Bill are meaningless. Many people in Northern Ireland were persuaded to vote yes by the promises given by the Prime Minister when he came to Northern Ireland on three occasions. When they saw him on television, they took him at his word. I tried to persuade them that what he signed and said was meaningless, but they would not believe that. Now, in the Bill, we discover that what I believed has come true. The Prime Minister's promises have not been fulfilled in the Bill.

Time is of the essence, so I conclude by saying that this is a bad Bill. It is a sad day for the House of Commons when it considers a Bill to release murderers. Therefore, I shall oppose it.

9.20 pm

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): I shall be brief and I apologise, therefore, if I cannot develop one or two of my arguments as much as I would have wished.

I was happy to support the agreement when it came before the House. Various things have been said about it in this debate, and I find myself as unable to agree with the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) as I am with the hon. Member for Hemel Hempstead (Mr. McWalter).

Ultimately, Northern Ireland is a civil society. It enjoys, in substantial areas, a great measure of peace, but we belittle the people of Northern Ireland if we attribute to them a state of wardom such that we have to extend or change the law to accommodate their circumstances. It is a bad precedent.

That having been said, the agreement implies on our part an act of hard-headed faith. I have never had any doubt in my mind that if violence comes to an end, that of itself is a good precondition for looking at the case of each individual convicted for an act of violence. If the violence has ceased, it is a good reason for releasing them as soon as possible. That would have applied whether or not the agreement had come into being.

Therefore, if we are approaching a situation where peace will come to Northern Ireland, there are sound reasons for looking to release prisoners as expeditiously as possible, as long as we do not release into the community those who will resume violence.

There are matters connected with the agreement which have given me cause for concern. Applying my mind as a lawyer, I read the agreement carefully and I concluded that what the Prime Minister had to say on 6 May about the linkage between the release of prisoners and the cessation of violence and decommissioning was, on a reading of the agreement, correct. I hope that it is, because I am concerned not about whether other parties to the agreement may come to a different interpretation but to know the Government's interpretation of the agreement.

Listening to the debate, there has been enough casuistry from supporters of the Government to suggest that there are those who read into the agreement some very different things from others about the linkage of decommissioning with the cessation of violence.

As I said earlier in an intervention, I have no doubt that the agreement can be construed—it is reflected in the legislation—as meaning that an act of preparation for violence would be the failure within the two-year period to achieve the substantial decommissioning that is envisaged in the agreement.

If that is not the case, the sooner the Government say so, the better. There is a tendency in circumstances of this kind to have a hope and a prayer, and sometimes to go beyond what is realistic. It is important that people know where they stand. Obfuscation may be a Government art form, but it will do us no good in this context. If the matter is not clarified now, it will be clarified later, with far worse consequences.

[Mr. Dominic Grieve]

I am prepared to accept what the Prime Minister said, because it appears to be in accordance with the agreement, but I seek confirmation of that. The question of what amendments are tabled or become critical in Committee will depend on how the Government interpret the agreement to the House and on the assurances that can be given that what the Prime Minister said on the matter is correct. I believe that the agreement and the Bill match, and that the agreement was properly reflected by what the Prime Minister said, but I look forward to reassurance that that is indeed the case.

The issue with which I now wish to deal briefly may be slightly off the remit of the Bill, but it is important. I expect that, by the time the two-year period is up, there will be virtually no IRA prisoners in this country who have not been transferred either to Northern Ireland or to the Republic. I understand that the remit of the Bill concerns prisoners transferred to Northern Ireland, but the status of prisoners transferred to the Republic is a matter of abiding curiosity to me. Some of those prisoners have the unique and unpleasant distinction of being virtually the only ones subject to the full life tariff. Some were transferred on the Irish Government's explicit assurance that they accepted the full life tariff imposed by the Home Secretary.

Where do those prisoners fit into the agreement? If they do not fit into the Bill, into what agreement do they fit? I do not accept that they are merely the responsibility of the Government of the Irish Republic, because that Government's previous ability to release them has been fettered by their assurance of the full life tariff.

There are exceptions—properly made—in the Bill. I know from my experience of encountering terrorists in the courts that they come in all shapes and sizes—from the young romantic who has murdered, but who may properly wish to be released into the community quickly, to the psychopath who probably constitutes a danger to the community whether or not he is a member of a terrorist organisation, and who was drawn to terrorist organisations like a bee to a honey pot.

What measure of control will the Government exercise over influencing the release date of prisoners transferred to the Irish Republic, and how do such prisoners fit into the agreement? Even if the matter falls outside the remit of the Bill, I should be grateful for an explanation of how that will work.

I thank the House for allowing me the indulgence of exceeding the normal time for Back-Bench speeches in order that I might raise those matters.

9.27 pm

Mr. Malcolm Moss (North-East Cambridgeshire): I am more than happy to have given my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) five or six minutes for his excellent contribution to this debate.

I reiterate the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay) in thanking the Secretary of State and her Ministers for involving the Opposition and seeking our advice in the drafting of the Bill. As my hon. Friend said, some of our points have been incorporated, but the Bill still does not go far enough to satisfy our concerns and those of many people in Northern Ireland. As my hon. Friend said, we shall submit amendments and force those to a vote in Committee unless we have further accommodation from the Government.

Contrary to the accusations of some Labour Members, we do not seek to rewrite the agreement; we merely seek to make clear in the Bill the intent and the terms of the agreement. That is no less an intent than the Prime Minister has sought to achieve in his various comments over the past few weeks.

I seek clarification from the Minister on two questions that were put to the Secretary of State by my hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell. The first relates to the issue of Guardsmen Fisher and Wright. We seek confirmation that the Bill does not apply in their case. Clause 3(3)(a) sets a first condition that the sentence must be for a qualifying offence. It seems to me that the offences committed by Guardsmen Fisher and Wright do not fulfil that condition. Perhaps the Minister will clarify that when he responds to the debate.

Clause 1(5) refers to a lawyer who holds a legal qualification in any jurisdiction. The issue raised was not dealt with fully. There is still some doubt, and we seek confirmation that the qualification should be from the United Kingdom.

I can say in response to the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. Browne) that we welcome the agreement and we acknowledge that it is a momentous event in the history of Northern Ireland. History will determine how momentous it is, but it is a key and significant step. We want further progress on the basis of that agreement. There is a glimmer of hope, and that was shown by the positive 71 per cent. vote in the referendum. However, that is conditional on good faith being exercised by all the participating parties. The commitments by the signatories to the agreement are clear cut and have repeatedly been endorsed and elaborated on by the Prime Minister himself.

It is the duty of the Opposition to challenge the wording of the legislation that interprets the intent of the agreement. There may well be differing views on the legal interpretation of words in the Bill. Is that not what the courts will be asked to determine? As a lawyer, the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun should have understood that fundamental point.

There is no inconsistency in our position. We have made it clear in the House, in private meetings with the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State, and publicly in Northern Ireland and in mainland Britain that we seek a clear and unequivocal commitment to giving up violence for good, and that includes decommissioning. We believe that that commitment should also apply to the release of prisoners. After all, the Prime Minister has said no less. The hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson), in his powerful speech, and my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield alluded to many of the Prime Minister's comments in the past few weeks. In the limited time available to me, I do not intend to reiterate them. In the Prime Minister's various interviews and statements on 6 May, 14 May and 17 May in the House and in Northern Ireland, the word "decommissioning" occurred time and again. Furthermore, on every occasion he linked decommissioning to both prisoner release and the taking up of Executive positions in the assembly.

The Bill does not make those links in anything like the same clear and unequivocal way. That is the critical issue. The people of Northern Ireland were entitled to believe

what the Prime Minister said about those links when they voted yes to the agreement. The House is entitled to believe that the Prime Minister meant what he said under questioning from the Leader of the Opposition. The country as a whole is entitled to believe the Prime Minister when he promises to link legislation on prisoner release to the giving up of violence for good. The Prime Minister said that the

"war is finished, done with, gone".

To ordinary men and women in Northern Ireland and in mainland Britain, it is inconceivable that an organisation that eschews violence and terrorism cannot co-operate fully and totally with the decommissioning process.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell, the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) and the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) raised the issue of the prisoners transferred to the Republic of Ireland.

The intention of the agreement is clear from paragraph 1 of the section on prisoners, on page 25. I think that the hon. Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) quoted from it twice. It states:

"Both Governments will put in place mechanisms to provide for an accelerated programme for the release of prisoners, including transferred prisoners, convicted of scheduled offences in Northern Ireland or, in the case of those sentenced outside Northern Ireland, similar offences (referred to hereafter as qualifying prisoners)."

Clause 15 of the Bill deals with sentences passed outside Northern Ireland—that is, in mainland Great Britain. Subsection (1) gives the Secretary of State power to provide for clauses 3 to 13 to take effect, if the prisoner concerned meets the four conditions specified in clause 3(3) to (6).

It strikes me that, if the likes of Paul Magee and the Balcombe street gang had stayed in prisons in the United Kingdom—as provided for in clause 15—they would have been subject to this legislation. The fact that they have been transferred to the Republic of Ireland under a separate jurisdiction does create a slight problem, but, given the intent in the paragraph in the agreement on the release of prisoners, I do not think that they can be seen to have prejudiced their case by moving from prisons here to prisons in the Republic. I hope that the Minister will clarify that point for once and for all.

The hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) said—and I think that his comments were echoed by the hon. Member for Hull, North—that there was no question of introducing new elements into the agreement, and, by inference, into the Bill. He implied that no embellishment would be countenanced—particularly to clause 3(8) and (9), the subsections which are at the heart of the Bill. Indeed, he challenged both the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State to come to the Floor of the House and say why the legislation was to be changed from the word and the spirit of the agreement.

I presume from those comments that the hon. Gentleman is content with the words in the Bill as drafted. I also presume that he was consulted about those words before the Bill was drafted. That is not a problem. Consultation was widespread, and many parties were included: I have already accepted that. It is, however, unusual for the first draft of a Bill, as it appears on Second Reading, to be perfect. I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman does not entertain the view that other words and combinations of words could strengthen the legislation in a way that we would like, while still not going beyond the terms of the agreement.

I shall give the Minister plenty of time in which to speak, as I know that he has many questions to answer. I have raised some of the key issues, principally those arising in clause 3(8) and (9). We shall be tabling amendments to those key provisions. We hope that the spirit of co-operation that the Government have shown hitherto will continue when the Bill returns to the Floor of the House for its Committee stage next week.

9.38 pm

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. Adam Ingram): This has been an interesting and wide-ranging debate about an issue that generates strong emotions. In the time available, I shall do my best to deal with all the points that have been raised, although it may not be possible for me to do so. It will certainly be possible to discuss the details of many of the points raised this evening in Committee.

There have been many difficult and dark days in the troubled history of Northern Ireland, but 10 April and 22 May stand out like beacons. On those days a new light shone on the Province, a ray of hope and the glimmer of a better tomorrow. The Good Friday agreement and the referendum which endorsed it so convincingly are without doubt significant turning points in the history of Northern Ireland. Those two events are the opportunity for the people of Northern Ireland to move forward into a future that is no longer plagued by violence and blighted by fear.

All hon. Members have an obligation to listen to what the people of Northern Ireland have said. They are the people who have been living with the troubles all these years and who have been most damaged by them. They are saying that they want a better future for themselves and their families.

When the participants to the talks signed the agreement on Good Friday, they knew that hard decisions lay ahead and that difficult actions would be required. Equally, when the people of Northern Ireland overwhelmingly voted yes in the referendum, they did so knowing that they would have to accept decisions and developments that had previously been anathema to them. The talks participants and the people of Northern Ireland endorsed the Good Friday agreement knowing that it was a total package that would stand or fall as a whole.

The legislation deals with one of the first of the important matters on which the agreement can either founder or move ahead. The Government have made no secret of the fact that the prisoner element of the agreement was not easy for us. We share the concerns of many people about the early release of prisoners. However, it is time for all those who have suffered hurt over the past 30 years to take a deep breath and say that, although this is not necessarily a perfect end to the troubles, realistically it is the only one.

I shall now deal with the issue of victims. During my time in Northern Ireland I have constantly been amazed at the capacity of so many of those who have suffered gravely over the years, whether from the discriminate bombings and shootings of republican terrorists or from the evil sectarian murders by so-called loyalists, to forgive and to look ahead. Without that, politicians would not have been given the time and space in which to forge a better future.

[Mr. Adam Ingram]

In my role as Minister for victims, I am particularly conscious of the Bill's possible impact on victims and their families. I understand the hurt and the fears of many of those people, and I understand the need to ensure that their concerns and interests are properly addressed. In that context, I should like to thank the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) and my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, South (Ms Moran), who also spoke about victims, for their comments. They both pertinently drew attention to the need to ensure that victims who want the information can find out when particular offenders will be released. Lord Alderdice and the Alliance party have shown a particular interest in the issue and have made similar suggestions and representations on behalf of victims. In Committee next week, I shall be happy to consider further questions on the issue with a view to tabling a Government amendment to tackle it.

The hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough asked how the Republic of Ireland would deal with victims. That is a matter for the Government of the Republic. They have also appointed a Minister with responsibility for dealing with victims of terrorism over the years in the Republic, and I am due to meet him shortly to discuss what we can jointly do. Legislation and how to deal specifically with such issues are matters for that Government.

The hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) spoke about the sensitivity of victims and about informing them. We shall have to deal with Victim Support and other such groups to ensure that information will be offered sympathetically. The overriding principle is that it will be for victims to decide whether they want to receive information. We shall be establishing a procedure whereby victims may identify themselves if they wish information to be brought forward, so that they can ease some of the pain that they may feel about prisoner releases as the releases begin to progress over the coming months and years.

The hon. and learned Member for North Down (Mr. McCartney), who is not present, said that we were only now beginning to think about the issue of victims. Just about everything that the hon. and learned Gentleman says is wrong. He is wrong again on the issue of victims. It is not true that victims have been ignored by this or by previous Governments. Over the years, considerable sums of money have been routed towards groups that have sought to assist victims. Since this Government took office, we have established a commission specifically to consider the issue. It has reported recently; a Minister responsible for victims has been appointed; and we are making great progress. It is wrong to say that we have ignored victims over the years; that is simply not so.

The hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough asked whether the Secretary of State would consult the Chief Constable and the General Officer Commanding on whether a ceasefire was being maintained. The answer to that is yes. It is clear that they are both key players in understanding the effect of what is taking place on the ground. Of course, at present, both the Secretary of State and I are constantly in touch with the Chief Constable and the General Officer Commanding in assessing security matters on a week-by-week basis.

I turn to the safeguards in the Bill. Although we owe it to victims and to the people of Northern Ireland to address fears about release, we must obviously take account of how we go about it. The Bill builds in the major safeguards which were envisaged at the conclusion of Good Friday agreement and which the Prime Minister has promised since.

The gates of the Maze prison are not being flung open and prisoners will not be granted an amnesty for their criminal actions. The safeguards will ensure that prisoners who support terrorist groups that continue to engage in violence or return to violence will not be released. Prisoners who will be released on licence will be recalled if they engage in terrorist activities after release. Safeguards also ensure that the programme of release can be stopped if circumstances change. That means that, if a terrorist group returns to violence, prisoners who support the organisation will not be released, and those who continue to support it while on licence can be recalled. Another important safeguard is that life sentence prisoners will not be released if they are a danger to the public. Those are very important criteria and will be rigidly applied.

I turn to the Prime Minister's pledges. The message that the Prime Minister gave is very clear, and was confirmed in his statement to the people of Northern Ireland on 14 May. He said that, if parties are to benefit from accelerated release, their commitment to democratic, non-violent means must be established in an objective, meaningful and verifiable way. He said that a range of factors were to be taken into account in clarifying whether the terms and spirit of the agreement have been met and whether violence has genuinely been given up for good.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State set out the following factors in her introductory statement, and they are now included in the Bill. They are whether an organisation is committed to the use now and in future of only democratic and peaceful means to achieve its objectives; has ceased to be involved in any acts of violence or preparation for violence; is not directing or promoting acts of violence committed by other organisations; and is co-operating fully with the decommissioning body.

Since we are judging what assurances have been given, it is worth looking at what has happened. It is worth underlining that prisoners have been released throughout the troubles. They include almost 450 life sentence prisoners who were released through the life sentence release mechanisms set up by the Conservative Government in 1983. Only two of them have been recalled as a result of further serious terrorist-type offences. Those prisoners include also more than 245 fixed-sentence prisoners released early under legislation introduced by the Conservative Government as recently as 1995. Only two of those prisoners have had their licence revoked.

The 1995 legislation was introduced during a period in which both loyalists and the Provisional IRA had ceasefires in place, and continued in force even when the PIRA ceasefire broke down, with the horrific docklands bombing. Although the previous Government had power to suspend by order that legislation, they chose not to do so. In many respects, we are today considering building on that Conservative legislation.

The new scheme will lead to earlier release and will for the first time involve life sentence prisoners. However, the changes are balanced by safeguards that were absent from the 1995 legislation. Specifically, we will be able to penalise organisations that do not maintain ceasefires and to prevent release of prisoners, especially life sentence prisoners, who will be a risk to the public.

Mr. John D. Taylor (Strangford): Will the Minister make it clear whether IRA prisoners can be released regardless of whether there is decommissioning?

Mr. Ingram: As the right hon. Gentleman knows, one of the factors that has to be taken into account—it is one of the four factors—is commitment by those organisations to be engaged fully in that process. That factor is quite clear both from what the Prime Minister has said and in the legislation.

I tell the right hon. Member for Strangford that every hon. Member wants an end to paramilitary weapons. We all want decommissioning. The Government have initiated legislation to achieve that end. In the next few weeks, we will be signing the scheme to put into effect the means to achieve it. However, ultimately, the mechanism that those organisations would apply in decommissioning is voluntary. It is the organisations that will have to comply with the factors and produce the weapons. We do not have mechanisms to take weapons from organisations unless they co-operate with the schemes, which will be signed up to within the next few weeks.

I shall deal now with the points raised by the hon. Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay), which were raised again by the hon. Member for North-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Moss).

Mr. Robathan: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Ingram: No; I should like now to deal specifically with the transfer of prisoners, as I am very conscious of the time.

Mr. MacKay: On decommissioning, and in response to the Minister's reply to the right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor), may I ask whether the Minister agrees with the Prime Minister's statement on the Floor of the House that

"It is essential that organisations that want to benefit from the early release of prisoners should give up violence. Decommissioning is part of that"?

If decommissioning is part of release, surely the Minister will agree that it must be a prerequisite—rather than the Secretary of State or her successors merely saying that they will take it into account. If the Minister can give us that confirmation today, I think that we will have very few problems with the rest of the Bill.

Mr. Ingram: Of course I agree with the Prime Minister. However, let me quote the Prime Minister's exact comments, which have been quoted selectively. In reply to the Leader of the Opposition, the Prime Minister said:

"Again, I agree with the right hon. Gentleman. It is essential that organisations that want to benefit from the early release of prisoners should give up violence."

We all agree with that. He continued:

"Decommissioning is part of that, of course, but it goes further. It is not just a question of decommissioning, but a question of making sure, as the agreement says, that there is a complete and unequivocal ceasefire. What is more, there is provision in the agreement for that to be kept under constant review."—[*Official Report*, 6 May 1998; Vol. 311, c. 711.]

So what the Prime Minister said—

Mr. MacKay: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Ingram: No.

What the Prime Minister said—[HON. MEMBERS: "Give way."] I am answering the point. The Prime Minister's comments went further than the assurance now sought by the hon. Member for Bracknell. On that basis, I hope that the hon. Gentleman now finds it within himself to judge that he can support the legislation.

Mr. MacKay: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has quoted the passage in full—it was purely because of the time that I did not—because I agree with the rest of what the Prime Minister said. Any reasonable person who looks at what he said—a lot of reasonable people in the Province looked at it and decided in the end to vote yes during the referendum campaign—would judge that decommissioning had to take place before prisoners were released. That is absolute fact. If that is not conceded in the legislation, the people of Northern Ireland will have been ratted upon.

Mr. Ingram: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman is being so offensive about the Prime Minister, who made such a—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. I remind the hon. Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay) that we should always use temperate language in the House.

Mr. MacKay: I will withdraw the words "ratted upon" and say misled.

Mr. Ingram: The hon. Gentleman is merely finding another way of being offensive. Clearly, that has been the whole import of what he has been saying. We have a bipartisan approach and we are trying to move forward. The hon. Gentleman is now saying that the Prime Minister has misled the House and the people of Northern Ireland, while at the same time saying that he welcomes the agreement and recognises the major contribution that the Prime Minister made in bringing it about and getting that tremendous vote on 22 May. Can the hon. Gentleman get his act together? Can he begin to think clearly whether he wants to compliment the Prime Minister or to insult him?

Mr. MacKay: I am not saying that the Prime Minister misled the House, if the legislation is corrected. I am assuming that the Prime Minister acted in good faith and was saying what would be in the legislation; but it is not in the legislation, and unless the legislation is amended, people will assume that the right hon. Gentleman has misled the House. I am asking the Minister to ensure that that provision is in the legislation—then there will be no problems whatever.

Mr. Ingram: Perhaps I should have taken longer for my winding-up speech, if that had been permitted; because of those interventions, I will not now have time to cover all the points made.

[Mr. Ingram]

I shall deal with the point made by the hon. Member for Bracknell about the Prime Minister's assurances and what is reflected in the legislation. Clause 3(9), which must of course be considered with all the other factors that have to come into play, states:

"In applying subsection (8)(b) the Secretary of State shall in particular take into account whether an organisation—

(a) is committed to the use now and in the future of only democratic and peaceful means to achieve its objectives;

(b) has ceased to be involved in any acts of violence or of preparation for violence;

(c) is directing or promoting acts of violence committed by other organisations;

(d) is co-operating fully with any Commission of the kind referred to in section 7 of the Northern Ireland Arms Decommissioning Act 1997."

Those are four clear factors, which the Secretary of State will take into account and which are wholly consistent with what the Prime Minister said in the House and to the people of Northern Ireland. I hope that when the hon. Member for Bracknell leaves the Chamber he will reflect on those—he probably will not correct his thoughts at this point in time. He has complimented the Prime Minister in the past and he should compliment him again for ensuring that those factors are in the legislation. They are important and they will have to be taken into account.

The transfer of prisoners from England—not from the mainland as the hon. Member for Bracknell said—to the Republic of Ireland is another critical area that has been mentioned. Repatriation of such prisoners was agreed on the basis that the Republic would continue to enforce their sentences. The hon. Gentleman and others referred to a particular prisoner, Magee, who would normally expect to serve a period similar to that which he could have expected to serve in England.

Under the Belfast agreement, both Governments agreed to introduce mechanisms for the early release of prisoners—the agreement that the hon. Gentleman says he supports. The sentences of those prisoners repatriated to the Republic of Ireland may therefore be reviewed under the terms of the agreement. That is a clear reading of the agreement. It cannot be interpreted in any other way. It is a matter for the Republic of Ireland how it implements its aspect of the agreement, in the same way as it is a matter for the House how we implement ours. My understanding is that legislation will not be required in the Republic, but that is a matter for its jurisdiction.

Many other points need to be dealt with, and I am sure that we will do that in Committee.

Question put, That the Bill be now read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 343, Noes 10.

Division No. 299] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Arbuthnot, James
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atkins, Charlotte
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Jackie
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Caplin, Ivor
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Collins, Tim
Colman, Tony
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cox, Tom
Cran, James
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davies, Rt Hon Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Doran, Frank
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Duncan Smith, Iain
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Evans, Nigel
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fyfe, Maria
Gapes, Mike
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Gorrie, Donald
Grant, Bernie
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hain, Peter
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hammond, Philip
Hanson, David
Harris, Dr Evan
Hayes, John
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Heald, Oliver
Healey, John
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkin, Bernard
Jenkins, Brian

Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Key, Robert
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lansley, Andrew
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Lidington, David
Livingstone, Ken
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Luff, Peter
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
MacKay, Andrew
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Madel, Sir David
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mallon, Seamus
Mandelson, Peter
Maples, John
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Maxton, John
May, Mrs Theresa
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Moss, Malcolm
Mowlam, Rt Hon Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Paul *(Torfaen)*
Nicholls, Patrick
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
Paice, James
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Raynsford, Nick
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Rowlands, Ted
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spring, Richard
Squire, Ms Rachel
Stevenson, George
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stott, Roger
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Trend, Michael
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vis, Dr Rudi
Ward, Ms Claire
Watts, David
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Willetts, David
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Willis, Phil
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Janet Anderson and
Mr. Greg Pope.

NOES

Donaldson, Jeffrey
Flight, Howard
McCartney, Robert *(N Down)*
Paisley, Rev Ian
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Thompson, William
Trimble, Rt Hon David
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John D. Taylor and
Rev. Martin Smyth.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read a Second time.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 63 (Committal of Bills),

That the Bill be committed to a Committee of the whole House.—[*Jane Kennedy.*]

Question agreed to.

Committee tomorrow.

NORTHERN IRELAND (SENTENCES) BILL
[*MONEY*]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 52(1)(a),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any expenditure incurred by the Secretary of State by virtue of the Act.—*[Jane Kennedy.]*

Question agreed to.

Grantham Hospital

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Jane Kennedy.]*

10.14 pm

Mr. Quentin Davies (Grantham and Stamford): I am grateful for the opportunity to take up in the House a matter of vital importance to my constituents. Grantham hospital is a successful general hospital with a wide range of activities, including obstetrics and gynaecology, which are presided over by three consultants. The hospital has benefited a great deal from expansion and investment over the past 20 years of Conservative government—the last party political point I will make this evening.

Grantham hospital has depended for its maternity and obstetric service on paediatric support delivered, on contract, from Queens Medical Centre in Nottingham. That support includes the necessary neonatal cover to enable obstetricians to practise in the full confidence that they will be able to resuscitate when necessary and deal with difficult cases.

All that has now been put at risk. I have it at first hand from Queens Medical Centre that it would have been perfectly happy to continue with its contract, but that contract conflicted with the ambition of Lincolnshire Health to set up an ambulatory paediatric system throughout Lincolnshire, to be based at Lincoln county hospital. It was to be made answerable to consultants based in Lincoln and Boston, and the expectation was that in-patient paediatric cases would be referred to Lincoln county hospital; so Lincolnshire Health made it plain to Queens that it could no longer expect to supply in-patient and out-patient paediatric services. Queens Medical Centre therefore gave notice that it could not continue to provide the necessary neonatal cover. There is thus the prospect of an end to all maternity services and all deliveries in Grantham hospital.

I emphasise this history because it is important to appreciate that, if there is a crisis, it has been created by Lincolnshire Health. If we are seeking solutions, they are solutions to problems gratuitously caused by Lincolnshire Health.

At the end of last year, Lincolnshire Health produced a draft consultation document setting out one preferred option and three others that were dismissed in the same document. The community health council rightly objected to that method of proceeding; I am delighted to acknowledge that the Government shared the council's view. Lincolnshire Health was ordered to produce a genuinely open consultation document, to ensure that the options were considered dispassionately and professionally. Lincolnshire Health was also required to give a commitment to conduct a survey of opinion among women in the area covered by Grantham hospital.

It is my contention—I have no doubt that that contention will be 100 per cent. vindicated by the document discovery process that will be launched when we have a judicial review, which I trust we will now have, given that the community health council has requested one—that, first, the survey that was carried out has been blatantly ignored by Lincolnshire Health and simply thrown into the wastepaper basket; and, secondly, far from carrying out the genuine consultation exercise promised by Lincolnshire Health, the whole process has

been made a mockery. On both commitments—to have a survey to take account of local opinion and to carry out a proper consultation process—Lincolnshire Health has acted in bad faith and has deceived both the Government and the public.

Since February, the survey has been undertaken, and 95 per cent. of respondents expressed their wish that the status quo should continue. The overwhelming majority of those who were asked what they would like to happen if the status quo could not continue chose option 3, which is the availability in Grantham hospital of maternity services under midwife supervision. However, Lincolnshire Health continues to be committed absolutely to option 2, which is the abolition of all maternity services in Grantham hospital, so that no deliveries could take place there.

Another event that has taken place since February is that, as a result of discussions between Grantham hospital and Leicester royal infirmary an agreement has been reached in principle under which Leicester royal infirmary would be prepared to supply the consultant cover that Queens Medical Centre is now reluctantly withdrawing. That would enable a proper consultant-led neonatal facility to be re-established in Grantham hospital and so enable a full range of obstetric and gynaecological services to continue there. I quote a letter, dated 21 April 1998, from the acting chief executive of Leicester royal infirmary, David Sissling, who writes:

"We would be very interested in working in partnership with Grantham and District hospital in respect of obstetric services."

Notwithstanding the results of the survey, the commitment from Leicester royal infirmary, or the undertakings publicly given by Lincolnshire Health at the beginning of the year, a meeting of the health authority was held on 28 May in Sleaford—not in Grantham, whose population has a particular interest, although Sleaford people use Grantham's maternity services as well; incidentally, I am delighted to see my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) in the Chamber this evening. I was present in the audience throughout the period in which the public were admitted to the meeting, but I have never in my life seen such a mockery made of a meeting of a publicly accountable authority.

The executive of Lincolnshire Health who made the presentation focused entirely on option 2, which would remove all possibility of any deliveries taking place in Grantham hospital; she almost entirely ignored the other options, except to dismiss them, and said nothing whatever about the offer from Leicester royal infirmary.

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): It has to be said that holding a shambles of a public meeting was the pattern established throughout Lincolnshire and in every town in Lincolnshire during the consultation on the reorganisation.

Mr. Davies: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, whose comment reinforces the serious concern that we in Lincolnshire all feel about the conduct of our health authority in recent times.

To return to the meeting of 28 May, what was even more surprising than the fact that the executive charged with giving the board an objective assessment of the merits and demerits of each proposal should have concentrated on only one proposal was that, when the non-executive members of the board expressed their view that they were inclined to go for option 3—the midwife option—the Lincolnshire Health executive told them that it was too late, because the decision had already been taken and, even more scandalous, public money had already been expended on building and construction work at Lincoln county hospital on the assumption that option 2 would be selected. A complete mockery was made of the procedures. It is an extremely serious state of affairs, not merely for Lincolnshire, but for the country as a whole, that a public authority should conduct itself in such a fashion.

The closing of maternity facilities in Grantham hospital will be an unmitigated disaster for mothers, families and prospective mothers in Grantham and the surrounding villages, Sleaford, Newark and the other towns—about 100,000 people in all, who have been so well looked after by Grantham hospital over the years. It would mean an hour's travel on bad roads to get to a hospital where a delivery could take place.

It is all too easy to foresee the perils and tragedies that could ensue. There is the danger of babies being delivered in ambulances or passenger motor cars—as the Minister knows, most women are driven privately to hospital when they have babies, rather than transported in ambulances. There is the danger of mothers suffering haemorrhages and dying in a car or an ambulance on the way to one of the general hospitals an hour away. That is an appalling prospect, and a hideous responsibility would descend on the shoulders of anyone who connived at or accepted such a proposal.

There are other considerations of less enormous human significance, but nevertheless important ones. As we all know, mothers who are about to deliver often have premature symptoms. If the hospital is close to their home, they can be sent home and told to come back the next day if symptoms continue, or to return later. If they live an hour away on a bad road, they will presumably have to be kept in hospital overnight, and possibly for one or two nights before they deliver.

National health beds will thereby be occupied unnecessarily and expensively, and there will be considerable disruption to the families concerned. In its decision, Lincolnshire Health has taken no account of such incremental national health costs, or of the incremental ambulance costs that will be caused by the proposals.

A further consequence of the decision will be to weaken Grantham hospital, and perhaps fatally to emasculate it. If not only obstetrics but gynaecology are withdrawn, that may undermine the viability of the accident and emergency department, because no gynaecological facilities will be available as a back-up. If we lost accident and emergency, apart from the obvious danger to people's health and lives, it would be impossible for us to retain critical care beds in Grantham. If we had no critical care beds, I doubt whether surgeons would be prepared to undertake major or abdominal surgery in Grantham hospital.

By an inexorable clinical logic, that scenario leads to the closure of Grantham as a general hospital. There is a corresponding financial logic that leads in the same direction. We all know that hospitals have a high operational gearing and that fixed costs are a high

[Mr. Davies]

proportion of total costs. If some facilities are withdrawn—Lincolnshire Health proposes to withdraw at a stroke paediatrics, gynaecology and obstetrics—that undermines the financial viability of what remains. Again, the path leads inexorably to the closure of Grantham as a general hospital.

The lives and health of mothers and potentially of babies are at stake. Also at stake is the confidence of the British people in the integrity of our institutions and the procedures that have been established for taking public decisions of this kind. The conduct of Lincolnshire Health over the past few weeks is an affront to every principle of sound administrative procedure, and to every principle on which a public authority should be based. It makes a mockery of the concept of fiduciary responsibility, on which health authorities were originally established.

10.29 pm

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): I know that the House wishes to hear the Government's response, so I shall be brief. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) on securing this Adjournment debate and I endorse everything that he said. My constituents who use Grantham hospital view the proposals of Lincolnshire Health with great concern. They believe—as do many hon. Members and I—that it is important that Grantham hospital retains a consultant-led paediatric and obstetric service. Lincolnshire Health's proposals do not make provision for that and, accordingly, they are objectionable.

I know that the community health council is making a formal legal objection, so the matter will come before the Secretary of State, who will be responsible for the ultimate decision. The hon. Member for Newark (Mrs. Jones) and I have met the Secretary of State to discuss the matter and we shall continue to press him. We believe that he should rule that Lincolnshire Health's proposals are unacceptable and should be rejected. He should insist on the retention of Grantham hospital as a fully fledged district general hospital, preserving, in particular, a consultant-led paediatric and obstetric service.

10.30 pm

Mrs. Fiona Jones (Newark): I do not think that there is any disagreement between the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies), the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) and myself. Many women in my constituency go to Grantham and District hospital to have their babies. A maternity unit at Newark closed in the 1980s, and the women of my constituency were assured that they could have their babies at Grantham hospital, which involves a journey of 15 minutes. The closure of Grantham hospital will distance the health service from my constituents and it will mean that women must travel for almost an hour to either the Lincoln county hospital or to hospitals in Nottingham to have their babies. I have had babies in recent years, and I believe that that is totally unacceptable. People should be able to access local hospitals that are situated within a reasonable distance.

I am unhappy about Lincolnshire Health's proposals. They assume that, if Grantham and District hospital cannot deliver babies utilising a consultant-led service, all women will go to the hospital at Lincoln. That logic is fundamentally flawed because many women will opt to go to hospitals in Nottingham. Therefore, Lincolnshire Health will lose many clients—if that is the current terminology.

I am also extremely unhappy about the position adopted by the royal college. The Lincolnshire Health review is about finance, but the closure of maternity services at Grantham hospital is more about the position of the Royal College of Paediatricians. I accept entirely that paediatrics is a shrinking service, but I do not accept that, because members of the Royal College of Paediatricians find it inconvenient to train at a smaller hospital such as Grantham, my constituents must distance themselves from a service that they need. The Government must consider that issue: the Royal College of Paediatricians has decided that it does not want to train its paediatricians at local hospitals, so we cannot have consultant-led units at smaller hospitals and women cannot have their babies at local hospitals in rural areas. That is totally unacceptable.

10.34 pm

The Minister for Public Health (Ms Tessa Jowell): I begin by congratulating the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) on securing an Adjournment debate on Grantham and District hospital. My ministerial colleagues and I are well aware of the concerns that exist locally about the current and future level of health services provided by the hospital.

The hon. Gentleman has made known his concerns about Lincolnshire Health's proposals for Grantham hospital through meetings and correspondence with Ministers, as he has said. I acknowledge his efforts and those of other hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Mrs. Jones), in bringing together key local people in a constructive attempt to resolve the concerns about the level of services provided at Grantham and District hospital.

I am aware that the key issue that has prompted the hon. Gentleman to call for this debate is the decision taken by Lincolnshire Health at the end of May, in line with its consultation document, that with effect from 1 August Grantham and District hospital should provide only antenatal and post-natal out-patient care and day-care gynaecology, with consultant and midwife care being provided by other hospitals.

I know that this has caused concern in the Grantham area, and that that concern has been expressed specifically by the South Lincolnshire community health council. I am also aware that the Royal College of Midwives has criticised the consultation process that Lincolnshire Health has followed. I shall return to the consultation process later. The health authority wishes to keep discussion open following this decision. The door is not closed. I reiterate, the door is not closed.

I shall say a little about Grantham and District hospital before moving on to the health authority's current proposals and maternity services in general.

Mr. Quentin Davies: The Minister says that the door is not closed, but Lincolnshire Health took a formal decision on 28 May. The community health council, equally formally, has objected to it. The door is indeed not closed; it is open to Ministers to reverse the decision taken by the health authority and to introduce some sanity

into the provision of health care in south Lincolnshire. I hope that the hon. Lady and her colleagues will live up to those important responsibilities.

Ms Jowell: I am well aware of the stage that decisions have reached. I am aware also that further options are still being considered. I hope that the hon. Gentleman, in the spirit of his great concern about the issue, will make his contribution to the continuing discussions with the health authority.

I shall say a little about Grantham and District hospital before going on to the health authority's current proposals and maternity services in general. Sadly, for most people outside the local area, Grantham and District hospital will always be associated with the evil actions of Beverly Allitt during 1991. Locally, the hospital is held in high regard. It is a real testament to the comment, dedication and professionalism of the hospital's staff that that is the case. This is illustrated by the concern shown about Lincolnshire Health's proposals to change the services provided at the hospital, obstetrics and gynaecology being the matter of the debate. Concern has been shown locally in the press and in correspondence and representations to Ministers.

After the dreadful events of the Allitt case, paediatric services at Grantham were provided on a satellite basis by the Queens Medical Centre in Nottingham. Last year, the Queens Medical Centre made it known to Lincolnshire Health that it intended to withdraw from providing in-patient paediatric services because of concerns about clinical safety.

That decision was based on clinical isssues. Difficulties in recruiting consultant paediatricians to run the service were being experienced. That meant that standards of support for junior doctor training were not being met. The effectiveness of the service depends on the clinical skills of staff and on the trust's ability to recruit staff of the highest calibre. It also depends on a sufficient number of patients and variety of cases to allow staff to maintain and develop their skills. Those were all issues which could not be solved in relation to paediatric services at Grantham.

I understand, via public consultation, that the public and the CHC supported the health authority's decision to provide the majority of children's services from within Lincolnshire with an ambulatory service at Grantham hospital. The clinical implications of that development and its consequences for the obstetric and gynaecology services are clear. Without 24-hour paediatric cover seven days a week, the safe delivery of high-risk babies is unsustainable and clinically unsafe.

I fully understand that any proposal to change the services in a hospital causes concern. In this case, it is important to understand that the proposals are being made on grounds of clinical safety and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Newark made clear, not on grounds of finance.

Mrs. Fiona Jones: It is important to define a high-risk birth. A first birth is a high-risk birth. Therefore, any woman in my area who is having her first baby could not use a unit that is not consultant led.

Ms Jowell: A high-risk birth is determined clinically and defined within clinical guidelines. I agree with the point behind my hon. Friend's intervention. The circumstances of hospitals that serve rural communities are an important issue in relation to this set of decisions. It is important that hospitals in rural areas can meet tests of accessibility, clinical safety and the confidence of the communities that they serve. Scattered rural communities present different issues compared with densely populated urban centres.

As time is short, I reassure the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford, and other hon. Members who have shown so much concern about the issue, that the decision-making process is continuing. The need for safe, clinically effective and efficient services throughout the county must underpin the review of services in Lincolnshire. Those factors will be of paramount importance in making decisions about obstetric and gynaecology services in Grantham.

Significant investment has been made by the health authority in paramedic obstetric training, with 36 staff receiving additional training in the last year to accommodate the needs of a service which is divided between two or more hospitals. That is an essential part of developing support for high-risk delivery.

As the hon. Gentleman made clear, the CHC is seeking judicial review. I hope that it will not pursue that course, and that it will be possible to resolve the matter locally. I reiterate that the decision-making process is still open. If the matter cannot be resolved locally, the decision will fall to Ministers.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at sixteen minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 11 June 1998

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

LLOYDS TSB BILL *[LORDS](By Order)*

Order for Third Reading read.

To be read the Third time on Thursday 18 June.

Oral Answers to Questions

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Ethnic Minorities

1. **Ms Helen Southworth** (Warrington, South): How he intends to ensure that people from ethnic minorities have equal access to the new deal. [43751]

The Minister for Employment, Welfare to Work and Equal Opportunities (Mr. Andrew Smith): Ethnic minorities will, of course, have the same entitlements as anyone else to all aspects of the new deal. For the first time in employment programmes, we have brought in ethnic monitoring, and we are working closely with ethnic minority groups and businesses. Trained personal advisers will help to tackle both barriers to employment and the discrimination that ethnic minorities face. A key priority of the new deal is to ensure full and fair opportunities for people, whatever their ethnic origin. As there are still appallingly high levels of unemployment among black and Asian people, that help is long overdue.

Ms Southworth: Does the Minister welcome the fact that three black organisations have joined up to provide gateway services? Does he agree that every local new deal partnership has a responsibility to be a true, rather than just a paper, partnership that is inclusive of all members of the local community so that people from minority ethnic organisations can have equal access to the opportunities of the new deal, and a real step forward into employment?

Mr. Smith: I agree with my hon. Friend's two good points. We are encouraging ethnic minority community groups and businesses to be involved at all levels of the new deal, and we are acting on their advice. A six-monthly review of the effectiveness of local partnerships in involving representatives of local ethnic minority communities will ensure that the new deal is reaching those clients.

Independent-Maintained School Partnerships

2. **Mr. Nick St. Aubyn** (Guildford): What responses he has received during the period of consultation before his Department issues regulations governing partnership between local education authorities and independent schools. [43752]

The Minister for School Standards (Mr. Stephen Byers): We intend to begin consultation on draft regulations once the School Standards and Framework Bill receives Royal Assent.

Mr. St. Aubyn: Given that the Minister has demanded that Surrey council spends an additional 5 per cent. on education this year, while the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions has cut Surrey's funding by 1 per cent., how does he expect Surrey to meet his desire when its efforts to do so in partnership with independent schools are being hamstrung by delays caused by his own Department?

Mr. Byers: No delays are being caused by my Department. I wrote to the hon. Gentleman on 22 March and 12 May to ask for details of the scheme that is being promoted by Surrey. I regret that he has not replied to those letters or supplied me with details of the scheme. Perhaps he knows full well that Surrey's proposals have met almost universal opposition from schools in Surrey. The message to Conservative councillors in Surrey is that they should give priority to education in the county's own schools, as the Labour Government do. Those schools should be given every pound that the Government have provided to Surrey.

Mr. Dale Campbell-Savours (Workington): Who benefits from partnerships, and how?

Mr. Byers: There is the possibility, in a positive sense, to have partnerships between the independent sector and the maintained sector in a way that actually builds bridges for the benefit of all children. What the Government are not prepared to see is the sort of scheme being promoted by some authorities which seek to replace the assisted places scheme with a local variation that is not about building bridges but about reinforcing divisions. The Government believe that the time has come to put dogma to one side, and to have a school system that meets the needs of all our children, not just a few.

Class Sizes (Leicestershire)

3. **Mr. Andrew Robathan** (Blaby): If he will make a statement on primary school class sizes in Leicestershire. [43753]

The Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. David Blunkett): In January this year, the average primary class size in Leicestershire was 26. Last year, it was 26.7. Currently, 21.7 per cent. of children are in classes of more than 30. Last year, the figure was 23.4 per cent.

Mr. Robathan: My figures show that the average primary class size has gone down by 0.06 of a pupil in one year. Even the Secretary of State would have to admit

that it will take some time for that to work its way through to reduced class sizes. The children of most parents will have left primary school before there is any effect. What does the Secretary of State say to the 30 parents from Thistley Meadow school in Blaby who have written to me, some of whom voted Labour in the general election because they believed in Labour's pledge? When is a pledge an early pledge and when is it a late one? Was not the little card that I have with me, Labour's general election pledge card, a fraud perpetrated by new Labour on the parents of Leicestershire and the people of the United Kingdom?

Mr. Blunkett: Many more might have voted Labour if they had known that there would be a reduction of 0.7 per cent. in just one year [HON. MEMBERS: "0.06"] I am using the official figures. Leicestershire has received £291,000 and Leicester city £584,000 so that 4,100 children will be in smaller class sizes from September, with an extra 65 teachers.

Mr. Andrew Reed (Loughborough): I am sure that my right hon. Friend remembers visiting Sileby Highgate school in Leicestershire, at which I am a governor, in 1996. He will recall that all its class sizes were well over 30. That was under the previous Administration, so we do not need to take any lectures. Will he confirm what he told me in a written answer last July—that in Leicestershire the cost of the assisted places scheme for the 447 pupils who were benefiting from it was £1.49 million? Does he agree that that money is much better spent on reducing class sizes in Leicestershire schools, particularly Sileby Highgate?

Mr. Blunkett: I agree with my hon. Friend. That is why those who buy private education put tremendous emphasis on class sizes. It ill becomes Conservative Members to proclaim that they are in favour of smaller classes for the children of those who buy private education but to be against it for the children whom they should represent.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): Does the Secretary of State realise that, to implement his Government's literacy scheme, teachers are required to create a maximum of five groups of six pupils? That is 30 for every class.

Madam Speaker: Order. The question relates specifically to Leicestershire.

Mr. Foster: I assure you, Madam Speaker, that this is very much about Leicestershire. I hope that the Secretary of State is aware that his literacy scheme requires five groups of six pupils. Given that he has no plans to reduce key stage 2 classes—

Madam Speaker: Order. I am sorry but the hon. Gentleman is not accepting my guidance. I am moving on. This is about Leicestershire.

Mr. Jim Marshall (Leicester, South): I hope it is, Madam Speaker, as I represent a Leicestershire seat. May I confirm what my right hon. Friend said about infant class sizes in the city of Leicester—that, because of the extra money that the city has received this year, there will be no infant class in excess of 30 from September this year? Does he accept that 10 per cent. of junior classes will be in excess of 30, however, and that one reason for that is that local heads and governors make the decisions on the distribution of class sizes? Will he signal his intention to offer guidance to heads and governors about the need to have smaller class sizes across the whole age group?

Mr. Blunkett: A prerequisite of the plans that will have to be submitted this autumn will be that reductions in class sizes will not have a knock-on effect for primary schooling as a whole. Leicester and Leicestershire will benefit from the £62 million that we have allocated for this year and from the 1,500 extra teachers. Some 100,000 children will gain from the investment that we are making nationally.

Mr. David Willetts (Havant): I am sure that the Secretary of State is familiar with the report of the Local Government Association, representing Leicestershire—and other parts of the country—on the devastating practical implications of the Government's class size pledge. Can the right hon. Gentleman assure parents in Leicestershire—and throughout the country—that there will be no reduction in parental choice and no increase in mixed-year teaching as a result of the Government's pledge?

Mr. Blunkett: We have made it absolutely clear that parental preference is a critical part of enabling people to make the right choice in sending their children to the nearest high-quality school. We have made no bones about the fact that, where there are mixed-age classes, the guidance of Ofsted and the standards unit should be followed in making them work. I find it difficult to answer the question coming from an hon. Member who has written and spoken condemning the argument about class size, suggesting,

"there is little evidence of any correlation between class size and educational achievements".

No wonder he wrote it in a book called "Why Vote Conservative?" He knows he has the answer in the words he used.

Schools (Bury)

5. **Mr. Ivan Lewis** (Bury, South): If he will make a statement on the *(a)* performance and *(b)* level of funding of Bury's schools. [43755]

The Minister for School Standards (Mr. Stephen Byers): Key indicators show that the performance of Bury's schools is above the England average. The level of Bury's standard spending assessment in 1998–99 was £67.8 million—an increase of 6.4 per cent. on the figure for 1997–98. That amounts to an extra £109 for every primary pupil and an extra £127 for every secondary pupil.

Mr. Lewis: I thank my hon. Friend for that response. Is he aware that, before and during the election, my hon. Friends and I promised people that five, six and seven-year-olds would be taught in classes of 30 and under by about 2001, which will be towards the end of the first term of the Labour Government? Is he further

aware that from September 1998, 95 per cent. of five, six and seven-year-olds in Bury will be taught in classes of 30 and under?

Mr. Byers: I offer my congratulations to those schools in Bury and the teachers responsible for the good standards that are now being achieved. I compliment my hon. Friend and his colleague my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, North (Mr. Chaytor), who have been great champions of the school system there. I am delighted to confirm that we pledged that, by the end of this Parliament, there would be no five, six or seven-year-olds in a class of 30 or more. I am delighted that, in September of this year, 3,500 fewer five, six and seven-year-olds in Bury will be in classes of more than 30. I am confident that, with that targeted support, Bury will be able to do even better for its children than it is doing now.

School Exclusions

6. **Mr. Chris Mullin** (Sunderland, South): What advice he has given to local education authorities regarding school exclusions and the making of alternative arrangements for the education of children who are excluded; and if he will make a statement. [43757]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Ms Estelle Morris): We have recently issued brief interim guidance on the changes to the law that come into force in September 1998. We are also preparing a new package of guidance on a range of exclusion issues that will reflect the recommendations of the truancy and school exclusion report.

Mr. Mullin: Is my hon. Friend aware that, in many parts of the country, there is little or no provision for excluded school children? I am aware of a couple of cases in my constituency where children as young as 10 or 11 are left hanging around the streets for much of the day. Does my hon. Friend agree that if we allow the problem to continue, we will store up a big difficulty for ourselves in future? Will she tell us what plans we have to address this problem?

Ms Morris: My hon. Friend is right: sadly, children who are excluded from school are often those who need the most help and more education to raise standards, but they are excluded from any educational provision. It is not only in my hon. Friend's constituency that excluded children receive no education; it is a pattern that we found throughout the country when we took office a year ago. That is why we have already made a firm commitment, coming out of the school exclusion report, that children excluded for more than three weeks will have a right to full-time and appropriate education. That will be phased in when resources allow; the resources will be there and we intend that implementation should take no longer than three years in every local education authority throughout the country.

Mr. Tony Baldry (Banbury): Most parents, teachers and governors are concerned not about school exclusions but about when the Labour Government are going to deliver on the pledge they made at the general election to reduce class sizes. Class sizes in Bury might be going down, simply because there is substantially—

Madam Speaker: Order. The question is not about class sizes.

Mr. Baldry: No, Madam Speaker; it is about school exclusions. The Government are making a lot of what they are doing about exclusions, but my point is that people in Oxfordshire are not coming up to me and expressing their concern about exclusions of children in Oxfordshire. They are concerned about when the Government are going to deliver on their policy and pledge to reduce class sizes—

Madam Speaker: Order. Thank you very much.

Universities (Access)

7. **Mr. Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield): What assistance he proposes to give to those universities that wish to increase the numbers of students from mainstream comprehensives. [43760]

The Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. David Blunkett): From this autumn, we are doubling access funds and, from September, universities will be able to use a proportion of those funds to provide support and help for new access, and not merely for hardship among those who are already at university. We are also working with the university sector as a whole to link individual universities with schools and their communities, so that pupils can experience university life well in advance of deciding from the options available.

Mr. Sheerman: That is quite a good answer, but my right hon. Friend could do better. We need to acknowledge the seriousness of the fact that the best universities for teaching and research are dominated by entrants from the private sector, from the best grammar schools, from comprehensives in affluent areas of the country and from sixth-form colleges. In the top 40 to 50 universities, the continued exclusion of students from average comprehensives who get three As at A-level is a national tragedy and a scandal. Will my right hon. Friend put the profile on the matter and make it a top priority to get something done about it?

Mr. Blunkett: I shall try to do better, and will do so by following what we are already doing, which is holding detailed meetings with the university sector and the Higher Education Funding Council to achieve precisely what my hon. Friend rightly wants. It is true that in the West Riding of Yorkshire, in which his constituency used to be incorporated, more students from comprehensive schools went to Oxford and Cambridge in the days of Alec Clegg than do so now. The way to achieve a real transformation is not only to increase expectations and get the universities to be more embracing in their admissions policy but to transform the standard of education in schools so that every child has that chance.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): Is it the right hon. Gentleman's view that more students will go to university from mainstream comprehensives as a result of

the introduction of tuition fees and the abolition of the maintenance grant? On reflection, does he not bitterly regret that it is under a Labour Government that our state education system will become no longer free at the point of access?

Mr. Blunkett: I bitterly regret the fact that the Conservatives put a cap on entry to higher education; that they cut the unit cost by 40 per cent. and reduced quality; and that they did not concentrate on lifting standards for all children in our schools to get them into university. I am pleased that, from this autumn, an extra 1 per cent. of those leaving school—comprehensive or otherwise—are taking up higher education. We have every intention of extending that in future.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating King's college, Cambridge, which admits more than 90 per cent. of its students from the state sector? Does he welcome Cambridge university's advertising campaign to encourage more students from the state sector to apply?

Mr. Blunkett: Yes, I applaud what is being done by King's college and by students at Cambridge, who are reaching out—visiting, linking with and mentoring students in schools across the country. I just wish that it were happening in all colleges and all universities.

Mr. David Willetts (Havant): May I tell the Secretary of State that my book, "Why Vote Conservative?" has a companion volume, "Why Vote Labour?", which has much less to say about raising educational standards? Following his letter to me yesterday about university applications, will he confirm that, during the debate on the Teaching and Higher Education Bill, Ministers deployed statistics that were embargoed by the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service and showed that the proposed introduction of tuition fees is having a significant impact in reducing applications to Scottish universities from English students?

Mr. Blunkett: I am inclined to read from another of the hon. Gentleman's books, "Is Conservatism Dead?"—the answer to which is yes. The answer to his question is no. Ministers did not use embargoed information. As I told him in the letter, the information was not made available until 4.30 pm on Tuesday, so Ministers could not have used it.

Teacher Shortages

8. **Mr. Tim Boswell** (Daventry): What plans he has to modify teacher qualifications to take account of shortages. [43761]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Ms Estelle Morris): Ensuring that there are sufficient, well-trained, high-quality teachers is central to our aim to raise standards. We have no plans to boost recruitment by lowering the entry requirements to the profession.

Mr. Boswell: The hon. Lady will be aware from correspondence between us of some hard cases concerning the transition between the licensed and the registered teachers schemes, and difficulties when somebody wishes to teach at primary level but does not have a degree in one of the national curriculum subjects. Nobody in the House would wish in any way to devalue the qualified teacher status or to reduce standards, but, given the growing teacher shortage, does she agree that is essential that the rules are interpreted as flexibly as possible to ensure that willing teachers are not deterred from the profession of their choice?

Ms Morris: For once, I am in total agreement with the hon. Gentleman. I assure him that his constituent, Miss Morgan, who, if my memory serves me correctly, is seeking a place on a bachelor of education course, is fully entitled to do so given her degree. I am happy to reassure the House and those beyond it that nothing in the entry requirements to initial teacher training demands that one must have a degree in a national curriculum subject. Of course, by the end of the training course, one must have the necessary subject knowledge in order to teach effectively, but there is no bar to ITT if one does not have a degree in a national curriculum subject. If any hon. Member knows of any constituent who finds such a difficulty when they apply for teacher training, I would be most grateful to hear of it and would make the Government's views known directly to the initial teacher training institute concerned.

Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe (Bradford, South): Will my hon. Friend look at the process of postgraduate certificates of education and of the clearing house through the graduate teacher training regime, as some things do not seem to match in that area? The entire process seems to be becoming disreputable.

Ms Morris: My hon. Friend is right; the subject needs looking at. There is a problem about the timing of applications and the way in which different institutions deal with them. We are determined that those who wish to apply for teacher training are able to do so as easily as possible and that institutions providing courses can choose the best and most suitable candidates. I am not entirely convinced that that is happening at the moment; we have the matter under review.

Mrs. Theresa May (Maidenhead): Does the Minister accept that the problem of teacher shortages is creating a growing crisis in our schools? Yesterday, it was reported that the chief inspector of schools, Chris Woodhead, called on the Government to take action to redress the problem. So far, the Government have produced a cinema advertisement and a plan for what the Minister for School Standards describes today in *The Sun* as a "super teacher grade", which is creating much concern in staff rooms. Will the Minister guarantee that, during this Parliament, there will not only be sufficient teachers to stand up in front of pupils in schools across the country but every child in a secondary school will be taught in every subject by a teacher who is a specialist in that subject?

Ms Morris: I welcome the hon. Lady to her position on the Front Bench. This is the first opportunity that I have had to do so, although we have spent many months in Committee together, and I feel that we already know each other reasonably well. I remind her that being new to the Front Bench does not mean that she can wipe away

18 years of Conservative Government. Her comments were amazing coming from somebody whose Government left a crisis in teacher recruitment. Year after year, we saw the number of people applying for teacher training courses decreasing, and the previous Government took no action.

We inherited that situation, and, in the past 12 months, we have taken action and we shall continue to do so. We have provided £10 million for secondary subject shortage schemes; there are two new employment-based routes; we have established the General Teaching Council; we have set standards in initial teacher training; we have run taster courses for shortage subjects and targeted particular groups. The hon. Lady referred to the advertising campaign. That has led to about 1,000 new inquiries every week from people who might be interested in teacher training. Our record over 12 months of trying to improve teacher recruitment stands up very well compared with the inaction of the previous 18 years.

Ethnic Minorities

9. **Ms Karen Buck** (Regent's Park and Kensington, North): What plans he has to promote equal opportunities for ethnic minorities in training and employment. [43762]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. Alan Howarth): We attach great importance to ensuring that people from ethnic minorities are not disadvantaged in training and employment. The Department for Education and Employment is committed to mainstreaming race equality in all our policies, programmes and services. That is part of our strategy across Government to build an inclusive society.

Ms Buck: Does the Minister agree that it is unacceptable that half of London's young black men are unemployed? Is he aware that there is genuine concern that the training and enterprise councils are not tailoring all their employment and training programmes to meet the skills deficit of young black men? Will he give us an assurance that he will review the TECs' performance in that respect, in consultation with representatives of black and ethnic minority groups?

Mr. Howarth: I share my hon. Friend's deep concern about the problem she describes, which is particularly severe in London. The rates of unemployment among people from ethnic minorities are twice as high as those for white people. Across the country, the position deteriorated during the last 10 years of Conservative Government, but it is particularly concerning among young black people, for whom, as my hon. Friend says, the figure is vastly higher. I congratulate her on her strong personal commitment to improving equal opportunities in the part of London that she represents and to supporting our strategy across the country.

We share my hon. Friend's concern about the unequal opportunities that members of ethnic minorities appear to have had in TEC-delivered training programmes. We have introduced a national minimum standard and required TECs to set demanding targets to deal with the problem.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): I remind the Minister that he was a Minister in the very Government to whom he referred. Will he confirm that the way to improve job opportunities for black people and other ethnic minorities in London and elsewhere is to instil in them a work ethic and improve their job and training opportunities, not to introduce a quota system for employers?

Mr. Howarth: I should be sad to think that the hon. Gentleman was complacent about the position that the previous Conservative Government allowed to develop; I was not, as he knows. There is no question of imposing quotas. We are determined to ensure equal opportunities because Labour Members find racial discrimination abhorrent.

Given that there is no significant disparity in advanced level and other adult qualifications between members of ethnic minorities and others and yet there is a disturbing gap in employment levels, part of the explanation must lie in employers' attitudes. We have to find the most constructive and effective ways to ensure that culture and attitudes change so that members of ethnic minorities get the opportunities which the hon. Gentleman, like all hon. Members, surely wants them to have.

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland): Does my hon. Friend agree that, if we are to keep faith with black and Asian communities, we must give the matter the highest priority? Will he look again at the modern apprenticeship scheme, where only 2 per cent. of the participants are black and Asian young people?

Mr. Howarth: My right hon. Friend is right: we must do very much better in a range of Government-funded and training and enterprise council-delivered programmes. I accept the anxiety that he expresses about the poor performance of members of ethnic minorities in modern apprenticeships.

Student Loans

10. **Mr. Phil Willis** (Harrogate and Knaresborough): What plans he has to allow part-time further education and higher education students to have access to income-contingent loans. [43765]

The Minister for School Standards (Mr. Stephen Byers): The Teaching and Higher Education Bill contains provisions that will give the Government the power to make support available to part-time students by way of income-contingent loans.

Mr. Willis: On 21 April, the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment, the hon. Member for Pontypridd (Dr. Howells), said in the Standing Committee on the Teaching and Higher Education Bill that the Government intended to move to resource accounting in 2001-02 and to use the student loan debt as a "balance sheet asset". Can the Minister confirm that? In those circumstances, what earthly reason is there for not allowing part-time students to have access to income-contingent loans from 2001?

Mr. Byers: The year 2001 will take care of itself when it arrives. We must give the Government the power to provide part-time students with access to

income-contingent loans. The Bill enables us to do that. In 2001, we may be able to make the finances available to secure access to those loans.

We are putting measures in place before then, because current part-time students need support. That is why my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on Monday access to a fund for part-timers who are at present in work and who might become unemployed. He also announced that, for the first time, part-time students would have access to the access fund, and the money for the access fund was doubled. Practical steps are being taken now to offer new opportunities to part-time students—we are not waiting until 2001.

Mr. Derek Wyatt (Sittingbourne and Sheppey): One of the great things that we did this century was to create the Open university. Will Open university students qualify for part-time funding?

Mr. Byers: Open university students will be in the position of other part-time students. The year 2001 may well be the time when they will have access to income-contingent loans. They will have access to the new measures announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on Monday, and that will make a real difference to many of them.

The Government are seized of the fact that Open university students are one of the categories of students for whom education has not been free. People speak of free access to education, but that is simply not the case. We believe that the status quo is not an option. Change must and will take place to extend opportunities and to provide higher education institutions with the money that they need.

Standard Spending Assessment (Worcestershire)

11. **Mr. Peter Luff** (Mid–Worcestershire): What was the real-terms percentage change per pupil in the education standard spending assessment of Worcestershire for 1998–99 compared to 1997–98. [43766]

The Minister for School Standards (Mr. Stephen Byers): The real-terms increase was 1.85 per cent. per primary pupil and 1.21 per cent. per secondary pupil. That amounts to an extra £94 for every primary pupil and an extra £106 for every secondary pupil.

Mr. Luff: Does the Minister understand that, notwithstanding those figures, school budgets are being cut? Most parents, teachers and governors in Worcestershire think that, when the Prime Minister spoke of "education, education, education", he meant "education cut, education cut, education cut". Will the Minister give an early—preferably urgent—pledge that, next year, Worcestershire will have an increase at least equal to that of other education authorities, and preferably more, to make up for this year's frankly shocking settlement?

Mr. Byers: The hon. Gentleman is letting his prejudices get in the way of fact. The reality is that an extra £106 will be provided for every secondary pupil in Worcestershire this year. That stands in stark contrast to what occurred in the five years between 1992 and 1997—a period in which the hon. Gentleman was a Conservative Member of Parliament for Worcestershire—when there was a real-terms cut of £177 for every secondary school pupil in Worcestershire. The facts are simple: in the last five years of the Conservative Government, there was a real-terms cut of £177 for secondary pupils in Worcestershire, and, one year into a Labour Government, there has been an increase of £106 for every secondary age pupil in Worcestershire. Those are the facts—not the prejudice of Opposition Members.

New Deal

12. **Laura Moffatt** (Crawley): What plans he has to help unemployed people over the age of 25 years move from benefits into work. [43767]

The Minister for Employment, Welfare to Work and Equal Opportunities (Mr. Andrew Smith): On 29 June, the new deal for those aged 25 and over who have been out of work for more than two years will get under way across the country. That will be another manifesto promise kept. In addition, in November we shall start pilot programmes bringing more intensive help to those who have been out of work for 18 months or a year. We have also introduced five prototype employment zones, which began in February.

Laura Moffatt: Does the Minister agree that the extra £100 million for the long-term unemployed will help my constituent Maureen Wells? She has been a carer since she was a newly wed and now wishes to take her place in the work force, but she must have her self-esteem and employability improved. Will the new deal partnership help her and give her the time to sort herself out so that she may take her rightful place in full employment?

Mr. Smith: Yes, indeed. A very important feature—and, according to the evidence so far, a very effective feature—of the new deal is that unemployed people are receiving personal counselling with the continuity of support that a dedicated personal adviser can provide, coupled with access to a range of specialist advice and help, including training courses. That support will be available for the long-term unemployed under the new deal which starts on 29 June and under the pilots, which have been announced for November and to which my hon. Friend referred.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): Will the Minister do two things for unemployed people over 25 who live in the Ribble Valley? First, will he congratulate Skillshare—an organisation of volunteers and others who provide education for the over-25s, among others, and allows people to share their skills with the unemployed so that they have a better chance of education or employment? Secondly, will he contact Lancashire county council, because that Labour-controlled authority is stopping the £26,000 in funding for Skillshare? The organisation will close at the end of the month unless the county council continues that funding, which is essential for the unemployed in my area.

Mr. Smith: I join the hon. Gentleman in congratulating organisations such as Skillshare and other voluntary and community bodies that are dedicated to the education and training needs of the unemployed. They certainly need support, and they are getting it through the new deal.

As to the hon. Gentleman's second point, I shall ensure that the new deal partnership in his area—which is almost certainly already in contact with Skillshare—investigates what means might be found to make sure that the invaluable services that Skillshare provides will continue to be available to local unemployed people.

Mr. Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): The Minister referred to pilot schemes for those who have been unemployed for a long time. Is he aware that many people who have suffered long-term unemployment have complex personal problems and difficulties? For example, many of them do not have great levels of literacy. Will the Minister ensure that assistance is given to people with literacy difficulties to help them enter a technological and increasingly information-based employment market?

Mr. Smith: Yes. The assessment of the basic skills help that people need is an important feature of the gateway in the pilots which will begin in November. It is crucial that appropriate, effective and high-quality courses are available for the older and long-term unemployed as well as for the young unemployed so that they may achieve those skills that are a key component of employability and can do so much to enhance their prospects of gaining rewarding work.

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford): Why are the Government providing relatively less help for the unemployed who are over 25, when all the evidence shows that they are much more likely to need help to find work? Does that not suggest a gap between pious rhetoric of the policy and policy itself, which is dictated largely by short-term presentational gimmicks?

Mr. Smith: First, I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his appointment to the Front Bench.

The priorities that we set out in introducing the new deal for the young unemployed and the new deal for the long-term unemployed reflect what we said and, indeed, go beyond what we promised in our manifesto. We cannot forget that youth unemployment runs at well over twice the level of unemployment across the rest of the work force.

Everyone knows the particular damage to young people and to the community at large that is inflicted by exclusion from the opportunities and the responsibilities of work at an older age, but our new deal programmes are designed to provide the right assistance, right across the age range. As well as offering counselling and continuity of support from a personal adviser, the new deal for the long-term unemployed offers a £75 a week subsidy for the first six months of employment for someone who has been out of work for more than two years, and the opportunity to be educated or to train for up to a year. It really is a new deal for the long-term unemployed. The public will ask the hon. Gentleman why the previous Government did nothing about that.

School Transport

13. **Mr. David Heath** (Somerton and Frome): What plans he has to review arrangements for home-to-school transport. [43768]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Ms Estelle Morris): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has no plans to review the arrangements for the provision of home-to-school transport.

Mr. Heath: Given the large amount of money that some local authorities are forced to spend on school transport—Somerset, for example, has to spend £5.3 million, which is £26,000 a day, on bussing children around—and, given that the precise distances involved, such as the two-mile and three-mile limits, and the appropriateness of particular routes are major bones of contention between local authorities and families with children, does the Minister agree that it is time that the Education Act 1944 was thoroughly reviewed to consider the provision of a comprehensive and fairer system of school transport?

Ms Morris: I appreciate that school transport is an important issue for local authorities in constituencies such as the hon. Gentleman's. It is one of the issues to which they must give careful consideration when allocating resources.

The key point is that it is up to the local authority to make decisions about school transport, as long as it is acting within the law. The law says that transport is necessary for a pupil of a compulsory school age to attend the nearest suitable school if it is beyond statutory walking distance. Above and beyond that, his local authority, as well as many others, has flexibility to offer financial assistance where it thinks that is appropriate. It is up to local authorities to respond to local situations.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): None the less, my hon. Friend might have a gentle word with some local authorities about the quality of school transport. Although some counties are working hard to ensure that no contracts are handed out to substandard firms, does she agree that some buses that are on the road carrying school children need to be put off it as soon possible?

Ms Morris: My hon. Friend is right. She has a long-standing interest in the issue. The Department keeps it under review, and will continue to do so.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Mid-Bedfordshire): But this Labour Government cut a £4.3 million grant to Bedfordshire county council which the previous Conservative Government gave to it. It is likely that school transport will be cut in Bedfordshire, because the Government have cut the money to it. Will the hon. Lady consider the money that rural parts of Britain are receiving from the Government, and do better? Rural parts of Bedfordshire need help, which the previous Conservative Government gave but which this Labour Government have denied.

Ms Morris: The hon. Gentleman has a bit of a cheek. One reason why school transport was cut year after year was that, year after year, local authorities had to manage with a diminishing budget from the Conservative Government. Local authorities now have more money to

spend on education—an extra £850 million this year, which means that they will be able to decide to put money into school transport, as well as into school standards.

Mr. Cynog Dafis (Ceredigion): Does the Minister agree that it is important not just to provide transport for school children, but to enable them to walk and cycle to school? Is the Department working closely with the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions to develop the safe routes to schools scheme that would enable children to arrive safely at school, and also make an important contribution to reducing the amount of road traffic?

Ms Morris: The hon. Gentleman is right to ask that question. My Department has been working closely with Transport Ministers on the forthcoming White Paper. Making it safe for children to walk to school is crucial. There has been a massive increase in the number of children who are being driven to school, often for very short distances and to destinations that are not on their parents' way to work. We want to encourage children to walk to school, but we know that we cannot do that unless we can ensure that conditions are as safe as possible. That is what parents want and have a right to expect.

This is an important agenda, and I am sure that, like me, the hon. Gentleman looks forward to the publication of the White Paper.

New Deal (North-east Lincolnshire)

14. **Mr. Austin Mitchell** (Great Grimsby): When he plans to extend the new deal to older workers in north-east Lincolnshire. [43769]

The Minister for Employment, Welfare to Work and Equal Opportunities (Mr. Andrew Smith): The new deal for people aged 25 and over will start on 29 June. In addition, the area will benefit from the November new deal pilots, as South Humber is one of the districts in which the private sector has been invited to tender. We are consulting on the content of that programme.

Mr. Mitchell: This is mildly sycophantic on the Mackinlay scale, but I am delighted with my right hon. Friend's answer. I know that he is determined to extend the benefits of the new deal to older workers who need and deserve the boost—the help and support—that he has been giving to the young unemployed.

I hope that my right hon. Friend will continue to bear in mind the urgent needs of north-east Lincolnshire. We have not only higher unemployment, while unemployment in the rest of the country is still falling, but—on a new basis of calculation—one of the highest unemployment levels, if not the highest, in the whole of Yorkshire and Humberside. The need is urgent in north-east Lincolnshire.

Mr. Smith: I agree with, and welcome, my hon. Friend's commendation of the programme, and its relevance to the needs of his constituents. I assure him that, whatever is the private sector lead, it will—together with the new deal partnership—engage in close consultation with the local community and local business to ensure that the particular needs of those older long-term unemployed people are dealt with effectively, and in a way that conforms to the high-quality standards that are the hallmark of the new deal.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): Does the Minister agree that, in north-east Lincolnshire, as elsewhere—

Madam Speaker: Order. Not "as elsewhere". The question applies specifically to north-east Lincolnshire.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) *rose*—

Madam Speaker: I call the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh). He represents Lincolnshire.

Mr. Leigh: In view of the particularly helpful question put to him by the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell), will the Minister consider extending the new deal to him in the forthcoming Government reshuffle? Some of us admire the hon. Gentleman.

The Minister ought to remember that unemployment is very high in Lincolnshire, especially in rural areas. I hope that he will not forget our problems, rather than directing his attention entirely to north-east Lincolnshire.

Mr. Smith: We all admire my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby. As for the needs of the part of Lincolnshire to which the hon. Member for Gainsborough has referred, partnerships in the new deal across the country have been invited to bid to have the opportunity to be one of the 20 pilots alongside the private sector pilots to which I referred. We shall evaluate those bids against the effectiveness and quality of what they offer the local community, and how much innovation they show in working with local authorities, training and enterprise councils and local private business.

University Students

16. **Mr. Howard Flight** (Arundel and South Downs): If he will make a statement on the number of new students at British universities *(a)* starting in autumn 1998 and *(b)* who started in autumn 1997. [43771]

The Minister for School Standards (Mr. Stephen Byers): Some 507,000 students domiciled in England started either full or part-time courses in 1997. It is too early to say how many students will start in autumn 1998, but I am sure that the House will be delighted to know that, so far, applications from 18 to 21-year-olds have increased this year compared with last year.

Mr. Flight: It is pretty poor that the Government do not know how many students will be going to university this autumn. Given the need for overall planning and budgeting, I see no reason why the figures should not be available. If, as I suspect, there is no increase, does the Minister attribute the outcome to the unwise changes that the Government have made, such as the introduction of tuition fees and those made as a result of the Government's particular interpretation of the Dearing report?

Mr. Byers: There are two principal reasons why I cannot give the hon. Gentleman the figures for this

autumn. First, the A-level results are not yet known, which is a significant factor for entry into university. Secondly, mature students are applying ever later in the cycle. This year, as in previous years, mature students are applying far closer to the start date than they did a few years ago. It ill becomes a Conservative Member to talk about access to higher education when his party not only starved the sector of resources, but put a 30 per cent. cap on the number of young people who could enter higher education. That was not merely a bureaucratic cap; it was a cap on the aspirations of tens of thousands of young people who had the qualifications but who, under a Conservative Government, never had the opportunity of going on to higher education, which their talents and abilities merited. No more of that under this Government: we shall extend and expand higher education. No more caps on aspirations: we shall meet the needs and desires of young people.

Mr. Derek Twigg (Halton): On Monday evening, during the debate on the Teaching and Higher Education Bill, in response to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell), the shadow Secretary of State said that the Conservative party would introduce top-up fees. To be fair to him, he said that it would not be widespread. When challenged to say what areas would be included, he would not answer. Would not top-up fees have a detrimental effect and prevent wider access to higher education?

Mr. Byers: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The hon. Member who now speaks for the Conservative party on education matters wants to create an Ivy League of university establishments, which would divide the sector. As a result, many young people would not be able to go to the university of their choice. That is a good example of the policies pursued by the Conservative party, and it shows why the Conservatives will not be returned to office until they recognise the plot, which for education is quality provision in schools, further education colleges and universities for all our young people, not just for a few.

EU Tobacco Advertising Directive

17. **Mr. Graham Brady** (Altrincham and Sale, West): When he plans to publish an employment impact assessment of the effect of the EU tobacco advertising directive on UK employment. [43772]

The Minister for Employment, Welfare to Work and Equal Opportunities (Mr. Andrew Smith): A preliminary regulatory appraisal was produced as part of the parliamentary scrutiny of the EU proposals and was deposited in the Library on 2 December. An updated assessment, including any employment effects, will be included in the White Paper, which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health will publish later this year.

Mr. Brady: I thank the Minister for that response. Does he share my concern that an employment impact assessment after the Government decided to support the directive is of questionable value? Does he further share my concern that the Employment Commissioner, Mr. Padraig Flynn, has explicitly ruled out conducting an employment impact assessment across the European Union? If the Government think that such an assessment is worth doing, why does not the Commission?

Mr. Smith: As I think the hon. Gentleman should know, when the Select Committee on European Legislation and Standing Committee B examined this proposal, they debated these matters in great detail and decided that the proper procedure had been complied with throughout. The hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends should take note of the fact that 61 per cent. of respondents to the 1996 Office for National Statistics attitudes survey said that they did not think tobacco advertising should be allowed. The Government are not only implementing an important manifesto commitment, but going with the will of the people and implementing proposals that will be good for the public's health.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): We cannot disregard the employment implications altogether, but is it not somewhat sad that Conservative Members still do not believe that tobacco advertising has implications for the health of our constituents. We only have to look at what is happening in our hospitals—the deaths, amputations and other operations—to realise that the directive is right and should be fully supported by hon. Members on both sides of the House.

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend is right. This is a manifesto commitment. It will save lives and it is good for health. It makes sense to get on with it.

Postgraduate Researchers

18. **Mr. Tam Dalyell** (Linlithgow): If he will meet the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals to discuss problems faced by postgraduate researchers on temporary contracts. [43773]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. Alan Howarth): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has not been approached by the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals on this issue. He would, of course, consider carefully any representation that it wished to make.

Mr. Dalyell: Are temporary contracts a satisfactory way in which to reward researchers, who may be in their 40s and 50s and who have depended on this form of remuneration all their lives?

Mr. Howarth: My hon. Friend is well aware that this is a long-standing, very difficult and important problem. He will, I hope, at least share my pleasure that a concordat relating to contract researchers has been agreed between the CVCP, other bodies representing universities and colleges, the research councils, the British Academy and the Royal Society. The signatories are committed to improving the terms and conditions of employment of contract staff, to training and careers guidance, to appraising and reviewing their development and to the provision of maternity and long-term sickness benefit. A group has been established to monitor the concordat's implementation and to identify and encourage practice. It is chaired by Sir Gareth Roberts, whom my hon. Friend knows well. The group hopes to report in the autumn.

Economic and Fiscal Strategy

3.30 pm

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): With permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a statement. The comprehensive spending review has been the most comprehensive and in-depth examination of Government spending and priorities for many years. The results of it will be announced in two stages. Today, I will announce an entirely new regime to apply to public spending control: a fundamental reform of the rules that govern our public finances. Later next month, I will set out the results of a wholesale revision of our spending priorities and the purposes of Government support in each Department.

The central challenge is to combine prudence and stability in public finance with investment and reform in public services. There are four key elements to our approach. First, the new regime must be consistently prudent and responsible. Strong public services cannot be sustained on weak public finances. The spending plans that we set must ensure sustainable finances over the whole economic cycle—rigorous financial discipline that, together with monetary stability, ends once and for all the boom and bust that for 30 years has undermined stability, hindered long-term investment in our public services and prevented this country from achieving its potential.

That is why we will enforce two fiscal rules: the golden rule that, over the cycle, current spending is covered by revenues, and the sustainable investment rule that there must be a prudent debt-to-gross domestic product ratio.

Secondly, in each Department, we are assessing radically what Government do and how and where they spend their money. The comprehensive spending review results, when published, will not only show changes in priorities within and between Departments, but must redefine the role of Government, so that they are enabling and empowering, not centralising and controlling. Where Government should be acting, we will do more. Where Government is unnecessary or restrictive, we should not act at all. The results of the spending review will mean reform and modernisation.

Thirdly, in respect of publicly owned assets, the essential test should be how best to meet the public interest, and we will, therefore, propose a radical change in Government policy towards investment and the assets that Government hold. Finally, where Government spend on public services, they should link spending explicitly to modernisation and reform for each Government Department. Where there is extra money, it will be tied to specific outputs. It will be investment, but only in return for reform.

First, therefore, the framework that follows for the future. For 30 years, British public spending has been characterised by the annual spending round rather than long-term planning; by the year-to-year bidding culture, with all the problems of hurried end-of-year corrections, instead of the strategic planning of resources; by incremental bids that are not tied to outcomes, rather than spending to achieve defined results. Too much attention has been given to current spending and muddling through, too little attention to long-term investment and reform. There has been too much focus on the public sector acting in isolation from the private sector and not enough long-term partnership with it.

To break decisively with this old-fashioned and short-termist culture, we will first abolish the annual spending round. We will now set Departments firm plans and fixed budgets for three years at a time. Secondly, to ensure that our fiscal rules are met and to make possible long-term investment in our infrastructure, there will now be a separate capital budget and a separate current budget for each Department. Thirdly, in place of incremental budgeting, we will lay down new targets for efficiency and performance for every Department. Fourthly, instead of the old, sterile conflict between public and private sectors, we will now promote new partnerships between public and private sectors. Fifthly, for the first time, the Government are legislating for a Code of Fiscal Stability which requires more open and comprehensive reporting of the public accounts. The key assumptions have been and will continue to be audited by the independent National Audit Office.

My right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, whom I thank for all his work in the review, and I are today publishing detailed figures both for the current balance and for capital spending. We will set out in these documents not only the public sector's net cash requirement—the PSBR—but the internationally accepted accruals measure of public sector net borrowing, which will provide a better guide to the underlying state of public finances—that is the public sector net borrowing. Copies of the Economic and Fiscal Strategy Report will be available in the Vote Office.

All these changes—the end of the annual spending round, a long-overdue distinction between investment and current spending, a new emphasis on outputs, more effective partnership between public and private sectors and proper public scrutiny of how Governments are meeting their fiscal rules—make clear the importance that the Government attach to reform and modernisation as the foundation for both sound finance and good public services.

I turn now to the public finance plans that follow from the fiscal rules. The Government inherited a national debt which doubled in the early 1990s. In the last economic cycle, debt as a proportion of national income rose by 18 percentage points and is now around £15,000 for every family in the country. As a result, we are paying more in interest payments than we spend on schools, or on housing and law and order put together.

In addition, we inherited an annual level of public borrowing that was unacceptably high. In the final year of the previous Government, the public sector net cash requirement was £23 billion, and public sector net borrowing was £27 billion. In the first year of the Labour Government, with the tough decisions that we took in our first Budget in July, public sector net borrowing fell last year from £27 billion to £6 billion. We kept within the spending ceilings that we inherited. In addition to a £400 million increase in the Budget for pensioners, we were also able to put £2 billion more into the health service and £2½ billion more into education.

Those who said that we would fail to meet our targets and would fail to show the discipline necessary have been proved entirely wrong. Indeed, over the first two years of the present Government, through setting tough departmental limits, spending is within budget as promised. But Britain must have sustainable public finances, not just for one year or two, but throughout the economic cycle. British public spending, which,

for decades, has been denied a long period of consistency and stability, must now be subject not only to the framework for the future that is prudent, but to clearly defined limits.

As a result of the plans that I am announcing today, we will lock in the fiscal tightening that I announced in the March Budget, not just for this financial year, but for the next financial year as well. Over the three years from the time we came into Government—that is to 1999–2000—the fiscal tightening amounts to 2¾ per cent. of national income, measured by the public sector net cash requirement, and 3½ per cent. of GDP measured by public sector net borrowing. That is more than £25 billion since 1996-97. This is the fiscal tightening from 1996-97 to 1999-2000 that we promised in the Budget.

To meet our first rule—the golden rule—the Government will plan for balance on the current budget over the economic cycle as a whole. For 35 years, current spending has grown by an average of nearly 3 per cent. a year in real terms. Within that average, annual changes have ranged from plus 11 per cent. to minus 3 per cent. From 1989 to 1994, a surplus on the current budget of over £10 billion was transformed into a deficit on the current budget of £38 billion. So, in the same way as our economy has suffered from the instability of boom and bust, public spending has suffered from the instability of stop and go. The uncertainties caused by that short-termist approach have frustrated the long-term planning of decent public services.

Let us be clear about who has suffered first and who has suffered worst: the vulnerable who depend most on our public services. Imprudence in public spending is of no help to those who rely on public services being there when they need them.

In the previous economic cycle, Britain ran an average deficit on the current budget of 1½ per cent. of GDP—the equivalent of an annual deficit of £12 billion. By contrast, the plans that we publish today will ensure that, over the full economic cycle, Britain will have a current budget balance—current expenditure covered by revenues over the cycle—which other Governments have promised but not achieved.

So that we can deliver sustainable public finances—and, thus, sustainable public services—over the whole cycle, the plans that I am announcing today deliberately take a more cautious approach than previous plans in meeting the fiscal rules. That is why we need to plan for a surplus on the current budget over the next three years. The plans that we publish today are for a surplus on the current budget, next year, of £7 billion; in 2000-01, of £10 billion; and, in 2001-02, of £13 billion.

Within that new framework, I can confirm that current spending will grow in line with our cautious estimate of the trend rate of growth of the economy, which is 2¼ per cent. in real terms each year over the next three years. Current spending is now planned to be 39¼ per cent. of GDP every year for the rest of the Parliament.

It is because we are showing that prudence in public finance and because we are prepared to modernise in choosing our priorities that we will be able to invest in long-term improvements in our key public services—education and health—and also fulfil our commitments to those such as the elderly, who depend on public services.

As everyone knows, the public will be better served if we also ensure the best value for money and the most efficient possible use of resources. Inefficiency in the public sector is a cost which could be afforded by a Government who had a vested interest in proving that the public service could not work and believed in a philosophy of private, good; public, bad.

Inefficiency will not be tolerated by a Government who will modernise the public sector so that this country is properly equipped for the future. That is why, in our spending review, there will be no place for new spending unless there is reform through clear targets, new standards and rigour in the use of money. I can confirm that each Department will set efficiency targets as a result of our review. Each Department will also be set new quality standards. I can confirm that, as part of best value, we will introduce an inspectorate for housing that will help to improve management of council housing, set new standards for performance and guarantee the high quality of investment.

Before allocations are made from the comprehensive spending review, Departments will have to demonstrate how they propose to root out unjustified subsidies. Therefore, not only will we set ourselves fixed budgets for three years, but we are building in new disciplines to ensure that investment is conditional on reform. Just as those new disciplines will apply to current spending, they will be applied also to capital investment.

Our second fiscal rule is to ensure a stable and prudent ratio of debt to national income—the sustainable investment rule—which is essential if we are to contain interest payments on the national debt. If the Government simply left the debt-to-GDP ratio at the level that we inherited from the previous Government, we would be making interest payments of £25 billion more over the Parliament, at a cost to public services.

In the interests of greater stability, I propose to bear down on the debt-to-GDP ratio. The plans that we are publishing today show that the debt ratio falls from 45 per cent., when we came into government, to 40½ per cent. next year; and, in the following years, down again, to 39½ per cent., and to 38¼ per cent. The comparable figure in the European Union is 78 per cent.

Britain will now plan on the basis that our debt-to-GDP ratio will be 40 per cent. or lower. For the first time for decades, we are set, over the cycle, to have both a current budget in balance and a prudent debt-to-GDP ratio. As a result of our two fiscal rules, public sector net borrowing, which was more than 3 per cent. of national income in the most recent economic cycle, will average 0.2 per cent. for this Parliament, 0.2 per cent. for next year, 0 per cent. for the following two years and 0.1 per cent. for the year after that. We will meet the fiscal rules that are laid down in the Maastricht treaty.

It is only because we have set this tough framework—based on strict control of public spending, a prudent debt-to-GDP ratio and a fiscal tightening—that it is possible to take the necessary action to reverse the chronic underinvestment in our country's education, health, transport and housing infrastructure and to re-equip Britain as a modern nation. In recent years, total investment, public and private, in Britain has fallen as a share of national income—it is far behind the rates of our competitors and those that we achieved in the 30 years after the war.

If Britain is to renew its infrastructure, as it should, we must be prepared to break with old dogmas. We will not succeed simply by throwing money at problems or by

[Mr. Gordon Brown]

privatising the responsibility for them, so we must be prepared to look at new ways in which to manage our assets and, if necessary, to redeploy them so that they serve the future rather than reflect the past.

The British Government have property, land and other assets worth hundreds of billions of pounds. As we discovered in the first register of national assets, Britain has an accumulation of unused and underused properties and holdings. We can no longer afford a surplus of holdings when we have such a deficit in investment. There is no benefit to us in hoarding assets that do nothing to equip us for the future when we need to build a 21st century infrastructure. No public interest is served by continuing to hold surplus land and buildings that we know are not needed.

The fiscal projections set a new target for central Government to realise for investment around £1 billion a year for each of the three coming years from the sale of surplus holdings that we no longer need. In the next financial year, we will go ahead with the sale of all remaining debt held in British energy. We will realise the value of what we do not need, to invest in what we do need.

My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister and I will propose a new long-term framework for investment by local authorities to release resources for new investment and to co-ordinate the use of existing assets. Local authorities are now expected to realise at least £2¾ billion a year from property sales—again, that is a sale of what we do not need, to pay for investment in what we do need.

To maximise investment in the renewal of our infrastructure, public and private sectors must work together in a more effective and modern partnership. In the past, the private finance initiative was a means of substituting private investment for public investment—it was an excuse for abdicating responsibility for public investment, so there was no net gain to investment in our country.

As we have shown in our new deal for schools, public-private partnerships work best when public investment succeeds in levering in additional finance from the private sector. Moreover, as the Deputy Prime Minister has shown in the planned investment in the channel tunnel rail link and in London underground, private investment can be mobilised to serve the public interest.

The Government will apply a public interest test. What is the best means—whether through private or public investment—to secure the highest levels of investment in Britain's future, so ensuring the best public services? It is not to demand private ownership as a matter of dogma when it does not serve the public interest, and it is not to maintain state ownership when private and public partnership is the best way in which to advance the public interest.

It is obvious to the Deputy Prime Minister and me—*[Interruption.]* It is obvious that the levels of investment and efficiency that we need in National Air Traffic Services can be best achieved by a partnership between the public and private sectors, which will give NATS the ability to plan and finance the forward investment that they want to make.

Safety is paramount: the Government's proposals will ensure that air safety regulation is conducted independently from National Air Traffic Services and is open and transparent. The regulator's remit will be to enforce the toughest safety standards in the world.

My right hon. Friend the Minister of Transport is to make a separate announcement today on the future of air traffic control services. Our preference is for 49 per cent. of the shares, and a golden share, to be held by the Government, and 51 per cent. by private investors, including employees. We will hold consultations on the details of the implementation of the proposals.

The realisation of assets will enable us to invest more in our transport infrastructure, as will our proposals for greater commercial freedom for financially sound regional airports such as Manchester, Newcastle, Leeds-Bradford and Norwich. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Brown: I thought that Conservative Members would be interested in plans for new investment in our airports.

The same partnership approach is appropriate for the Commonwealth Development Corporation, which needs new finance for higher investment in developing countries. The Secretary of State for International Development will introduce proposals to sell a majority holding.

We will consider how to extend the existing public-private partnership in the Tote into a broader partnership with the private sector. We are also agreed in principle that a new public-private partnership is the best way for the Royal Mint to take advantage of new commercial opportunities.

Those are four examples of new partnerships being evolved that show that we can make the long-term investment that we need while protecting and safeguarding the public interest. Public investment in reform and modernisation is also a means by which the Government can help to renew the infrastructure.

Under the previous Government, public investment fell below 1 per cent. of national income—to 0.8 per cent.—and we now invest less than our major European partners. The present Government recognise that we must invest properly in our economic and social infrastructure to equip us for the future.

We must invest in our schools and hospitals; our transport infrastructure; our science and technology base; and in building better housing and safer and stronger communities. To meet those challenges for the future, we are setting up a new programme: investing in Britain's future.

Over this Parliament, we will double the level of net public investment as a share of national income, raising it from ¾ per cent. to 1½ per cent. Through realising unused and underused assets and being prepared to take tough decisions, we will plan to invest £29 billion a year in our economic and social infrastructure by the end of this Parliament.

In place of two decades of rundown in investment, Britain is now ready to invest in its own future. Our long-term aim will be to maintain the share of investment in national income at this sustainable and prudent level.

For years, we were told that prudence in public finances could be achieved only at the cost of running down public investment and neglecting public services. Those Conservative years ended with neither good public services nor prudence in public finances.

The framework that I am announcing today means that, with sensible and tough decisions about priorities in every Department in our spending review, this country will be able to ensure that the necessary resources are available for health, education and essential public services. Because of our toughness to modernise, our discipline and reform, our prudence today provides the solid foundation to invest in better schools, hospitals and public services today and tomorrow.

In place of short-termism and neglect of public services, we have a new long-term direction for renewal of our public services and of our country. Prudence and investment in reform are the way forward to creating a Britain that is modern, strong and fair. I commend the statement to the House.

Mr. Francis Maude (Horsham): So far, the Chancellor of the Exchequer has had a Budget in July last year, a pre-Budget in November, another Budget in March and a mini-Budget in June. Now there is a comprehensive spending review in July. Four Budgets in 12 months is not bad going for a self-proclaimed devotee of long-term planning and consistency.

In today's *Financial Times* we can read why he has been forced to do all that. It states:

"The announcement is expected to 'focus ministers minds' in the final stage of spending negotiations, says a government member."

We know where that came from—not from the Red Lion, but from the horse's mouth. The statement effectively announces the failure of the Chancellor's comprehensive spending review. It was designed to save money, but it has saved nothing.

We support the reduction in national debt—*[Interruption.]* We certainly support it, but we should like to know whether all Labour Members support it. If the Chancellor reads the papers, he will find that the reduction in national debt to which he has referred was due to be exceeded under the plans of the past Conservative Government. For him to claim the credit is quite cheeky.

I pay tribute to the Chancellor's courage in adopting a programme of modernisation of the public sector. I assure him that we shall give firm support to his plans to privatise a number of entities. We remember the comments that he and his colleagues made when those issues were debated in the past, and we shall do our best in the coming days to reconcile those remarks with his fulsomely enthusiastic remarks of today. No doubt such a reconciliation can be achieved; we are charitable folk and we shall do our best to seek one, and to give him the support that he deserves for his programme of public sector reform.

It is just a pity that whenever—*[Interruption.]* The Deputy Prime Minister should listen with enthusiasm because we are the only people who are supporting him; he will not find much support behind him.

The Chancellor's statement is of some importance. We always said that the Government would be a tax and spend Administration. We have already seen the taxes—the equivalent of 5p added to the basic rate of income tax in only 13 short months. Today, goaded by broken promises on waiting lists and class sizes, he has gone soft on spending. No one should doubt that today's statement amounts to a fundamental reversal of the Government's economic policy. It is not surprising that press stories over recent days have veered widely between—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. The House must settle down and listen.

Mr. Maude: Press stories have veered widely between promoting Brown the Iron Chancellor and Gordon the giveaway spender. Today, it is goodbye Iron Chancellor; may he rust in peace.

Can the Chancellor confirm that the Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee knew of his spending plans last week when it decided to put up interest rates again? If it did not know, how can it be expected to do its job when the monetary right hand does not know what the fiscal left hand is doing? If it knew, was not its immediate decision to raise interest rates a damning indictment of his change of policy? Once again, are not hard-working people paying the price for the Chancellor's mistakes?

On the Chancellor's claim to be abolishing the spending round, what will be the size of the contingency reserve for these three years? If it is substantial, does he understand that there will be a spending round? All his colleagues will wrangle about how it is divided up. If it is not substantial, how will he cope with the unexpected demands for public spending that arise, the necessities that cannot be avoided? Does he really think that the Secretaries of State for Health and for Education and Employment will sit quietly, accept it as it is and not wolf all their dinner at once and come back for more?

Before the general election, Labour made a string of incompatible pledges. It pledged not to raise taxes, to spend more on health and education while cutting spending on welfare, and to end boom and bust. If we had to count the number of times that we have heard the Chancellor and the Prime Minister use the words "boom and bust", we would run out of calculators. On promise after promise, the Chancellor is failing to deliver. He has delivered boom and bust at the same time. Manufacturing is in recession while inflation is rising. He has put taxes up 17 times, the equivalent of 5p on the basic rate of income tax. It is easy to be an Iron Chancellor when all it involves is putting his hand in other people's pockets.

Today, the Chancellor has had to announce that he has lost the battle with his Cabinet colleagues to keep spending down. Will he confirm that in his last set of Budget forecasts, he set three growth options for public spending: $\frac{3}{4}$ per cent., $1\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. and $2\frac{1}{4}$ per cent? Having failed to get savings from his colleagues has he not he been forced into the slackest, least prudent, least disciplined choice? Is not his central problem his failure to control welfare spending? He promised to cut it, yet every welfare reform so far has cost more, not less. The basic objective of the comprehensive spending review has failed.

Is not the baseline figure fiddled to begin with? Can the Chancellor say how much higher the control total would be without the fiddles to hide billions of pounds of public spending? Has he not changed the rules of the private finance initiative to get debt off the Government's balance sheet without the transfer of risk, which is

[Mr. Maude]

essential? Can he confirm that the Accounting Standards Board is resisting his attempts to fiddle the books in that way? Is not the extraordinary treatment of the channel tunnel rail link, about which he boasted, the most brazen of those fiddles? How does he justify taking the cost of the new deal outside public spending altogether, as if, in some mysterious way, it is not public spending at all?

Will the Chancellor confirm what is said in one of the newspaper reports that mysteriously appeared this morning—that school repairs will in future count as capital spending? Is not the fudging of the difference between capital and current spending at the core of his great boast to be increasing investment? It is a good job that he is increasing public investment because his Red Book shows that private investment in business is scheduled to fall sharply in future years. That is directly because of the economic policies that he has pursued. Will the Chancellor persist, as one of the fiddles, in raiding the lottery for yet another slab of public spending? This is new Labour, new accountancy. It is the Chancellor's contribution to creative Britain.

The reality is that Labour was elected to office on incompatible pledges. To the City, it was an end to tax and spend; to the spending lobbies, it was jam today. The comprehensive spending review was designed to square that circle. The Chancellor has told us today that he has failed comprehensively. The Government made clear promises before the general election that they would not raise taxes but they have. They were going to control inflation, but the Chancellor has missed his target 11 months out of 12. Labour was going to support home owners, but they are all paying more now. It has all gone now. Prudence has been dumped. She was just another photo opportunity.

Mr. Brown: I should start by welcoming the shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer to his new position. I hope that he will enjoy his period in the office. Conservative Members should have some pride in the fact that the new spokesman on financial matters was the Minister who in 1991 personally signed the Maastricht treaty.

The right hon. Gentleman started by saying that he supported us. Then he said that he opposed us. Then he said that he supported us. Then he opposed us. What he revealed as he went on is the extreme right-wing agenda that is now dominant in the Conservative party. He lectures us on debt, but it was his Government who ran up the national debt and doubled it. He lectures us on stop-go, but the worst two economic cycles happened under the Conservative Government when they caused two of the most difficult recessions for our industry. He lectures us on social security, but his Government, by their failure and by causing unemployment, massively pushed up social security spending simply to keep people out of work. He lectures us on tax, but his Government were responsible for 22 tax rises and for raising the amount of tax, against all promises that they made in their election manifesto. He even tried to lecture us on the channel tunnel rail link, but it was his Government's failure which caused all the problems that my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister had to intervene to solve.

In all those areas, the shadow Chancellor has nothing to offer to the debate, except for one thing—that we should cut spending more. He says that we should cut spending and the share of spending. Over the next few months and years, he will have to explain to the British people through debates in the House which hospitals, schools, transport investment and housing expenditure he wishes to cut. We will relentlessly pursue the Conservative party over its real aims for the future of the welfare state.

It is wrong to say that there is any problem with the Accounting Standards Board.

The Monetary Policy Committee makes the decisions. It is independent and able to do so.

The right hon. Gentleman mentioned public spending as a share of national income. It will fall to 39 per cent. during the next three years, as I said in my statement.

Debt interest payments over the next few years will be at a prudent level because we are reducing the share of debt in national income.

We have a programme of investment and reform combined with prudence. During the Conservative years, we had neglect of investment, the run down of our public services, and imprudence and boom-bust in the economic management of this country. We offer the only way forward. The shadow Chancellor will have to go home and think again. The Conservative party is unfit not only for Government, but for Opposition.

Mr. Giles Radice (North Durham): The Treasury Select Committee will want to look carefully at the Chancellor's statement and at the comprehensive spending review when it is announced later. Is my right hon. Friend aware that abolishing the annual spending round in favour of a three-year planning period will not only build in fiscal prudence, but will provide Departments with a long-term planning perspective which is so badly needed? Is he further aware that the public spending plans announced today will provide extra resources for badly strapped public services, especially education and health, and will promote badly needed capital investment and capital projects?

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who is the Chairman of the Treasury Select Committee. I shall be happy to work with it in reviewing the proposals, as will the Chief Secretary. My hon. Friend rightly points to the big change that we are announcing today, from an annual spending round to a three-year plan of spending, within which each Department will have far greater flexibility and the ability to plan over that period. I was surprised when I heard the shadow Chancellor say at lunchtime that the annual spending round was a tried and tested way of doing things properly. If it is the first commitment of the Conservative Opposition to restore the annual spending round, I hesitate to think what other proposals they will come forward with later.

My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that the purpose of the spending review is to ensure that we can get the money that is necessary to the priorities that we have. Education and health are two of the greatest priorities for this country, but they were neglected under the previous Government. We are determined to make sure that those priorities have the resources they deserve. We are prepared to take tough decisions to make that

possible. When I come back to the House in a month's time, we shall be able to announce the allocations for health and education over the coming years.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): Does the Chancellor accept that the Liberal Democrats welcome the timing of today's statement and, like the Chairman of the Treasury Select Committee, the hon. Member for North Durham (Mr. Radice), the signs of greater long-termism in the Government's fiscal policy? The Chancellor may agree that, under the Tories, the short-term approach to budgeting and, in particular, to capital investment was extreme. To the extent that that is clearly going to change, his statement is immensely welcome.

The Liberal Democrats also welcome the Chancellor's greater emphasis within Government on outputs as a determinant of funding. However, if budgets for three years are to be set in one go, should not the Government open up the debate to wider public consultation, in line with the spirit of the pre-Budget report, rather than keep it so tightly under wraps that we have little opportunity to contribute? With budgets fixed for three years, will the Chancellor assure us that there will be a sufficiently funded contingency reserve to meet variations over that period?

Is not there a danger that the Chancellor is trying to satisfy two audiences at once? Would it not be better to choose more decisively than he has done between bigger public surpluses and better public services? Today's *Financial Times* was right to conclude:

"The question . . . is whether the increases he"—

that is, the Chancellor—

"will feel able to permit can meet the objectives for improved services the government has set."

Liberal Democrats welcome the boost to investment that the statement provides, but does the Chancellor not understand that quality education and quality health rely just as much on first-class teachers and nurses as on first-class buildings?

Will the Chancellor confirm that, even if control spending grows at 2.5 per cent. in real terms over the next three years, it will still have grown by only 1.5 per cent. per year over the life of this Parliament—less than the 1.8 per cent. achieved by the Tories over the past 18 years? Does the Chancellor accept that, even if spending growth was 3.75 per cent. per year over the remainder of the Parliament, it would still be no higher as a share of national income than it was under the Tories?

What will the extra money deliver in terms of services? That is the question people need to have answered. No doubt, the modest early years pledges are now deliverable by the later years of this Parliament, but can the Chancellor say whether average hospital waiting lists will be lower in this Parliament than in the last? Will primary school pupils of all ages be removed from oversized classes? Will nursery education be extended to all three-year-olds whose parents want it?

During the election campaign, the Liberal Democrats warned that keeping to Tory spending plans would mean worse education and health services. Sadly, so far, we have been proved right. Is not the reality that, although the Chancellor might have done enough today to stop things getting worse, he has done far too little to deliver the sort of radical improvement in our education and health services for which the British people thought they had voted and which they are now entitled to expect?

Mr. Brown: First, let me tell the hon. Gentleman where I agree with him. I agree with him when he says that we should concentrate on outputs and on the effectiveness of services and not simply on the size of the budget. I agree with him when he says that we should have three-year plans; indeed, that is what we shall do. I agree with him when he says that he wants to have a discussion on what level of public spending is necessary; no doubt, through the Treasury Select Committee, of which he is a member, he will involve himself in that debate. I agree with him that it is important that resources go to education and health, which are the two priorities.

However, the hon. Gentleman should congratulate the Government on what we are doing and what we plan to do. On education, he asked for £500 million to be invested in capital re-equipping of our schools. We are investing £2½ billion already and, of course, today's announcement makes more investment in the long term possible. He said at the election that we should invest £1¼ billion in the health service. We have already put £2 billion more into the national health service—£300 million last year and £1.7 billion this year. Of course, it is our aim to get resources to help. He should congratulate us on what we have done and on what we are doing.

The hon. Gentleman read out a list of items which, no doubt, the Liberal Democrat party has carefully costed. We will not make spending commitments in every single area, as he has been doing. The Liberal Democrats will not face up to difficult decisions about taxation in the Finance Bill; on public spending, their amendments to student loans legislation alone would have cost 1p on income tax. We do not know what they favour.

I should remind the hon. Gentleman that, in the first speech of this Parliament by the leader of his party, the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) said:

"If we tighten our belts now, we have a real opportunity to get to grips with the huge hangover of debt left behind by the Conservatives."—[*Official Report*, 14 May 1997; Vol. 294, c. 74.]

That is the real world that we inherited; that is what we are tackling. In the spirit of the statement of the leader of his party, the hon. Gentleman should be supporting us.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Speaker: Order. I appeal for co-operation from hon. Members in asking brisk questions, and ask the Chancellor to give brisk answers, as so many hon. Members are seeking to put questions.

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): The Chancellor is obviously right to draw the clear distinction between capital and current expenditure in a new form, which will be widely welcomed. He will be judged by how far that leads to the very large increase in capital investment that many of us want. Ending the annual spending round will be welcomed not least by spending Ministers, who will find themselves short of the annual misery, and by Treasury Ministers, who have the worst of it. Is my right hon. Friend aware that, over a long period such as three years, there will be a change in priorities

[Mr. Robert Sheldon]

and in their perception? How does he intend to ensure flexibility, other than, perhaps, by increasing the contingency reserve?

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. I very much appreciate his guidance and advice—first as Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee, and since then. He is right to draw attention to the importance of capital investment in the modernisation of the country. We shall insist on the toughest efficiency standards in the use of resources. Some of the measures that we are bringing forward this afternoon are designed to achieve exactly that. We can prove that public investment and prudence can go hand in hand.

My right hon. Friend also raised the abolition of the annual spending round. As he knows, under its old form, end-of-year allocations were made simply to use up the budget. There was not the necessary flexibility to put the money forward for the best available purpose, and Departments were not able to plan ahead strategically, as we are now able to do. Of course, within their budgets, Departments will be able to examine their priorities and regularly assess them. It is one of the fundamentals of the review that standards and efficiency targets must be met. His fears about an inability to change when new priorities develop are not founded, because there are flexibilities in the budgets.

Mr. Stephen Dorrell (Charnwood): I enjoyed the Chancellor's description of his medium-term financial strategy almost as much as I enjoyed his description of his privatisation programme. If he is really going to set before the House detailed three-year programmes, Department by Department, without the safety valve of an annual spending review, how will he accommodate, as the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) asked, not just shifts of priority in a Department's programme, but shifts in the Government priorities between departmental programmes? How will he deal with the inevitable unexpected event that will arise during this Parliament?

By setting firm programmes three years ahead, is not the Chancellor lining himself up for a spending crunch some time in this Parliament, or are we seeing the beginnings of a process that will lead to excuses for another round of tax increases later in the Parliament?

Mr. Brown: I welcome the sight of the right hon. Gentleman on the Back Benches. I hope that he will be able to speak his mind in the way in which he promised. Unfortunately, his first statement was to agree with the shadow Chancellor that the annual spending round is somehow of great merit. Perhaps its repeal should be the first item in the Conservatives' manifesto at the next election on which they can agree.

The problem in British public spending is not too much long-termism or that people have made decisions in advance and have not been able to change them, but too much short-termism and an inability to plan ahead. Of course, individual Departments will be able to consider priorities within their budgets, but the comprehensive spending review is considering priorities for the next three years. When I report, with the Chief Secretary, to the House next month, we shall be able to say not only what those priorities are, but how the modernisation and reform necessary to achieve them is working. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will be able to welcome our proposals.

If the right hon. Gentleman thinks about his experience at the Treasury and as a departmental Minister, he will realise that it is the short-termism of Government that has made us unable to invest in our future. Public expenditure on investment is so low because it was very easy for Governments to transfer money from investment to consumption and not face up to difficult decisions. The result is a run-down Britain in terms of transport and other amenities that are vital for the future. We shall tackle that problem and take the necessary action. The right hon. Gentleman's perspective, and his writings—which I have read—mean that he should be in a position to support us.

Mr. Ken Livingstone (Brent, East): Could the Chancellor assure the House that the spending totals that he is setting will be sustained in real terms even if lower than expected GDP growth means that those totals would go beyond 40 per cent. of GDP?

Mr. Brown: The whole point of the spending figures that we are announcing is that we are working on a three-year basis. In other words, individual Departments will be able to consider their position over time and make the necessary adjustments. I want them to have flexibility, which we are introducing in other areas. Conservative Members were shouting when I announced our proposals to enable local authority airports to have greater commercial freedom to make investments.

On public spending as a whole, we shall not promise to allocate money that we do not have simply because decisions are not made by others. We shall set targets, which must be met. They will be sufficiently good to enable our health and education services to invest in the future. The three-year programme offers the flexibility necessary to deal with any problems that arise.

Mr. David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden): The Chancellor will be aware that I was among those who welcomed his commitment to eradicate the deficit in all the years of this Parliament. I certainly welcome his commitment today to output and the associated realisation of under-utilised assets, which will help towards that end.

However, does not the Chancellor accept that it will be a tragedy if that commitment is viewed by the financial communities as an exercise in creative accounting? Earlier, he brushed aside the question of the independent Accounting Standards Board's concerns about his treatment of private finance as off balance sheet. That is not simply a technical issue; it means that the Government may conceal from the public the shouldering of large liabilities for the future. Will he tell the House how he will deal with that serious concern of the Accounting Standards Board?

Mr. Brown: I am happy at all times to discuss these measures, but the right hon. Gentleman is referring to a discussion within the accounting community about the specific treatment of items related to the private finance initiative. He referred to creative accounting. We shall not do as the previous Conservative Government did, which is why we have introduced public sector net borrowing as

a better measure of the underlying state of public finances. The old public sector borrowing requirement figures did not reflect the true underlying state of public finances. If the right hon. Gentleman considers the public sector net borrowing figure, he will find that it is a better estimate of that state. I am happy to discuss these matters with the Accounting Standards Board, but PFI projects are a precise issue, which we and the board are dealing with.

Mr. Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement, particularly on the public-private partnership in National Air Traffic Services. Will he reiterate that its employees can now look forward—perhaps through having their own shares—to having a real share in the success of the services; that safety, while independent of NATS, will remain paramount; and that, taken with new commercial freedoms for regional airports, his statement is good news for investment in Britain's transport infrastructure and, therefore, for prosperity and success up and down the land?

Mr. Brown: A high level of investment in the air traffic control service will be necessary in future years. We have proved in other initiatives in which we have been involved that private finance can be levered in to support the public investment that is being made. Our preferred option for National Air Traffic Services will do exactly that. As a result, both the employees and the users of the service will see enhanced investment in the future service. Our proposal for the independent, wholly publicly controlled regulatory body is designed to ensure that we have the safest air standards in the world. I believe that when people study the proposals as they come forward, they will find them worthy of support.

Mr. Peter Brooke (Cities of London and Westminster): I congratulate the Chancellor on keeping a straight face for most of his statement. What effect does he expect today's announcement to have for the balance of the year on the value of sterling?

Mr. Brown: The right hon. Gentleman, who is a former Treasury Minister, knows that it is not for me to comment on the day-to-day movement of sterling. I have already said that I share the worries of exporters about the level of sterling. Most of the questions to me were tabled when sterling was at DM3.10. It is now substantially lower than that. Indeed, it is only 2 to 3 per cent.—if I am right today—higher than it was when the Labour Government came to power last May. The big rise in sterling took place in the years and months before the general election. The sterling rate in relation to the dollar is virtually unchanged over the past two years.

As I said, I share the worries of exporters about the pound, but what they fear most of all is what we are taking steps today to eliminate: the stop-go in our public economy and our national finances. By taking steps to ensure stability, we are doing the best service to exporters.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Rather differently from my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, Central (Mr. Davies), may I express concern about the air traffic controllers? Has there been discussion with the representatives of their unions? What technical advice has the Treasury received on safety? As I understand it, we are proposing something which no other country in the world has done. Every other country has a public air traffic control system. The temptations in certain circumstances to take short cuts could imperil safety.

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising the question. A statement is being made this afternoon by the Minister of Transport. In time, he will also publish his reply to the Select Committee report that examined all the issues in relation to air traffic control. The proposed independent regulator will ensure that the air safety standards are the best in the world.

My hon. Friend might consider that we need new investment at the highest possible levels in our air traffic control services, and if, as a result of the partnership that we propose, we can lever in private investment in addition to the existing public investment, that will ensure a better future for both the employees and the customers of National Air Traffic Services. I give my hon. Friend a guarantee that the best safety standards in the world are our objective.

Mr. John MacGregor (South Norfolk): I welcome the Chancellor's total reversal of his previous position and his conversion to the privatisation of National Air Traffic Services, but why the delay? Why did he not do that a year ago, as he could have done, as we urged him, and as the Civil Aviation Authority wanted, to avoid delaying its investment plans for a whole year?

Will the Chancellor answer the question on the private finance initiative that he has so far failed to answer? Will he give a guarantee that the Government will not engage in off-balance-sheet creative accounting on the new and substantial Government guarantees on private sector finance, such as the channel tunnel rail link, and will he include them in his public expenditure figure?

Mr. Brown: There is no question of that in the channel tunnel rail link proposals. The Deputy Prime Minister made clear the arrangements that we had agreed, which were put to independent authorities.

On air traffic control, we are determined to ensure the highest levels of investment that are necessary. When we came into government, the plans that the right hon. Gentleman suggests were well advanced were not well advanced at all. We have had to examine these matters in detail, and will continue to do so. I guarantee that we will want the highest standards of safety, and a public sector independent regulator will ensure that. Air traffic control will benefit, as will transport as a whole, from levering in more private investment. It is a private-public partnership in which the Government, under the preferred option, have 49 per cent. of the shares.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): May I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his good luck in the choice of shadow Chancellor, whose performance today almost made his predecessor appear competent? May we assume that the proceeds from the sale of council assets will be invested by those same councils? If so, how will my right hon. Friend ensure that the asset-poor councils do not slip inexorably further and further behind the asset-rich councils?

Mr. Brown: I said in my statement that the Deputy Prime Minister and I were considering a new framework

[Mr. Brown]

for investment by local authorities. We aim to raise the levels of investment in our vital assets. That new framework with local authorities will be discussed by the Deputy Prime Minister, in the case of England, and by the Secretaries of State for Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland. Those discussions will take place in order to ensure that we secure the best use of our assets. I assure my right hon. Friend that the distribution will be fair.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Does the Chancellor recall the phrase "selling the family silver" and the political criticisms that he once shared about the folly of basing an economic strategy on the wholesale disposal of public assets? Was it not the Labour party's position hitherto that privatisation of air traffic control would jeopardise the new air traffic investment promised to Prestwick? What assurances can the Chancellor give Prestwick workers that that new investment will be delivered under the new privatised arrangement?

Mr. Brown: It will not prejudice the new investment. We are talking about higher levels of investment after years of uncertainty. I hope that the Scottish National party will not start the sort of scaremongering that it indulged in on many other issues, only to be proved wrong. I made it absolutely clear at the general election that we were prepared to consider this issue, and we have done so.

As to the hon. Gentleman's point about the use of resources from privatisation, I remember reading that the shadow Chancellor had said that the great thing about privatisation is that it can be used for tax cuts. We are releasing resources that we do not need, in order to fund investments that we do need. In view of this country's infrastructure and what needs to be done in the health service, in education and in transport, we must take a modern view of how we shall equip ourselves for the future and be prepared to release assets that we do not need in order, to make the investments that we do need. I am sorry to say that, once again, the Scottish National party—with its extreme and old-fashioned views—opposes us.

Mr. Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): May I congratulate the Chancellor on recognising that having a medium-term economic plan is better than not having one? It has been a long time since the House was in such a position.

I have two specific questions. First, I am sure that the Chancellor is aware of the considerable economic arguments, particularly in the private sector, regarding whether it is better to use one's asset base to borrow against for investment purposes or to sell parts of it in order to use the capital for investment purposes. Will he put in the Library the comparative analysis that led him to the conclusion that it was better to sell assets than to borrow against them?

Secondly, the Chancellor will know also that the distribution of assets among local authorities is as inconsistent and uneven as the distribution of capital receipts. Would he consider it acceptable if local authorities that do not have surplus lands were to advance proposals to sell the properties in which their tenants live or the school buildings in which children are educated and the lands on which those buildings stand?

Mr. Brown: The discussions that the Deputy Prime Minister is having with local authorities and other Secretaries of State will consider issues in relation to the use of resources.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson) will not raise groundless fears regarding particular assets that are important to individuals. His main question was about whether we would be prepared to relinquish some of our assets or to fund new investments by borrowing. I remind him that we inherited borrowing levels of £25 billion and that we are paying more in interest payments than we are paying to fund our schools. As a result of the previous Government's mismanagement, we are paying more in interest payments than we are spending on housing and law and order combined.

I want to create a situation where, instead of paying interest, we use the funds that we have to invest in our future. As I said in my statement, if we had continued with the debt-to-GDP ratio that we inherited from the previous Government, we would have been funding an additional cumulative total of £25 billion in interest payments over this Parliament. I am not prepared to use public money to do that when we want to be able to put it directly into houses, hospitals, schools and transport infrastructure.

My hon. Friend asked whether we are prepared to borrow. The answer is yes, but within limits. We are not, however, prepared to borrow in a way that would amass huge interest payments—that money could be better used for other things. I hope that he will now agree with me.

Sir Michael Spicer (West Worcestershire): Having given up control of monetary policy, the Chancellor of the Exchequer apparently intends to give up year-on-year control of fiscal policy, so what will be the point of his job? Perhaps he should consider adding the Treasury to the excellent list of sales that he announced today.

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman spends most of his time criticising me for measures that I have taken, so I presume that he thinks that some of my decisions are sufficiently controversial not to be written off as irrelevant.

At the Treasury, we have inherited a situation in terms of debt and borrowing levels that has to be dealt with. We must reform the public finances, and the Chief Secretary and Ministers are doing that. I hope that, by the end of that process, the hon. Gentleman will agree that we have done things that should have been done a long time ago.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): May I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his radicalism and his pragmatism in his statement? He has been radical; we all know that longer-term planning makes sense and that some of the ideological baggage on this side needed to be buried, and buried now. Will he ensure that his radicalism carries through to the sort of investment that we need in this country? We must prioritise investment that leads to value added wealth creation in enterprise, innovation and intellectual property.

Mr. Brown: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend, and he rightly points to the wholly unacceptable neglect of

investment over recent years. When hon. Members absorb the fact that, under our proposals, it will be possible to invest £31 billion in the last year of this Parliament to improve the infrastructure of this country as a result of the tough decisions that they are taking, they will begin to see the difference that we can make to public services and infrastructure.

We shall, of course, do that in a way that gives us a long-term plan for the future. The public-private partnerships that we propose are a means to realise resources for investments elsewhere and, at the same time, to lever in private finance to enhance the public investments that we are making. The policy of long-termism—planning for the long term—is one which we shall continue to pursue.

My hon. Friend mentioned investment in innovation and science. I can tell him that that is one of the priorities that we have identified. Hospitals, schools and transport are priorities, as are housing and building stronger communities, but I also mentioned the science and technology base. I hope that we will be able to show results in that area when we come to the end of the spending review. The rundown of science and technology under the previous Government is something which no Government should have allowed, and something which we are not prepared to tolerate.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I welcome the general thrust of the statement, especially the long-term view. About 13 years ago in the Northern Ireland assembly, we had carry-over from Departments so that we did not have mad spending at the end of a period.

May I press the Chancellor on the concept of the continual review to update matters? Will we have open accountancy so that we can see where the money is going? It is amazing how money is missed time and again in normal business practices, and we must admit that, even in Government circles, it is hard to understand some of the accountancy.

Mr. Brown: I hope that the hon. Gentleman agrees that some of the announcements that we have already been able to make in Northern Ireland have allowed us to begin to make provision for enhancing the infrastructure of the country in roads and railways, and in new investment in airports. That is an important means by which we can help to create new job opportunities and encourage businesses in the area. We shall continue to do that as a contribution to matching prosperity with peace in Northern Ireland.

As for the hon. Gentleman's point about openness of access, I entirely agree with him that independent audit and public scrutiny are needed. That is why the National Audit Office has been called on to scrutinise our figures and some of our assumptions—as it will continue to do—and why we are prepared to be judged on the basis of the fiscal rules that we set down. The fiscal responsibility clause in the Finance Bill shows that we are prepared to be judged on the basis of regular reporting to Parliament on these issues.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman will agree that that system is far preferable to the one that we had before. It means long-termism, which he has supported, along with openness and proper scrutiny. That is right for Parliament.

Mr. Paul Goggins (Wythenshawe and Sale, East): I thank my right hon. Friend for his statement. Will he spell out in more detail its implications for Manchester airport? Sixteen million passengers travel through the airport each year, and 15,000 people work there. It is estimated that that figure could be doubled by 2005, with proper investment. Can my right hon. Friend confirm that greater commercial freedom for Manchester airport will mean greater freedom to invest, bringing jobs to my constituency and to the north-west as a whole?

Mr. Brown: It is exactly because we want further investment, and want to give greater commercial freedom to enable it to take place, that we are making this provision as part of our comprehensive spending review. Manchester airport, which I have visited, has expanded enormously in recent years, and is set to expand again. We want to give that profitable airport the commercial freedom in key areas that will enable it to make the investments that will be necessary for the future. I hope that in Manchester, as well as in other areas where the same will happen, the move will be welcome. It is a contribution to a modern airports policy.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): If the Chancellor is genuinely determined to adopt long-termism as against short-termism, and to facilitate greater capital investment publicly, privately and in partnerships with, for instance, Manchester international airport—a magnificent airport, serving the north-west—he has my support.

Wearing my hat as Chairman of the Procedure Committee, however, and describing the right hon. Gentleman as a modernising Chancellor, may I ask whether he backs the Committee in its desire to ensure that the House can scrutinise the estimates and public expenditure more effectively than it does at present? The current structure and system are outdated.

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his initial remarks. I think that he speaks more for mainstream opinion than many Conservative Members, although they know that further investment—indeed, the modernisation of our infrastructure—must take place, and that we are making the tough decisions that are necessary to achieve that. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will continue to speak out boldly on the issues that matter.

As for what the hon. Gentleman said about the Procedure Committee, I have talked to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, who is sitting beside me. We will consider the matter, but I cannot give the hon. Gentleman a final answer now.

Mr. Stephen Timms (East Ham): Will the Chancellor ensure that the welcome increase in public investment that he has announced is targeted where it is most needed, so that we can tackle effectively the legacy of social exclusion and unequal public services left by the last Government?

Mr. Brown: I thank my hon. Friend for drawing attention to one part of my statement—the announcement of public investment to enable us to build stronger and safer communities.

Historically in this country, money invested in our communities has not been invested in a way that has tackled the causes of poverty, deprivation and

[Mr. Brown]

unemployment. As part of the new deal for the communities in which my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister is involved, I want us to look at problems of social exclusion—in particular, at the causes of social exclusion—and to establish how, by investing in education or by providing new business opportunities, we can create the jobs that will enable people to move out of poverty.

I assure my hon. Friend that tackling social exclusion is a major priority of this Government. I want a country in which there is opportunity for all, and in which everyone knows that he or she has a contribution to make.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): Does the Chancellor accept that the broad welcome given to his statement by Conservative Back Benchers reflects the fact that he has today set in concrete Tory spending levels for the rest of the current Parliament? How on earth will he be able to adjust his policy to the reality of life year on year and the state of the economic cycle, when he plans to have precisely 39.25 per cent. of gross national product as current expenditure in each year?

Mr. Brown: In one sense, I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman, who has drawn attention to the problems of investment. He does not, however, follow me down the road in understanding what we must do about those problems. I propose that we invest in our future, and release funds with which to do so. The right hon. Gentleman should support me in that.

The funds to which I refer owe nothing to Conservative underinvestment in our future. The Conservatives refused to invest. Investment as a share of gross domestic product fell to 0.8 per cent; we inherited that problem, and are trying to deal with it. The right hon. Gentleman should support us when we are trying to secure more hospitals and schools, and a better transport infrastructure—but is this not typical of the nationalist parties, which are so extreme that they will not see the need for investment in our future?

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. We must move on. *[Interruption.]* I know that hon. Members are disappointed and are heaving sighs, but I have the names of those who have not been called, and I shall try to call them on another occasion. Forty-nine Members were rising to question the Chancellor, and they could not all be called in the space of an hour and a quarter.

Business of the House

4.45 pm

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mrs. Ann Taylor): I should like to make a statement about the business for next week.

MONDAY 15 JUNE—Consideration in Committee of the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Bill.

TUESDAY 16 JUNE—Opposition Day (13th allotted day).

Until about 7 pm, there will be a debate on NHS waiting lists, followed by a debate entitled "The crisis in Scottish local government". Both debates will arise on Opposition motions.

Motion on the Council Tax Limitation (Derbyshire County Council) (Maximum Amount) Order.

WEDNESDAY 17 JUNE—Until 12.30 pm, debate on the fourth report from the Social Security Committee on disability living allowance, followed by a debate on the first report from the Defence Committee on peace support operations in Bosnia and Herzegovina, followed by debates on the motion for the Adjournment of the House.

For three hours, consideration in Committee of the Human Rights Bill *[Lords]* (second allotted day).

For three hours, conclusion of consideration in Committee of the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Bill.

THURSDAY 18 JUNE—For three hours, remaining stages of the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Bill.

Motion on the Church of England National Institutions Measure.

FRIDAY 19 JUNE—Debate entitled "Enterprising UK—the small business agenda" on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

The provisional business for the following week will be as follows.

MONDAY 22 JUNE—Progress on remaining stages of the Crime and Disorder Bill *[Lords]*.

TUESDAY 23 JUNE—Conclusion of remaining stages of the Crime and Disorder Bill *[Lords]*.

WEDNESDAY 24 JUNE—Until 2 pm, there will be debates on the motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Consideration in Committee of the Human Rights Bill *[Lords]* (third allotted day).

THURSDAY 25 JUNE—Opposition Day (14th allotted day).

There will be a debate on an Opposition motion in the name of the minority parties. Subject to be announced.

FRIDAY 26 JUNE—The House will not be sitting.

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire): We are grateful to the right hon. Lady for giving us details of next week's business and an indication of the business for the following week.

We are particularly pleased to learn that there will be a debate on the Floor of the House on the Derbyshire rate-capping order. Can the right hon. Lady confirm that her Government will follow the practice that has existed up until now—that if central Government want to control the expenditure of local government, that raises issues of sufficient importance for them to be debated on the Floor of the House rather than in a Standing Committee?

We have just heard a very important statement from the Chancellor of the Exchequer, which will be followed by another statement next month on the comprehensive expenditure review, setting the financial parameters for spending for the rest of this Parliament. Does the right hon. Lady agree that that raises issues of such importance that the House must debate them before we rise for the summer recess?

Can the right hon. Lady confirm that, contrary to what we had been led to believe, there will not be a statement next week or the week after on the transport White Paper? The reason that has now been given—that it has to follow the comprehensive expenditure review—goes clean against what the Government had said until a few days ago, which was that the White Paper would come first. Will she confirm that the real reason for the delay in the transport White Paper is the serious disagreement between the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister?

Can the right hon. Lady confirm that a statement will be made to the House on the outcome of the strategic defence review when that has been completed? Is she aware of the growing uncertainty in the armed forces caused by the delay in the completion of that exercise?

May I revert to a question that I posed last week about the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs and its request for a debate? The right hon. Lady said that the matter had been "overtaken by events". Does she, on reflection, agree that that is not the case? The request remains outstanding, and the Foreign Affairs Committee has rejected the offer by the Foreign Secretary.

As the Modernisation Committee addresses itself to the future of the parliamentary calendar, will the right hon. Lady turn her mind to the future of the summer recess and let us know whether she plans to invite the House to sit in August?

Mrs. Taylor: I shall deal with the right hon. Gentleman's points individually. I hope that he will accept that the usual channels work well on occasions. We are willing to be reasonable and to listen to representations. It is right that requests should be dealt with case by case. I am glad that we were able to reach an accommodation to enable the order relating to Derbyshire county council to be taken on the Floor of the House.

The right hon. Gentleman asked whether it would be possible to have a debate on today's statement from the Chancellor and next month's statement on the comprehensive spending review. I think that it will be possible to have such a debate before the summer recess. We should perhaps have further discussions through the usual channels about the exact timing and nature of that debate.

The right hon. Gentleman asked for a statement on transport. I hope that that will be made after the comprehensive spending review, but before the summer recess. That shows that we shall be extremely busy at that time, because he also asked for a statement on the strategic defence review. He should not complain about the fact that that review is taking some time. Given his previous interest in that matter, he will no doubt agree that such consideration should be extremely thorough.

The right hon. Gentleman referred to the Foreign Affairs Committee. I said last week that discussions were taking place. I understand that the Committee is still considering what it wants to happen, and the subject is with it at the moment.

The right hon. Gentleman asked about the Modernisation Committee and the summer recess. We would all like as much notice as possible of the summer recess, but I am afraid that I cannot give details at this stage.

Mr. Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): Could we have a statement next week about the Government's energy policy and the consequences for the deep-mined coal industry? The Leader of the House will be aware that the current agreements run out on 30 June. In coalfield communities, not just in Nottinghamshire but all over the country, coal miners are asking for fairness, not favours. There is an urgency about the matter now.

Mrs. Taylor: I am aware of the deadlines surrounding the issue, and I hope that a statement can be made about it shortly.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): May I put two questions to the Leader of the House on matters that concern the role and the perception of the role of Parliament, and the way in which we conduct our business?

First, will the right hon. Lady give us some guidance on the status of the consultants' report that has come into my hands, on the issue of the Line of Route visitors to both Houses? It would appear that consultants are investigating the possibility of charging our constituents who visit the House perhaps £9.50, which is comparable with the charge to visit Buckingham palace, or £5, which Westminster abbey charges. Will she give us an assurance that those proposals will be considered carefully? Who in the House has seen the proposals, and on what basis was the consultancy report prepared? Will she assure us that she will defend the rights of our constituents to come free of charge to the House, to see how the people's Parliament operates?

Secondly, does the right hon. Lady feel that we can draw lessons from the success or otherwise of the experiment with programme Committees? Will she pay particular attention to what happened in the House on Monday evening, when, sadly, we did not have a proper opportunity either to debate or to divide on the vital issue of tuition fees, which I think she will acknowledge is one of the central proposals in the Teaching and Higher Education Bill? If the House is not able to scrutinise such proposals and give a view on them, the other place must have the opportunity to spend a considerable time doing so. Is not the lesson from what happened on Monday night that programme Committees should be a great deal more scrupulous in recognising the needs of both sides of the House, particularly Opposition parties, and should not simply do the bidding of the Government party? I hope that the right hon. Lady will acknowledge that there are lessons to be learned, and that the Modernisation Committee will shortly be given an opportunity to see what can be learned from our experience so far.

Mrs. Taylor: I am aware of the report about the Line of Route visitors, although I have not yet seen it. I shall put the report in context. There is no proposal to charge constituents for coming to see Members of Parliament or how Parliament works. At present, this building is not open to the public during the summer recess or at weekends. A study has rightly been carried out to see

[Mrs. Taylor]

whether it would be possible to provide greater access to this historic building. Many tourists would want to visit the building if it were open at those times. It is right to consider charging in that context, but only in that context. We are still some way from any decision on the matter.

Programme motions and the Business Committee allocate the time that it is agreed should be devoted to any Bill. It is an all-party process: that is the essence of the agreement reached. I understand that an agreement was reached among all parties for the Bill that was debated on Monday. Decisions sometimes depend on which amendments are selected or are selectable. I refute the hon. Gentleman's claim that those Committees do the Government's bidding. All parties are represented, and there has always been agreement among the parties on the allocation of time within the overall limits. If there are lessons to be learned, it is right that we should learn them. This is an experimental process, and if anything can be done to improve the way in which we work, we should look into it.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On the understandably timetabled business for Monday, would the Government look kindly on an amendment that would allow us to discuss the problems of the case of Guardsmen Fisher and Wright, with a view to clarifying their position? That case can now be discussed in the House of Commons only under privilege, as Mr. Ernest Telford, lawyer of Belfast, has taken legal action that makes it very difficult for papers such as *The Spectator*, the *Daily Mail* and others to have a serious discussion of the case, which is of deep public interest and concern. As it is only under privilege that the country can have a proper discussion of the case, will there be an opportunity for that amendment to be selected?

Mrs. Taylor: I am aware that my hon. Friend has tabled an amendment on that subject. It is not for me but for the Chair to decide whether such an amendment should be selected. If it is, I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland will be as informative as she can in her response to a debate on that topic.

Mr. Philip Hammond (Runnymede and Weybridge): Is the right hon. Lady aware of the damning report by Sir Herbert Laming on the crisis in child protection in the Labour-controlled London borough of Ealing, which is to be published by the Department of Health this evening? It says that in Ealing

"children in public care and on the child protection register cannot be considered to be adequately safeguarded."

Is she further aware that the Under-Secretary of State for Health, who has responsibility for children's issues, has already issued a press statement saying how deeply concerned he is by that matter, and that he will call in the London borough of Ealing for consultation with him? Will she arrange for a statement by the Minister next week?

Mrs. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman raises what is obviously a serious problem that will concern hon. Members on both sides of the House. He mentioned that my hon. Friend the Minister has expressed his concern about that matter and is talking to the local authority involved. I shall ensure that the hon. Gentleman's comments are brought to my hon. Friend's attention, and I am sure that my hon. Friend will respond directly to him.

Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone): Will my right hon. Friend consider allowing time to debate the latest report by the Select Committee on Trade and Industry on energy policy? In that debate, we may be able to ascertain whether Lord Wakeham, who made a declaration in the House of Lords on 4 June that he was a director of Enron, the largest gas corporation in the world, knew that he would become a director of that company when, as a Minister in this House, he implemented privatisation plans for electricity. Those plans rigged the market against coal and pushed coal over the cliff.

Mrs. Taylor: The Government have welcomed the Select Committee's report and its contribution to the important debate on energy policy. My hon. Friend specifically refers to certain aspects of that report, and he may want to pursue them further either in an Adjournment debate or at Question Time next Thursday.

Sir David Madel (South-West Bedfordshire): Will the right hon. Lady think again about her answer to the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler)? There was an agreement on the Teaching and Higher Education Bill as to the amount of time that should be spent on it—nine hours—but surely, when the Opposition parties agree to the total amount of time, they should have the right to slice up that time as they see fit. We should be allowed to discuss the amendments that we want. The Government should not be so greedy in wanting everything.

Will the right hon. Lady please arrange for the Deputy Prime Minister to come to the Dispatch Box on Monday to make a statement? There will be a two-day strike on the tube, which will cause great inconvenience. We should like to know how the Labour Government will sort that matter out. After all, a year ago, they said that left can talk to left. Why do we not find out what has happened?

Mrs. Taylor: I have little to add to what I said about programme motions. I agree with the hon. Gentleman's comment that no one should be greedy. All views have to be taken into consideration; that, of course, includes the views of the Government, as well as those of others who might table amendments. The agreement on that programme motion encompassed all parties.

Industrial action on the tube would, of course, be regrettable. We hope that all those involved in these potential disputes will make every effort to achieve a quick resolution. None of us wants passengers to be inconvenienced. It is important that all the ramifications are taken into account by those involved.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): Is it possible to have an early debate, before the debate on the White Paper on integrated transport strategy, on the Government's policy on clean vehicle technology? I say that in the context of today's deputation at Westminster, by Lucas Aerospace. My right hon. Friend may know that it has served redundancy notices on 70 employees. If that goes through, it will mean the end of the only UK plant manufacturing cylinders for natural gas to power clean vehicles. That is

of immense importance not just to Burnley—my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) is with the deputation at the moment and cannot be with me—but to my constituency. In a wider sense, it is of immense importance to the UK.

Mrs. Taylor: I agree that clean vehicle technology is of immense importance. My hon. Friend will be aware of the work that my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister has been doing in that sector. I cannot promise my hon. Friend the debate that he and my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) wish to have in Government time in the near future, but one of them may wish to apply for an Adjournment debate.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): May I thank the Leader of the House for arranging for the debate on the capping of Derbyshire county council finally to be taken on the Floor of the House? Was it not disgraceful that the Government attempted to debate that in Committee, which has never happened to any previous capping order? As a senior member of the Government and as an upholder of the rights of Members of Parliament, will she comment on the fact that the Government's original plans were to ensure that no Derbyshire Labour Members were appointed to the Committee to discuss the measure? Following strong representations from the Opposition, Derbyshire Labour Members will be fully able to support the Government next Tuesday, if they so wish, on that capping measure.

Mrs. Taylor: I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would have been partly wearing his new hat and accepting that, on this occasion, the usual channels worked well.

Mr. John Cryer (Hornchurch): Can the Leader of the House find time for a debate on the past 10 years of British foreign policy? It would allow the House to consider the contrast between the open and straightforward way in which this Government have dealt with the Sierra Leone question, and the way in which the scandalous and seedy manipulations of the previous Government led to the Pergau dam scandal, arms to Iraq and the Scott inquiry, during which they tried to manipulate the situation, so that the then shadow Foreign Secretary had only three hours to read five volumes before the statement. It is a scandalous and sorry story, which continues with the apparent machinations of Secret Agent Aitken.

Mrs. Taylor: I am in a slightly dangerous position because the Foreign Secretary is here echoing the demands of my hon. Friend. I have to tell them both that I do not see the prospect of that specific debate in the near future, but I understand its attraction.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): May I join my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young), the shadow Leader of the House, in asking the right hon. Lady to look favourably on the need to find time for a debate on the statement that has just been made by the Chancellor, but may I differ with my right hon. Friend in one respect: we need that debate to take place ahead of the comprehensive spending review statement that the Chancellor will make next month? In the meantime, does she recognise that what the Chancellor said in relation to air traffic control, the Commonwealth Development Corporation and the Royal Mint presented an unassailable case for the privatisation of London Transport and the Post Office, among other public businesses, even if she and he prefer to call privatisation by any other name?

Mrs. Taylor: On this matter, I agree with the shadow Leader of the House that it would be appropriate to have a debate after the comprehensive spending review, and I think that I made my position clear on that. On London Underground or, indeed, the channel tunnel rail link, we should congratulate the Deputy Prime Minister on the new approach that he has adopted and the successful partnerships that he has been negotiating. The whole House should wish them well.

Mr. Tony McNulty (Harrow, East): My right hon. Friend will know that, in recent weeks, the London crime statistics have been published and that, in many national newspapers today, there is extreme concern about corruption among a small core of those in the Metropolitan police. It is usually at about this time of year that we have the annual Adjournment debate on policing in London. Would it be possible to squeeze it in this side of the recess, or may I have an assurance that it will take place as soon as possible after we return?

Mrs. Taylor: My hon. Friend is right to say that there is usually a debate on crime in London at this time, but it is not that long since we had one, and it is more likely that the debate will take place later in the year, rather than in the next few weeks.

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): The Leader of the House will be aware that there are now three early-day motions on the Order Paper expressing concern about the Government's proposals to restrict the sale of vitamin B6; there are 177 signatures on one of the motions. Indeed, the Select Committee on Agriculture has examined the matter. Is she aware that many scientists in Britain believe that the report that the Government have used is fundamentally flawed, and that that view is backed up by the United States national academy of science, which suggests that the Government have got this completely wrong? Given the huge concern in the House and in the country—I speak having served for 10 years as an officer of the parliamentary group for alternative and complementary medicine; I have never seen as much concern on any other issue—does she not think that it is time for the Government to provide Government time to debate that matter? Restricting the sale of vitamin B6, if it goes ahead, will seriously affect ladies suffering from PMT, elderly people with Alzheimer's disease and a range of people who rely on vitamin supplements, particularly vitamin B6, to alleviate their afflictions.

Mrs. Taylor: I think that we all have received representations from constituents about vitamin B6. The hon. Gentleman specifically mentioned the report produced in the United States. The Government have seen that report and Ministers have announced that they will take account of it in considering their responses to the consultation exercise. My hon. Friend the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has

[Mrs. Taylor]

been considering the matter carefully. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that all representations have been taken into account.

Judy Mallaber (Amber Valley): Does my right hon. Friend accept that Labour Members representing Derbyshire constituencies look forward to the opportunity on Tuesday to promote our beautiful county, welcome the opportunity to discuss the council's successes in view of the Conservatives' intransigence towards our county over the past 18 years and are pleased that the Government have recognised our financial difficulties and allowed us to raise the spending limits? Does she agree that it promises to be an interesting debate as Conservative Members are now asking why the Government have not given Derbyshire everything it wants, when, previously, Conservative Members and local councillors were saying that the council should not ask for anything at all?

Mrs. Taylor: It will be an extremely interesting debate. The cap on Derbyshire has been increased by £2.9 million. Such debates often do not turn out in the way that some hon. Members expect. My hon. Friend's analysis is probably nearer to what is likely to happen than that of some Conservative Members.

Mr. Norman Baker (Lewes): May I ask the Leader of the House for a debate on the important subject of genetic engineering? Is she aware that genetically modified crops are being planted in Britain, genetically modified food is on sale and experiments are being conducted in which animals are being genetically manipulated? Is she further aware that it is a matter of great concern to many people, including one who I understand I am not allowed to name in the House? Does she understand that the Government's ability to respond to the issue is being fatally undermined by the fact that the responsibility is split across so many Government Departments? Will she draw that fact to the attention of the Prime Minister?

Mrs. Taylor: The Government are determined to ensure that the use of genetic modifications to produce new crops and foods does not threaten public health or environmental safety. We are aware of all the issues that are involved and have campaigned in the European Union for better labelling, so that the public are properly informed. Full public consultations on the matter will take place in the next few months. The hon. Gentleman's point about proper co-ordination among Government Departments has been taken on board and, taking the wider issues into account, that is one reason why we have proposed a Food Standards Agency.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the essence of democracy is the ability of the legislature to check the Executive? Is it not the case that it is difficult to check the Executive when they perform their role collectively in Europe? May we have an early debate on that complicated issue? Many of us feel that legislatures across Europe are very weak vis-a-vis the ever-powerful and growing Executive tiger. Will she accept my invitation to join a group of parliamentarians from across Europe who are meeting tomorrow in Church house to discuss ways in which we can set up a virtual assembly, whereby nearly 5,000 parliamentarians will communicate using modern technology, so that we can start plotting and planning the downfall, or at least the curbing, of the European Executive?

Mrs. Taylor: I do not know whether my hon. Friend was planning to speak in this afternoon's debate, but I should have thought that he could make a significant contribution were he minded to do so and fortunate enough to catch your eye, Madam Speaker. I should also draw his attention to a report that the Modernisation Committee hopes to publish next week, on how the House deals with European legislation. It proposes some important alterations to the way in which we consider European legislation, which would benefit all concerned. I hope that my hon. Friend will welcome that report. He could develop his other points further this afternoon.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): Has the Leader of the House seen early-day motion 266?

[*That this House welcomes Scope's report, Polls Apart 2—Disabled People and the 1997 General Election, which shows that 94 per cent. of polling stations surveyed on 1st May were inaccessible to disabled people voting independently, and that some disabled people were either unable to vote or were injured trying to get into their polling stations, the majority of which were located in public buildings; recognises that the majority of disabled people interviewed by Scope wanted to vote in person on election day and rejected postal votes as a suitable alternative; and calls on the Government to review the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and Home Office guidance to returning officers with a view to removing the barriers that currently prevent disabled people from exercising their right to vote.*]

The motion deals with "Polls Apart 2", Scope's survey of the inaccessibility of polling stations during elections. I understand that a House of Commons Committee is looking at electoral reform. Can the right hon. Lady ensure that it looks carefully at the accessibility of polling stations, so that disabled people can vote in person, and the possibility of extending the time limits for postal votes? The new technology that was just mentioned by the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) should mean that more people would have access to postal votes.

Mrs. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman again raises an issue that should be of concern to us all, as we are elected through a democratic process. We should all want to make it easier for everyone to vote in person, wherever possible. We welcome the report that has been published and we are committed to establishing comprehensive and enforceable civil rights for disabled people. At present, we are considering how best to take forward that commitment and how advice and guidance to acting returning officers can be improved. We all have examples of such problems; before the general election, many hon. Members contacted returning officers in an effort to improve matters. I hope that we can build on that good work.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): May I ask the right hon. Lady to consider—if not next week, in the fairly near future—a full-day debate on the crisis in British agriculture? When the matter was last discussed in the House on 21 May, there was a three-hour debate in which

the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food spoke for three-quarters of an hour. He glazed over Agenda 2000, barely mentioned agrimonetary policy and neglected to address the catastrophic fall in farm incomes. British agriculture needs a proper airing in the House, and the way in which the time was divided up on that day simply did not give it due credit. Will the right hon. Lady consider providing a full-day debate, so that all the issues can be discussed properly?

Mrs. Taylor: Ministers have made it clear, as has my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, that the Government are aware of the problems faced by many people in agriculture. I would have hoped that the hon. Gentleman might have included in his reasons for a debate the excellent news that the European Commission has agreed a proposal for a date-based export scheme. Although there is a long way to go on that, perhaps he could put his comments in that context, too.

I cannot promise a debate in the near future, but I understand the concerns that were expressed by hon. Members on both sides of the House at the time taken by Front Benchers in that and other debates on similar topics. It is important that those of us who speak from the Front Bench understand the pressures on the time of the House and do our best to make sure that as many hon. Members as possible have the opportunity to speak.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Would the right hon. Lady be kind enough to look again at the answer that she gave my right hon. Friend the Member for North–West Hampshire (Sir G. Young) on the special report of the Foreign Affairs Committee? We are asking essentially a very simple question. The Committee said that it wished to gauge the feelings of the House. Will she please provide an opportunity for the House to express its views in the very near future?

Mrs. Taylor: As I said earlier, the Select Committee is still considering the matter. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has heard that the Select Committee will be writing to him, but he has not yet received a letter on that point. At the moment, I do not think that it will serve any useful purpose to take it further in the House.

Sir George Young: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. It concerns a matter on which I have written to you—the treatment by Ministers of questions from hon. Members. In respect of oral questions, you were good enough to say on 11 May:

> "I certainly expect Ministers to tackle them and to give a proper answer."—[*Official Report*, 11 May 1998; Vol. 312, c. 22.]

As for written questions, a number of my colleagues have tabled specific and factual written parliamentary questions, which were accepted by the Table Office. They have received replies from Ministers that refer them to previous ministerial statements or to other documents. However, nowhere in those statements or documents can the answer to the questions be found. Madam Speaker, are you prepared to give on the record a ruling on written replies that is similar to the one that you gave on oral replies?

Madam Speaker: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving me some indication earlier of his point of order. My advice to Ministers on answering written questions is exactly the same as the advice that I recently gave on answering supplementary questions to oral questions. As the right hon. Gentleman will be the first to appreciate, the satisfaction of the questioner cannot always be guaranteed. However, for all that, I expect Ministers to tackle all questions asked of them and to give a proper answer. In view of the right hon. Gentleman's comments on questions and answers, I wonder whether it might be a good suggestion if I were to ask him to give some specific examples to the Leader of the House, who is in the Chamber. I am sure that she would be interested to see those examples.

Cardiff European Council

[Relevant documents: Minutes of Evidence taken by the Foreign Affairs Committee on 2nd June (HC 387-ii); White Paper on Developments in the European Union July-December 1997 (Cm 3961); and Proposals for Council Decisions on the Principles, Priorities, Intermediate Objectives and Conditions contained in the Accession Partnerships (presented by the Commission)—ten unnumbered Explanatory Memoranda submitted by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on 25th February 1998 (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia) Council Number 6637/98 COM (98)53 final.]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kevin Hughes.]*

5.20 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Robin Cook): I am pleased to announce at the outset of this debate that, today, the House of Lords has not insisted on its amendment to the European Communities (Amendment) Bill. The Bill's parliamentary stages are now complete. We hope that Royal Assent will be granted very shortly, opening the way for the United Kingdom to ratify the treaty of Amsterdam in the near future. We shall be among the first three countries in Europe to do so. Under the previous Administration, the United Kingdom was one of the last two countries to ratify the Maastricht treaty. That contrast underlines the new priority and commitment that this Administration have given to Europe, and provides an excellent basis on which, on Sunday, we can welcome to Cardiff the leaders of the 15 member states of the European Union.

The leaders' agenda will be wide ranging. On Monday, they will meet Finance Ministers to discuss economic reform. At lunchtime, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will lead a discussion on the future direction of Europe. On Monday afternoon, they will discuss progress on enlarging the European Union, and the Agenda 2000 issues, such as reforming the common agricultural policy, simplifying the structural funds and securing budget discipline.

On Tuesday morning, the leaders will debate the summit's conclusions, including proposals from Foreign Ministers on current issues in foreign policy. It is with those foreign policy issues that I wish to start my speech.

On Monday, I chaired the preparatory meeting for Cardiff of Foreign Ministers, at which our discussion on the crisis in Kosovo was the most grave and sombre of our presidency. At the start of last week, Serbian security forces mounted a major military operation, with support from the Yugoslav army. Heavy machine guns and anti-tank weapons were used against villages and towns in Kosovo, particularly along the border area with Albania. The clear objective of the offensive was to empty those towns and villages of their civilian population. It is our belief that, last week, about 50,000 people were rendered homeless. Most of them were women and children; few could ever have been members of the Kosovo Liberation Army.

Monday's meeting of Foreign Ministers strongly condemned the ratcheting up of military violence, and expressed our firm belief that

"these attacks are beginning to constitute a new wave of ethnic cleansing."

In our statement, we specifically reaffirmed that the remit of the war crimes tribunal on Yugoslavia applies to all parts of the former Yugoslavia, including Kosovo. Those who carry out extra-judicial killings or crimes against humanitarian law should not do so in the hope that they will escape justice.

In the meantime, the urgent task is to halt the violence. At the United Nations, Britain has taken the lead in the Security Council to seek a resolution, under chapter VII, that will provide a mandate for all necessary action to halt the conflict. I am pleased to report to the House that, on Monday, the Foreign Ministers of European countries unanimously expressed their support for such a resolution. As we speak, NATO Defence Ministers are meeting to hear reports from their military advisers, who are considering all options that might be taken under that mandate.

Tomorrow, I shall host a meeting in London of the Group of Eight Foreign Ministers, which was originally called to discuss nuclear escalation in India and Pakistan. All members of the contact group on the former Yugoslavia are represented on the G8. We will, therefore, take the opportunity of our gathering tomorrow to hold a special meeting of the contact group, to send a clear signal of our resolve to Belgrade.

President Milosevic must bear personal responsibility for the crisis in Kosovo. Last week, he authorised violence on a scale that has not been seen in the former Yugoslavia since the truce in Bosnia three years ago. He should not make the heavy mistake of assuming that, this time, the international community will be as slow to react as it was in the early years of the crisis in Bosnia. Nor can he hope to find a place for his country in the modern Europe unless he starts to abide by the democratic standards of modern Europe.

In the past fortnight, President Milosevic has removed the broadcasting licences of 33 independent radio stations. At the same time, he has given separate broadcasting licences to his wife, to his son and to his daughter. No one can be fooled that that outcome reflects an impartial assessment of the respective merits of those applications.

Finally, before leaving the subject of Kosovo, I should emphasise that Europe condemns the use of violence for political ends by either side. The violent repression by President Milosevic has been totally counter-productive: it has strengthened the Kosovo Liberation Army. However, the Kosovo Liberation Army's activities will not liberate the people of Kosovo, but will only ensure the continuation of their suffering. Our support in Kosovo is for the elected leadership of the Kosovar people, who, to their credit, have consistently pursued a peaceful path towards their goal of autonomy.

For that reason, as we hold the presidency of the European Union, I shall this evening receive Dr. Rugova, the elected leader of the Kosovar people, to demonstrate our support for those among the Kosovars who seek a negotiated, not a violent, means of achieving their aspirations. I am confident that both sides of the House

will wish me today to convey to Dr. Rugova our united respect for his support for peace, and our resolve to halt the violence.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow) *rose—*

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North–East Fife): I would not disagree with anything that the Foreign Secretary has said in the past moment or two, and I welcome his comments on his intention of receiving Mr. Rugova later today. However, the Foreign Secretary will be aware that the possibility of obtaining a resolution on suitable terms from the Security Council of the United Nations will depend on Russia's attitude. Is he able—consistent with the usual diplomatic niceties—to give us some indication of what exchanges he has had with Mr. Primakov, his opposite number in Russia? What prediction can he make about the extent to which Russia will share the sentiments that he has just expressed to the House?

Mr. Cook: We have not, as yet, had any indication that Russia could support such a resolution. I very much hope that Russia would not choose to block such a resolution. It is worth recalling that Russia has now not vetoed a Security Council resolution for some half dozen years. I do not think that either Mr. Primakov or President Yeltsin would wish to break that very helpful moratorium on the veto by now using it to protect President Milosevic. One of the advantages of our meeting tomorrow is that Mr. Primakov will be present at the contact group, which will give us an opportunity of dialogue—in the hope that peer group pressure will get Russia to understand the strength of feeling in the rest of the international community.

Did my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) wish to intervene?

Mr. Dalyell: I had the same question, and the Foreign Secretary has given as much of a reply to it as he can.

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend is one of the few hon. Members who is honest enough to say that a question has been answered. I am grateful to him.

The ethnic confrontation and violence in Kosovo provide a stark contrast to the security and peace enjoyed by the peoples in the European Union. It is because all the countries of central Europe hunger for the security and stability that we enjoy that they now seek membership of the European Union.

As I look back over the months of our presidency, I believe that the achievement of greatest strategic significance was the successful launch that we gave to the enlargement process. We were able to develop a process in which all 11 countries were in the same pipeline, moving towards the same destination—the speed at which they arrive at the finish will depend entirely on the urgency with which they make the necessary reforms. We were also successful in negotiating a formula that dissuaded France from blocking the start of negotiations with Cyprus, which could have provoked Greece to block negotiations with any country.

In January, I made giving enlargement a flying start one of the objectives of our presidency—we have done that, which will be of long-term credit to Britain. Over the next decade, all the countries involved will become member states with full voting powers at the Councils of Ministers. It is important to our interests that they should remember the United Kingdom presidency as a time when we proved ourselves advocates and friends of their membership and competent managers of the process of enlargement.

It is equally important that the peoples of those countries should associate Britain with the benefits that they will enjoy as consumers as they lower the barriers to trade. When I addressed the House in the European debate in December, I mentioned the strong enthusiasm that I found in Warsaw for my insistence that membership of the European Union would require Poland to abolish the unfair, discriminatory and punitive taxes on whisky. I am delighted to report to the House that, last week, I received a message from the Foreign Minister of Poland informing me that the Cabinet had approved a reduction in the duty on whisky, to give it parity with brandy. I am confident that that news will be as welcome to drinkers of whisky in Warsaw as it will be to distillers of whisky on Speyside.

Enlargement is not the only historic step that is being taken under our presidency. Last month, the Heads of Government agreed that 11 member states could proceed to the final stage of economic and monetary union. Britain has not joined that first wave. We will judge whether we are ready to join on the basis of a hard-headed assessment of the economic interests of the British people; the Government are united in their view that the decision on the single currency must be determined on that basis.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Cook: I was hoping that I would get a Tory Euro-sceptic, but the right hon. Gentleman will do.

Mr. Wigley: I am sorry that I cannot fit either bill. The right hon. Gentleman regards the well-being of the economy as the paramount consideration in deciding the timing for entry to the euro, but if the well-being of the economy so dictates, will the Government consider entry sooner than 12 months after the next general election—assuming that this Parliament goes to its full term—or does the well-being of the economy take second place to the commitment to wait until a referendum after the general election?

Mr. Cook: We do not expect any tension between the two commitments. We came to our conclusion because Britain and the continent are at very different points in the economic cycle. That substantial difference will not be lessened in the short term—it will take some years for true convergence to come about. I assure the right hon. Gentleman that we have no intention of joining before we are confident that it would be to the economic advantage of the British people.

Our unity of view on the single currency contrasts with the division among Conservative Members, who are united only in the strength of their contempt for one another's views on the matter. When the European Parliament voted last month on the single currency, half the Tory MEPs abstained and the other half voted in three different ways—a multiple split that makes the Tory MEPs much more representative of the Tory party than many of the Tory Euro-sceptics would admit.

[Mr. Cook]

Europe faces many other challenges as a result of the two historic changes that I have outlined. A European Union in which Finns to Italians are paid in a common currency, and whose borders stretch from Poland to Portugal and from Scotland to Cyprus, will be a Europe that gives rise to new challenges as well as to new opportunities. We must ensure that we strike the right balance between the unity and cohesion of the Union and a flexibility that can reflect the diversity of its increased number of member states. That is why it is right that a centrepiece of the Cardiff summit will be a discussion by the leaders on the future of Europe.

In his Paris speech two months ago, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister set out his vision for Europe. He stressed the importance of reconnecting Europe with its citizens and of striking a better balance to respect not only the advantage of Europe acting in unity, but the individual identity of each member state.

The letter from Chancellor Kohl and President Chirac, which was released earlier this week, demonstrates that those arguments are winning the debate on the future of Europe. It represents a powerful statement of the case for subsidiarity, which the two leaders demand must be "strictly respected and applied" even more rigorously, and which rightly recognises that

"the citizen will not accept decisions at the European level unless it is clear that . . . such rules cannot be adopted at a satisfactory manner at the local, regional or national level."

That statement is unequivocal. It exposes the Euro-sceptics' fears of a centralised, federalised European state for the fantasies that they are—nightmares that have something of the night about them, but nothing of reality. If the Euro-sceptics will not listen to me, perhaps they will listen to the Conservative party's nominee on the European Commission, Sir Leon Brittan, who said the other week:

"Europe has changed and Britain has played a big part in changing it."

There could be no better place for Britain to demonstrate the leading role that it has played in promoting subsidiarity than Cardiff.

Mr. Wigley: Hear, hear.

Mr. Cook: I am grateful for the right hon. Gentleman's support. As a result of the Government's policies—which the right hon. Gentleman is also welcome to support—Cardiff will become the centre of a democratically elected assembly which will make political decisions in Wales accountable to the people of Wales. That is a visible reminder that the Government not only preach subsidiarity in Brussels, but practise it in Britain.

We also welcome the strong recognition in the letter from Chancellor Kohl and President Chirac that decisions within Europe should be open and transparent. During the UK presidency, we have made making proceedings more transparent a priority. I am pleased to tell the House that more members of the public and representatives of non-governmental organisations have attended open Council meetings during our presidency than in any previous presidency. Indeed, we had broken all previous records before our presidency reached halfway.

The more that Europe opens up its proceedings to the public, the more important it becomes that the public see that those proceedings focus on the issues that are of concern and relevance to them. When we launched the UK presidency, we stressed that its theme would be to make Europe work for the people and that we would focus on issues of popular concern, such as jobs, crime and the environment. Over the past six months, we have made solid progress on all three fronts.

On jobs, we were the first member state to produce a national action plan on employment, and Cardiff will be the first European summit at which the action plans, which have now been developed by every member state, will be reviewed. An unusual feature of the summit will be the morning discussion, with Finance Ministers, on economic reform to make Europe more competitive and to encourage employment.

We will also discuss reports from the Commission and from the business test panels on how we can encourage small and medium enterprises by reducing the complexity of European regulations. The objective is well expressed in the title of the Commission document—"Doing Less, but Doing it Better".

We have negotiated a pact on organised crime with all the countries that are candidates for membership of the European Union, to enable us to achieve greater co-operation in fighting the criminals who run major rackets in the drugs trade, money laundering and the sordid exploitation of the traffic in illegal immigrants.

Mr. Dalyell: Before my right hon. Friend leaves the subject of crime, he will not be entirely surprised when I ask him whether there will be any discussion of the Lockerbie crime and relations with Libya, especially in the context of his meeting with Dr. Mudenge and others from Uganda, Cameroon and other African states, and of the possibility of a resolution of a crime that will be 10 years old at Christmas 1998.

Mr. Cook: I congratulate my hon. Friend on the skill with which he has worked in a question which I know concerns him closely. I am happy to say that I had a very good meeting with the representatives of the Organisation of African Unity and the Arab League, at which I explained why we have full confidence in the standards of Scottish justice. I expressed regret at the fact that those two organisations did not respond positively to our invitation to them and the United Nations to send observers to study our legal system, and I repeated that offer to them.

I think that it is fair to say that Stan Mudenge and his colleagues left with the impression that they had had a fair hearing, and that I had explained exactly why we are robust in our faith in Scottish justice and why we are determined to ensure that the mass murder of 270 people is not allowed to pass without those who have been charged being brought to justice.

We have acted to implement the commitment in the Amsterdam treaty to integrate the protection of the environment across the broad range of European policies. Our presidency has witnessed the first ever joint meeting of the Transport and Environment Councils. As a result of that joint work on the environment and transport, we have been able to adopt tougher standards on vehicle emissions, which will produce cleaner air for our citizens.

The decision last week to ban the drift nets that drown dolphins has been broadly welcomed by the many people in Britain who support the campaigns to protect wildlife.

As we deliver on our commitments in our presidency of the European Union, we are constantly aware that Britain is a country with major ties of history and culture, and alliances around the globe, and not only in Europe. In particular, we have forged an excellent working relationship with Washington, and an effective partnership with both the White House and the State Department.

Britain's current high standing in Washington has been of direct benefit to Europe. At last month's United States-European Union summit, we secured an agreement that will protect European companies from US sanctions and commits the United States Government to resist any legislation that will result in extra-territorial penalties on European companies that are breaking no national or international law.

We have averted what could have been division between Europe and the United States over trade, and replaced it with unity in our approach towards countries such as Iran. I believe that the successful outcome of the summit, which is good for both sides of the Atlantic, was largely due to the fact that it was Britain in its presidency that represented Europe there.

In our presidency, it has been our job to speak for all the member states. I am happy to say that that does not prevent us, and has not prevented us, from also speaking for Britain. I noticed last Sunday that the Minister for Europe in the previous Conservative Government, the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr. Davis), complained that we had not given enough priority to tackling the ban on British beef. That was a compelling example of how out of touch Conservative Members can be with what is going on in Europe.

On 1 June, only a fortnight ago, the ban was lifted on exports of cattle from Northern Ireland under the certified herds scheme, and yesterday, the Commission agreed to propose to lift the ban on the export of beef under the date-based scheme for cattle born after August 1996.

We are not over the obstacle course yet: there are further hoops through which that proposal must go before it gets Council approval and comes into effect, and there appear to be elements in the Commission's proposals that we regard as unnecessary and unduly restrictive, but the fact remains that we now have in sight an end to the beef ban for the British mainland, as well as for Northern Ireland.

The fact that we have got this far is a striking illustration of how much better the Labour Government have been able to promote British interests through their constructive and positive approach to Europe. By contrast, the policy of confrontation pursued by the previous Government left Britain on the sidelines of Europe, with neither influence nor respect, and did nothing to further Britain's interests on beef or anything else.

I noticed last month that, one year on from the general election, *The Times* had discovered that Labour led the Conservatives as the party with the most popular policy on Europe by a margin of almost two to one. I freely admit that it was not always like this: at the previous general election, the same pollsters found the Conservatives leading on Europe by exactly the same margin.

The dramatic turnaround has happened because the public have had a year in which they have seen how much more can be delivered by a Government who have respect throughout the capitals of Europe and are taken seriously because the Europeans know that we are serious about doing business with Europe. In a spirit of fairness, I acknowledge the strong contribution made to our public support over Europe by Conservative Members, who have spent the past year unable to convince each other, never mind the public, what is the right policy for them on Europe.

The British public are much more sensible than many Conservative Members. They know that, in the modern world, we can make our way only by the health of our alliances and our trading links with the rest of the world. They know, too, that we shall not achieve security or prosperity in a global economy by being as rude as possible to our nearest neighbours.

The British public know that, if the Conservative party had, by some miracle, remained in power at the general election, the past six months of the UK presidency would have been squandered in the sterile and hostile confrontation that marked its last years in office. By contrast, we can look back with satisfaction on six months of steady achievement.

We have given a successful launch to an historic process of enlargement that will change the face of Europe; delivered real progress on our people's agenda of jobs, the environment and the fight against crime and drugs; developed a clear sense of direction for reform of the common agricultural policy; and injected momentum into the Agenda 2000 negotiations. Furthermore, we are winning the debate in Europe on subsidiarity, with the result that at Cardiff, we can launch a discussion that will confirm Europe's future as a union of sovereign states, not as one single, centralised state.

That is a record of achievement in which the whole of Britain is welcome to share our pride, including even the Conservative party, if it chooses to come out of the bunker, blinking into the light of the modern Europe. It is against that solid record of achievement through our presidency that we go to Cardiff, confident that we have set the right agenda for a constructive exchange and that it is we, not the Conservative party, who represent Britain at Cardiff, because it is we who represent the views of the people of Britain on Europe.

5.48 pm

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): May I begin with one of the few points on which I agree with the Foreign Secretary? I welcome the fact that the European Council is taking place in Cardiff, in my native land, and I place on record the fact that it is taking place there largely because of the influence exerted by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition when he was Secretary of State for Wales. Apart from that, I fear that there will not be a great deal on which I can agree with the right hon. Gentleman.

No one has ever accused the Foreign Secretary of false modesty, but the speech that we have just heard was one of insufferable complacency and self-congratulation, born more of his fantasies than of the real world. Let us now return to the real world.

A couple of weeks ago, he addressed the European Parliament. I, alas, was not present, but it was not necessary to be present to judge the impact of the speech.

[Mr. Michael Howard]

The very next day, Members of the European Parliament voted on a motion that congratulated the United Kingdom presidency on its achievements, a motion tabled by Labour Members of the Parliament, who form the largest group of the party of European Socialists. That party, and its allies, has an overall majority in the Parliament, so the prospects for the motion must have seemed auspicious. Yet such was the impact of the Foreign Secretary's speech that the motion was lost. The European Parliament declined to offer the UK presidency its congratulations.

The Foreign Secretary had done it again. The man who single-handedly bungled the royal visit to India, who caused grave offence during his visit to Israel and who has done more than anyone to bring the concept of ethics into disrepute had once more snatched defeat from the jaws of victory.

Mr. Roger Casale (Wimbledon): Can the right hon. Gentleman say what sort of approval rating he might have had from the European Parliament if he had been Foreign Secretary over the past six months?

Mr. Howard: I cannot answer that, because I have never had the great privilege of holding that office, but I can approach an answer.

The Foreign Secretary is fond of comparing the Government's attitude to and record on Europe to the attitude and record of their predecessor. An instructive comparison is, indeed, to be made. This was not the first time that the European Parliament voted on a British presidency. The European Parliament was addressed by a Foreign Secretary—Lord Hurd of Westwell—during our last presidency in 1992. Then, too, there was a vote on the UK presidency on the day after the Foreign Secretary addressed the Parliament. Once again, the motion was tabled by Labour MEPs, and it criticised the UK presidency. On that occasion, too, the motion was lost. The European Parliament took a more favourable view of that Conservative presidency than of the current Labour one. I hope that the Foreign Secretary will add that comparison to the list of which he is so proud.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): The right hon. and learned Gentleman is labouring his point. Perhaps he does not speak, for some reason, to Conservative Members of the European Parliament, but had he gone beyond the press reports he might have learnt that part of the reason for that vote was the view of many MEPs that the motion, a month before the end of the presidency, was premature. There was also concern about the European central bank fracas, which had nothing to do with my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary.

Mr. Howard: I shall have a word to say about what the hon. Gentleman describes as the European central bank fracas. His view that it had nothing to do with the UK presidency is by no means shared in the European Parliament or elsewhere in the councils of Europe.

The vote of the European Parliament two weeks ago was a humiliation for the Foreign Secretary. Behind that humiliation lies another truth: the presidency has been a flop. What a contrast with the high hopes set out six months ago. The Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary were going to transform the continent. The Foreign Secretary told us that the presidency would provide

"a clear opportunity to demonstrate that Europe can deliver on the concerns of our people."

The Government, he said, were to offer

"active leadership in the world."—[*Official Report*, 4 December 1997; Vol. 302, c. 521-22.]

The Foreign Secretary was so full of the prospects for the presidency that he quoted from the European press, telling us that we should read what the European papers said about the new Labour Government. I am always keen to take the Foreign Secretary's advice, and I have been reading the foreign press. The French journalist Pierre Beglau, writing for the magazine *Le Point*, said:

"The British Presidency of the European Union is . . . one of the most timid and poor in recent years."

The Italian newspaper *Il Sole Venti Quatre Ore* discovered what we have long known. There seemed, it said,

"to be a growing disparity between proclaimed intentions and reality."

Nowhere was that disparity more marked than in the half-term report that the Government published in March. I am not surprised that the Foreign Secretary did not refer to that half-term report. The House will understand why in a moment. The report was a British innovation. There is no tradition of half-term reports, but the Foreign Secretary was so keen to trumpet his achievements that he was determined to break new ground. The report was introduced by the Prime Minister in typical fashion. Great progress was being made, he said, on a number of policy issues. He added:

"Robin Cook has done a brilliant job in bringing together Ministers quickly and reaching agreement to help sort things out rapidly."

What were the 45 successes attributed to the British presidency in that report? The Secretary of State for Education and Employment had chaired a meeting about life-long learning. The need for measures to lower telephone bills was highlighted. A seminar of Government press officers was held, at which agreement was reached to disseminate more information on the EU via the internet. And what of the Foreign Secretary? Well, he was praised for "injecting new impetus" into the middle east peace process. Not a lot of people saw it that way at the time.

The whole ludicrous, self-serving exercise was viewed with incredulity by our European partners. One German diplomat said:

"It's funny, we always thought the British style was understated."

It is little wonder that we are now told, and perhaps the Foreign Secretary will confirm it, that the Government have abandoned their intention to follow up the ludicrous half-time report with a full-time assessment of their performance. There is not going to be a full-time report. The Government have at last recognised the only appropriate verdict on their presidency—the least said, the better. That did not stop the Foreign Secretary producing a half-time report, but he is not producing a full-time report because there is very little to say.

It is little wonder that, instead of dwelling on the achievements of the UK presidency—only three weeks from its end—the Foreign Secretary chose to spend much

of his time today on the problems of Kosovo. Those problems are, of course, acute, and I do not underestimate them for one moment. The whole House will want to join him in expressing our dismay at the emergence once more of violence, murder and rape in the Balkans.

However, the Foreign Secretary should have made a separate statement on Kosovo so that hon. Members could question him. I hope that he will do so next week. Meanwhile, I hope that the Minister of State will tell the House why, when we have known about that problem for so long, the military options for NATO have even now not been prepared. The Secretary of State for Defence talked on the radio this morning about the need for quick action, but it was known months ago that difficulties were likely to arise in Kosovo. Why was work not put in hand then to prepare options for action? When do the Government intend to approach the Security Council for authority to take action? What action do they have in mind? Will the Minister of State assure us that any such action will have clear objectives, and that the Foreign Secretary will return to the House to make a proper statement before action is taken?

Mr. Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman confirm that the situation in Kosovo dates back at least 10 years, and that there have been growing problems? It has until now been a peaceful conflict, without the kind of military intervention that we have seen in the past few weeks. There has been no fighting or incursions in the border area. The current situation is far more serious than when the right hon. and learned Gentleman was in government.

Mr. Howard: I thought that one of the tasks of the Foreign Office and the Foreign Secretary was to anticipate what might happen in the world. It has not taken genius to anticipate that, for a very long time, the problem in Kosovo could have burst into the kind of violence that we have seen in recent weeks. NATO should have been asked some time ago to prepare options for action. It is astonishing that we were told only a week ago that NATO might have options ready for those who need to take these most serious decisions by the end of this month. Given that the seriousness of the position in Kosovo has been known, and raised in the House, for months, it is astonishing that NATO was not asked earlier to put the work on options in hand.

Mr. Alan W. Williams (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman contrast the situation in Kosovo and the meetings and preparations involved with those made by his Government two years ago, when there was civil war in Bosnia? For years, while tens of thousands of people were being killed, his Government remained inactive on the sidelines.

Mr. Howard: I do not recall the Labour party when in opposition calling for military action in Bosnia at an earlier date than that at which it occurred. I do not think that there was much dispute between the parties then about what should be done.

Mr. Robin Cook: I understand that the right hon. and learned Gentleman was busy running the Home Office and was not present in foreign affairs debates, but I assure him that, for two years, we persisted in demanding more robust action in Bosnia. Preparations on the options available for NATO have been made for some time. We have no intention of publicly announcing in advance what those options might be to prepare President Milosevic, but we have been preparing them. That is in stark contrast to the way in which the previous Government spent years before they finally geared themselves up to intervening in Bosnia.

Mr. Howard: I do not think that we want to turn this into a debate on Bosnia, although I am happy to do so. I am talking about Kosovo, which is a serious problem. It was mentioned by the Foreign Secretary in this debate. It is astonishing that we were told at the end of last week that NATO might have its options on military action ready by the end of this month. Given the time that we have had to anticipate the difficulties that have arisen in Kosovo, that is an extraordinary state of affairs, and those who are responsible for it have a good deal to explain.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: I congratulate the right hon. and learned Gentleman on the elegance of his language, but we should not allow our admiration for that to conceal the fact that he has not shared with the House his proposals on Kosovo.

Mr. Howard: I would dearly like to see the NATO options, as I am sure would the hon. and learned Gentleman. Alas, I have not seen them. Clearly, several steps could be taken. I hope that we will have a proper opportunity to discuss the matter and that the Foreign Secretary will come to the House to make a statement on it. We can then have an informed discussion. I hope that we will be told a little more about how he intends to proceed.

Let consider how the achievements of the presidency match up to its promises and examine the key areas, the themes set out by the Prime Minister six months ago. First, there is economic reform. Has a single job been created as a result of action taken by the UK presidency? Has even one of the 18 million people unemployed across the European Union benefited from the rhetoric of the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary? Unemployment in the UK is 6.4 per cent. That is still too high, but in Germany it stands at 11.4 per cent., in Belgium and France at 11.9 per cent., in Italy at 12 per cent. and in Spain at 19.6 per cent.

Even the Minister without Portfolio, speaking in Florence on one of his many forays into the Foreign Secretary's territory, recognised that job creation is the most difficult of all the issues that Europe faces. How can Labour speak with any authority on the subject when it embraces the job-destroying social chapter of the Maastricht treaty and when one of its close socialist allies in France sees the answer to the crippling unemployment from which it suffers in a 35-hour week?

What of the

"cost and waste of the Common Agricultural Policy"

which

"continue to grow year by year?"

Those were the words used by the Prime Minister when he launched the UK presidency in December. Not a word passed the Foreign Secretary's lips this evening about

[Mr. Howard]

the CAP. There is no progress to report on the CAP, but the Foreign Secretary promised that its reform would be one of the key themes of the presidency. He said:

"We need a reformed CAP which gives a better deal all round—fair prices for consumers, flexibility for farmers, protection for the environment."

We all agree, but the CAP collapsed after the first meeting and member states have so far failed to find a common position to negotiate. Even the Foreign Secretary could not bring himself to claim that as one of the achievements of his presidency. CAP reform is buried in the small print of the half-term report.

What of enlargement? Labour's general election manifesto called it "a high priority". The Foreign Secretary said that getting it off to a good start was

"the step that will have the biggest impact on the shape of the European Union into the next century."

I agree. We regard enlargement of the European Union as the historic mission of our generation, but what evidence is there of progress?

The Prime Minister of Finland said that enlargement is

"looking more problematic than it did a year ago."

The truth is that we are going backwards, not forwards, in terms of progress on enlargement. Relations between the European Union and Turkey are at an all-time low. The Foreign Secretary completely failed in his efforts to persuade Turkey to attend the annual European Union-Turkey association meeting, yet he says that he is not disappointed. One shudders to imagine what would have to happen before he confessed himself discouraged.

The Cardiff summit will not be first European Union summit over which the Prime Minister has presided. He presided over the summit on economic and monetary union at the beginning of May, to which the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) referred. The Prime Minister's performance there did not receive rave notices. The Prime Minister of Luxembourg concluded that the summit proceedings were "absolutely shameful". The Italian Prime Minister, an ally in the Party of European Socialists, said that the Prime Minister was

"ill prepared for the negotiations".

The Austrian Chancellor, another ally in the Party of European Socialists, said that there were people much more experienced than he who said they had never seen anything like it. He added:

"We have now learnt how not to organise a summit."

That is the reality of the performance of the UK presidency, not the fantasy world into which the Foreign Secretary took us in his speech.

Nowhere has the gap between the Government's rhetoric and reality been greater than in the humiliation of the Chancellor of the Exchequer over the Euro X committee only a few days ago.

Mr. Alan W. Williams: Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman concede that, at the end of the day, a successful euro will be launched on 1 January next year with 11 member countries? One shudders to think what would have happened if the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) had been president at the Brussels summit.

Mr. Howard: I do not agree. The truth is that the Prime Minister went to that summit pledged to ensure that there was no fudge and no fiddle. What happened was fudge and fiddle on a grand scale. It was fudge and fiddle not only in allowing member states that did not begin to comply with the criteria set out at Maastricht to join the single currency but in what was described by the hon. Member for Swansea, East as the fracas over the presidency of the central bank. To claim that summit as a success is to fly in the face of the facts, and it will convince no one.

Mr. Bill Rammell (Harlow): The right hon. and learned Gentleman and his party have made much about the convergence of Belgium and Italy on the key criteria. I think that that is a fig leaf for attacking the single currency in principle. Had the Conservative party won the general election, and had you been in power at the summit, would you—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. The hon. Gentleman must try to use the correct parliamentary language.

Mr. Rammell: My apologies, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Had the Conservative party been in government at that summit and succeeded in negotiating the exclusion of Belgium and Italy, would the right hon. and learned Gentleman have been satisfied to proceed with the single currency on the basis of nine nations?

Mr. Howard: Of course. It has never been the view of my party that, if other member states wish to proceed with the single currency in accordance with the criteria set out in the Maastricht treaty, they should not do so. Of course they are perfectly entitled to do so. All that we would have insisted on would have been a firm application of the Maastricht criteria. They were set out in that treaty and they should have been observed. The Prime Minister said that he would ensure that they were observed, yet he did not. That is not likely to be conducive to the success of the single currency.

Mr. Robin Cook: I would not dream of pressing the right hon. and learned Gentleman to tell us the circumstances in which he would join. My question is much more modest. He chides the Government for having taken too long at that particular summit meeting. Will he give the House some estimate of how long the meeting would have been had he been chairing it and telling a number of those countries that qualified that they could not take part?

Mr. Howard: The Foreign Secretary is entirely wrong. I never mentioned the length of the meeting. The criticisms of the way in which the meeting was conducted go far deeper than its length. That is made perfectly clear in the quotations that I have cited. The right hon. Gentleman does not need to take it from me. If the Austrian Chancellor says that this was an example of how a summit should not be run, he should be listened to with some respect.

I understand why that little flurry of interventions was designed to divert the attention of the House from the Euro X committee. It was the committee over which the Prime Minister fought such a public battle last year. As usual, he claimed a great victory. He said that he had got exactly what he wanted, that we would not be

excluded from the committee's meetings and that all his aims had been achieved. What happened? When the Chancellor of the Exchequer turned up to chair the meeting, he was allowed to stay for an hour and then he was asked to leave. He was not even invited to dinner. Officials of the European Commission referred to him as a "gatecrasher".

That humiliation is the reality behind all the Government's claims to be leading in Europe. That is the reward for all those sacrifices of our sovereignty at Amsterdam. That is the background against which the Cardiff summit will take place.

In the past couple of days, we have witnessed an attempt by Chancellor Kohl and President Chirac to hijack the agenda for the summit. We have seen the patronising text of their letter to the boy Blair. We have seen how, under cover of lip service to subsidiarity, they make calls for further moves towards political union.

Mr. Gapes: Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman recall that, regularly over the past 10 years, the Christian Democrat leaders in Germany and the Socialist or Gaullist leaders in France have issued joint communiques prior to virtually every European summit, whether it was held in this or in another country? For example, President Mitterrand issued joint communiques with Chancellor Kohl. Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman confirm that that is a regular occurrence?

Mr. Howard: It is a regular occurrence, but if the hon. Gentleman looks back under previous documents of this kind, he will find that the tone is somewhat different. I want to draw attention to the way in which in this document, under cover of lip service to subsidiarity, those leaders make calls for further moves towards political union.

May we have an assurance from the Minister of State when he winds up the debate that any such calls at Cardiff for further political integration and union will be resisted? May we have an assurance that one last attempt will be made to achieve the goals of the presidency with which, as I said when we last debated these issues six months ago, we substantially agree? May we have an assurance that, this time, the Prime Minister will make a real effort to rescue the United Kingdom presidency from the ignominy into which it has fallen?

The Cardiff summit should be the crowning glory of the UK presidency. Instead, it is likely to be its farewell whimper. I hope that my forebodings are misplaced. I suspect that they will be amply justified.

ROYAL ASSENT

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I have to notify the House, in accordance with the Royal Assent Act 1967, that the Queen has signified Her Royal Assent to the following Acts:

Petroleum Act 1998

Audit Commission Act 1998

Community Care (Residential Accommodation) Act 1998

Late Payment of Commercial Debts (Interest) Act 1998

European Communities (Amendment) Act 1998

Cardiff European Council

Question again proposed, That this House do now adjourn.

6.14 pm

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): I join the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) at least in this: I welcome the fact that the Council is being held in Cardiff. I should have preferred it to be held in Swansea, but I concede that there is a stronger case for the Council to be held in Cardiff than there is for Cardiff to be the site of the assembly.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman made a number of points, most of which were rather petty. Clearly, he had trawled through a series of newspapers in Europe in the hope of finding some criticism of the Prime Minister. He emerged with one quotation from a right-wing French journal—hardly surprising—and one from an Italian journal which is very close to the Northern League—again, a rather right-wing journal. That is hardly an impressive result from what must have been an assiduous trawl by Conservative central office.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman criticised the Government for inaction over Kosovo. He hardly remembers that the real crisis there stems from 1989 when President Milosevic reduced the autonomy of both Kosovo and Vojvodina. The Government can hardly be criticised for the crisis or, indeed, for delays that come, understandably, from the hesitation of some of those in the contact group, such as Russia because of its close links with the Serbs.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman said that nothing was being done on the jobs front. Surely he recognises that the guidelines set out in the jobs summit in Luxembourg last November have been carried forward and that, for the first time, member states have produced action plans setting out how they are implementing those guidelines. In addition, a series of remarkable and new practical steps have been taken. There has been agreement on a package of venture capital support for small and medium enterprises, progress on setting priorities for the next generation of EU education, training and youth programmes, acknowledgement that the EU social fund should support national employment and lifelong learning strategies, demonstration projects and a series of meetings, including the Belfast meeting of Ministers, relating to the employability of women and issues such as child care, and a conference in Glasgow on work organisation. That is rather an impressive roll-call of initiatives on jobs.

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has set out a remarkable feast of achievements. However, a number of spectres were at the feast, and I intend to refer to some of them. Over the period of our presidency, there has been considerable success in terms of technical organisation. From a number of my European contacts, I have heard high praise for the quality of civil service support. The period from 1 January has been one of the busiest for foreign affairs in our peacetime history. That has imposed enormous burdens on Foreign Office Ministers, and Ministers in other related Departments. As my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe mentioned, there has been a record number of summits—relating to

[Mr. Donald Anderson]

EU enlargement, the first Europe-China meeting, the Europe-Russia meeting, the second Asia-Europe meeting, and preparation for Lomé—which must have imposed enormous burdens on both the machinery and the personnel, not least my right hon. Friend himself.

The presidency must be seen in the context of far greater warmth towards the United Kingdom among our European colleagues. I found significant the comment made on Wednesday morning by the National Farmers Union spokesman, who said that, had an attempt been made at diktat rather than negotiation, as had been made in the past—clearly, he meant by the previous Government—there would have been no progress in respect of BSE. Like my right hon. Friend, I cannot help but wonder what would have happened during the UK presidency had it been presided over by the Conservative party, which, as was shown by the shadow Cabinet reshuffle, is being pushed further in an unrealistic Euro-sceptic direction. Our European partners, at least for the time being, are prepared to give us the benefit of the doubt, in spite of our absence—temporary, I hope—from the euro.

It is clear that several of the objectives set by the Government at the start of the UK presidency have been met. I was especially impressed that my right hon. Friend achieved an unprecedented agreement on an EU code of conduct on arms exports. The ethical dimension of the foreign policy is often derided by its critics, but that code of conduct marks a serious change.

There is increasing Euro-realism among many of the leaders in Europe. I used to deride the previous Government's claims that Europe was adopting our agenda, at a time when there was clearly increasing divergence; but, in the tone of the joint letter by Chancellor Kohl and President Chirac, we see a greater willingness to accept subsidiarity, which is a theme of the Labour party. That is a highly significant acknowledgement. It was seen towards the end of last year during the Amsterdam debate in the Federal Republic of Germany, when the lander asserted their own views. It was Minister-President Biedenkopf of Saxony and the leaders of Bavaria who ensured, through the lander, that there was greater constraint on the federal Chancellor. If, as is predicted, the Social Democrats win the federal elections in September, there may well be a further move by the German federal Government in a direction that is favoured by this country.

In the past, there have been attempts to put an obstacle between France and Germany and to attract either France or Germany into the British orbit, but those attempts were misguided, because there is a clear foundation, from the Adenauer-de Gaulle era, for Franco-German friendship. I believe that Britain now has a real opportunity to enter that dialogue, not only because of the warmth towards and the acceptance of this country, but because of the direction in which the European agenda is moving and the practical vision of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister.

I was intrigued by what my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary said about the discussion to be held in Cardiff on the future of Europe. I understand that that is to be a lunchtime exchange of views, so it might have been a little overblown to speak of the future vision of Europe being decided between courses. Nevertheless, the discussion will be worth while and it will be interesting to see what political vision my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will feed into that lunch.

We cannot claim overmuch for our presidency, because any presidency is part of a continuum. The baton on the jobs agenda was taken up and carried forward by the UK Government after the jobs summit in Luxembourg last November. In exactly the same way, the themes that we have moulded and adapted will be taken up by our Austrian colleagues on 1 July. In my contact with the Austrians, I have been impressed by the way in which there is now a seamless gliding move from one presidency to the next, as themes are accepted and developed.

Whether the theme is jobs, the environment, crime, fraud or drugs, the overall agenda is now a people's agenda. There is a greater acceptance in the EU of the lesson taught by the first Danish referendum, which showed that the European elites had moved away from an agenda that had relevance to the people. I am glad that our Government are bringing us back to an agenda that our own people regard as relevant to their lives.

I see the importance of the scoreboard of performance in respect of the single market, which shows the greater strength of implementation, even among our Italian colleagues. The UK presidency would have been seen as an historic one in any case, because of the major decisions that had to be made on enlargement and on the European currency, but the success with which both those major advances have been completed is worthy of note; for example, on enlargement, the pre-accession strategies and dossiers have been agreed.

I was disappointed that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary did not dwell on the subject of Turkey. Although the snub to Turkey did not come during the UK presidency but in Luxembourg in December last year, Turkey had reasonable cause for dissatisfaction, and my right hon. Friend has tried hard to build bridges with Turkey. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister of State, who is to reply to the debate, will say something about whether Turkey has so far indicated that it is prepared to enter a dialogue on the Commission suggestions on building bridges.

I also hope that something will be said about the meeting in Glasgow on Monday, in which a number of threats were made about delaying enlargement because of concerns about regional funds among those who benefit so substantially from them and who fear their loss, especially the Iberian countries, Greece and Ireland. Because of the German elections, I suspect that there will not be as much progress made in Wales as we might want on revision and agreement of regional aid.

It is fair to say that the euro was launched well, in spite of the fracas. The markets have spoken more eloquently than the politicians by responding favourably, then and now.

A month or two ago, it was assumed that the Cardiff Council would be one of consolidation and continued preparation for the Austrian and, subsequently, the German presidencies. Since then, an amendment has been moved in terms of the major foreign policy crises that have overcome the smooth functioning of the presidency. I recall a distinguished former Labour Foreign Secretary, Michael Stewart, telling me that his nightmare as Foreign Secretary was that, at any one point in the day, two thirds

of the world was awake and capable of causing mischief. I fear that the Foreign Secretary must share that same nightmare.

There have been several crises over the past six months in respect of Iraq, Algeria and Indonesia, and I compliment the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett), on acting consummately and very sure-footedly in respect of each. Now, we must face the situation in Kosovo, nuclear tests and the middle east crisis—as well as, perhaps, the fact that Germany is raising questions over its financial contributions to the EU. The common theme is surely the absence of decisive leadership from the United States of America, whether on Kosovo, the middle east or elsewhere.

The challenge for Europe, particularly in respect of the Balkans, which is on our doorstep, is what we will do. If Europe is to be taken seriously in foreign affairs, as the common foreign and security policy apparatus is put in place following the Amsterdam treaty, we must ask ourselves whether the troika arrangement—in this case Luxembourg, United Kingdom and Austria—raises Europe's credibility and provides essential leadership.

In spite of the difficulties, the Government can take some considerable satisfaction from the way in which they have handled the presidency. They have ensured a smooth glide into the Austrian presidency. Lasting foundations for a stronger Europe have been laid.

6.31 pm

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): It is curious that, despite being told that Europe is such a vibrant issue in this place, fewer than 20 hon. Members are present for this essential debate on the eve of the Cardiff Council. It is extraordinary that it attracts so little interest. Nevertheless, this is a very important and interesting debate.

I listened with care, as I always do, to the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard). I am in some difficulty because I share some of his elegantly phrased analysis of the British presidency, but, of course, I disagree with some of his conclusions. I find it extremely curious to suggest that the Conservatives, had they been in a position to do so, would have done better than the present Government. All recent history defies that proposition.

The right hon. and learned Member was right to draw attention to the start of the British presidency. The Government came in like a lion, but are going out rather like a lamb. There was the overblown hoo-hah, as the expression goes, of the advent of the British presidency. There were loud fanfares, loud assertions and even louder ties. Indeed, I see that the Minister with responsibility for Europe is sporting one.

It was probable that the rhetoric could never have matched the actions during the presidency, however successful Ministers were. That expectation has been justified by events. The British presidency has not achieved all the objectives set, and probably could never have done so. The rather offensive proposition—to many of our partner nations in Europe—that a newly elected Government would suddenly lead Europe has not been borne out by events.

The hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson), the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, suggested that there was a feast of achievement to celebrate. I must say that it is rather a jejune feast, although there have been successes, and it is right that we should pay tribute to them. The accession talks, for instance, were well managed. I am pleased that progress has been made.

It is probably unfashionable to do so, but I congratulate the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on his activities in Europe. He has made a complete mess of agriculture at home, but in discussions in Europe to promote such matters as the lifting of the beef ban, he has done a fair amount of good work.

The European Union code of conduct on arms sales, which the hon. Member for Swansea, East mentioned, will be seen as the single most important achievement of the presidency. We were disappointed by the code's final form; it could and should have gone further and been a more transparent arrangement. Nevertheless, it is a signal achievement to have got so far—which makes it even more surprising that it was not mentioned in the Prime Minister's half-term report, which, as the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe said, was more of a half-baked report. It laid claims to great successes that amounted to no more than holding a meeting or having a half-formed idea of something that might be good in the short term.

The Government have some cause for celebration.

Mr. Donald Anderson: I hope that the hon. Gentleman would fairly agree that any criticisms about the inadequacies of the code of conduct should be laid at the feet not of the Government but of the attempts to gain consensus among more reluctant partner countries.

Mr. Heath: The hon. Gentleman is, of course, right in part; it was a process of negotiation. I believe that that process could have been taken forward had it been more open. Certain partner nations might have put rather more pressure on those more reluctant nations—let us not be mealy-mouthed—such as a particular one just across the English channel, which it might be said took a slightly different view. Nevertheless, let us simply accept that something has been done which should have been done, and a start has been made.

I agree with the Foreign Secretary that there is a record of environmental achievements; there have been tangible successes. There have also been moves towards more openness and accountability in EU structures—although not as quick as I would have liked. The baton of the Amsterdam treaty should have been picked up—without waiting for ratification—and taken forward on some suggestions which, under the treaty, require two years to be achieved. Nevertheless, some progress has been made.

Set against that background, there are the failures. The negotiations on European monetary union were a mess—by the Prime Minister's own admission. They did very little to promote the idea of a strong and stable arrangement which is consistent with the independence that is so crucial to the success of monetary union.

As far as I know, there has not been any success in cutting the costs of the EU. None of the range of options that we and others have put forward for cutting costs has been promoted or proceeded with. For example, it is a monstrosity that £700 million a year is spent on promoting the growth of tobacco—a substance which every member

[Mr. Heath]

state's health department is actively trying to discourage people using. That needs to be addressed in double-quick time.

We have made very little progress on reform of the common agricultural policy and the common fisheries policy. The Agenda 2000 proposals are on the table, but no more than that. The most important thing that Ministers can achieve at the Cardiff summit is the establishment of a firm timetable for progress on talks concerning not just reform of the CAP and the CFP but of the structural cohesion fund and the institutions. Talks on each of those matters needs a firm timetable. Europe does not work without deadlines to meet. Those deadlines must be set if there is any hope of success.

I do not believe that we have seen a strengthening of common foreign and security policy across Europe. Indeed, some of the Government's actions over recent months have been retrograde in that respect. It cannot have been good for European cohesion for Britain to act on the difficult subject of Iraq as if it were a member of the permanent two rather than the President of the EU. Algeria is another example of the European Union signally failing to make the impact that it should have done on a significant problem on its doorstep.

We can set against that the position in Kosovo, on which the Foreign Secretary spoke at length. Liberal Democrat Members will give him every support in his proposals. I make two pleas to him: first, that he makes every possible effort to involve Mr. Primakov and the Russian Government in any demarche that is available to him. It is essential that the Russians use their influence on Mr. Milosevic, because no one else has the same reach. Secondly, he should consider carefully the position in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, which is in grave peril from an overspill of the problems in Kosovo, and the position in Montenegro, because there could be a serious destabilising effect on that country. We could witness further inflammation in the Balkans.

The right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe was clear in his criticism about NATO's lack of preparation. I do not recall—he may correct me because he remembers his words better than I—his mentioning that point when we heard a statement on Kosovo a few weeks ago. I do not remember the right hon. and learned Gentleman making an explicit request—perhaps he did, or perhaps he has thought it up since then.

Mr. Howard: I made certain suggestions at that time—for example, concerning the stationing and reinforcement of United Nations troops in Macedonia—some of which have now been implemented. However, it never occurred to me that NATO had not prepared its options. There was no suggestion at that stage that it had not done so, and I assumed that it had. It was only when I read newspaper reports about a week ago that I had the first inkling that those options were, astonishingly, still under preparation.

Mr. Heath: Of course, I take it at face value that the right hon. and learned Gentleman made those implicit assumptions.

The Government have further failed in the parliamentary scrutiny of European Union matters within the United Kingdom. We heard from the Leader of the House earlier that proposals on that may be made shortly. I hope that they are, because it is essential that Britain has more effective parliamentary scrutiny of European affairs. There is a series of measures that would achieve that higher level of scrutiny.

The real opportunity in Cardiff, which has already been mentioned by several Members, is for the new start to the European institutions offered by the letter from Chancellor Kohl and President Chirac. It lays out important positions that the Government, by the happenstance of the UK presidency, have the opportunity to achieve. I am astonished by the language used in the letter, because some of it could have been written by members of my party's policy division. I see no difference between the subsidiarity proposals in the letter and the proposals that we have repeatedly made. It is interesting that the letter begins with the suggestion of

"an open and sober discussion at the European Council",

for which the lunchtime venue does not bode well.

The letter goes on categorically to state:

"It cannot be the goal of European policy to establish a European central state".

Hear, hear. It adds that

"some European institutions are becoming increasingly remote from the citizens and their day-to-day problems",

which is absolutely right. The letter also says that decisions should be

"taken as closely as possible to the citizen. Citizens will only become more strongly committed to the common Europe if decision-making processes are clearly understandable and transparent".

We have made precisely that point on many occasions. There is a need to reform Europe's institutions.

Perhaps it is now time to look beyond the rather flimsy protocol on subsidiarity that was appended to the Amsterdam treaty. I have criticisms of that: it was essentially a good thing, but it does not go far enough. We should consider a far more fundamental review of the levels at which decisions are made and, perhaps, try to achieve a concordat or protocol—call it what one will—that will establish once and for all where power is appropriately exercised in the different tiers of European Government, whether it is at the national tier or the regional and local tier.

We need a clear mechanism for ensuring that power does not gravitate to the centre, but is deployed at the lowest possible level. That is now a prerequisite for the development of a European Union that works for the citizens of Europe.

My criticism of the protocol in the Amsterdam treaty is that it is not an acquis communautaire; it leaves in place everything that has already been decided. We are talking about a new Europe with new problems and challenges. It is right that we consider whether what was decided in the past is necessarily right for the new Europe. The principle that Europe should do less, but do it better should commend itself to the House.

Finally, one outcome of the Cardiff Council must be a clear understanding on the timetable for the series of reforms that I have mentioned and a continuity beyond the British presidency into the Austrian, German and Finnish presidencies so that there is a continuum of reform that makes Europe a better place for its citizens. If Ministers can achieve that at the Cardiff summit, they will have served this country and Europe well.

6.46 pm

Mr. Alan W. Williams (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): I am glad to have the opportunity to take part in this debate on the eve of the European Council in Cardiff, and to add a Welsh voice to the proceedings.

I am delighted that we had the news yesterday from the European Commission that there are strong moves towards lifting the beef ban. Naturally, for my constituents in the very rural area that I represent, the beef ban has been a severe problem over the past two years. I follow these issues carefully and I know that, over the past months, the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and his officials have worked hard in Brussels with the Commission to develop, first, the certified herd scheme and, now, the date-based scheme. If that scheme is passed by the veterinary committee and, eventually, the Council of Ministers, it will mean a lifting of the ban over the next few weeks and months. It may take years rather than months, but we expect to recapture the export markets that were once held by British beef. That will help to raise prices. I am pleased that that announcement was made yesterday. It forms an optimistic backdrop to the weekend's proceedings.

More generally on agriculture, there is progress—it is always very slow—on reform of the common agricultural policy. That is now driven by Agenda 2000 and the need, with enlargement, to devote relatively fewer resources to agriculture in those structural reforms. It is important that we move away from production-based subsidies. In the past few months, one of the problems in the disbursal of the £85 million that came from the Government last Christmas is that the small farmers, who needed most help, were receiving the least. Those with large stocks of animals received the most help, but needed the least. There is a perversion in the CAP, in that 80 per cent. of the money goes to the richest 20 per cent. of farmers. We need to move away from such production-based support to a system that is based rather on people or units of labour and the environment. Our farmers, especially in the upland areas, do an enormous amount of work to maintain the environment and to make the countryside attractive to tourists. The support structures must take account of that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) referred to the importance of structural funds in the Agenda 2000 discussions. West Wales and the valleys are impoverished. The cases of Merseyside and South Yorkshire for objective 1 status have been accepted by the Commission. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will press hard for west Wales and the valleys to be recognised as eligible for objective 1 funding. Our gross domestic product per capita is below 75 per cent. of the European average, so we qualify and we need that support.

Mr. Wigley: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the gross domestic product per capita of his county, Dyfed, at 68 per cent. of the European average, and of Mid-Glamorgan at 62 per cent. and Gwynedd at 72 per cent. of the European average, are all below the GDP per capita of South Yorkshire and Merseyside, and therefore should certainly be granted objective 1 status?

Mr. Williams: I am grateful to my colleague, the right hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley), for giving the latest statistics on our inheritance after 18 years of Conservative rule. We have lost much of our heavy industry in the industrialised parts of Wales, and west Wales has more difficulty in attracting inward investment such as Clwyd and south-east Wales have successfully attracted. Our case for European funding is strong, and I hope that it will be strongly argued by the Government.

When the history of the United Kingdom presidency is written, the most important single issue of the past six months—despite the difficulties of that weekend in Brussels—will have been the establishment of the single currency. It will start on 1 January 1999, with 11 countries signed up to it. I am disappointed, of course, that Britain is not a member. We could not join, because of our inheritance. In the discussions on the Maastricht treaty, the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) achieved the opt-out from the social chapter and from economic and monetary union. A new Labour Government could not quickly join the single currency.

The Government are setting out the pathway. We are working with the public, the trade unions and business towards eventual membership of the single currency, which I hope will come early in the next Parliament. From the sidelines, we wish it well. Whether we are in or out, it is important for economic prosperity that the euro is a success. I note that, despite high unemployment, growth is returning to the economies of France and Germany. The latest figures are 3.5 per cent. growth in GDP in France and 3.8 per cent. in Germany. I hope that unemployment will soon start to fall in both countries.

In Britain, we must plan and work diligently for membership on 1 January 2002, pending a referendum. On that date, euro coins and notes go into circulation. That would be a reasonable time scale for us to join. If, as I am confident they will, our Government win the general election in 2001 or early 2002, we can hold the referendum to join by that date.

A major national debate is needed on the optimum value of the pound for joining the single currency. The pound is substantially overvalued. At DM3.10, it caused serious problems to farmers and manufacturing industry. The rate is now down to about DM2.92, but I do not believe that that is sustainable. If we joined at anything like that level, we should merely be repeating the sad experience of the exchange rate mechanism.

I do not know what the right figure is. I read all the economic commentators. I should be happy with DM2.70 or DM2.60. Some in the City favour DM2.50 or even as far down as DM2.30. There is a range of views. The Chancellor cannot give us his figure, because it is not conventional for the Chancellor to intervene in a matter that is so market-sensitive. The Confederation of British Industry, our leading businesses, trade unions, employers, chambers of trade and we as citizens should engage in a detailed debate to decide on a long-term sustainable value. For my part, it is below DM2.70. It is a critical decision, which we must get right over the next four to five years.

A further concern is the absence of any strategy to get our interest rates in line with those of France and Germany and those that will be set by the European central bank. The current interest rate of France and Germany is 3.5 per cent. Ours is 7.5 per cent. The Bank of England or the Treasury must develop a grand strategy over the next four or five years that would allow our interest rate to move from 7.5 to 3.5 per cent. without

[Mr. Williams]

creating a boom. If there was a rapid drop, there would be the danger of a house price explosion and of land values getting out of control.

We need a euro membership plan for 1999-2002, rather like the Chancellor's statement this afternoon on his fiscal strategy over the next three years, and the comprehensive spending review that will be published in July. Those critical background decisions are the Treasury's domain, but we must work on a larger national strategy for gearing ourselves to join the single currency.

We could be overtaken by events in the next year. Industrial corporations that do most of their trade on the continent will open accounts in euros. Banks will make it possible for farmers to have euro accounts. Ordinary citizens like us could open accounts in euros, instead of putting our money into building societies, for example. Indeed, there is the possibility next year of British citizens speculating against the pound by opening euro accounts, in the expectation that the pound will devalue as we approach membership.

I do not rule out the possibility of joining the exchange rate mechanism. We may need to consider that next year, if there is instability in the value of the pound. Perhaps we should join the exchange rate mechanism on 1 January 2000 at a negotiated rate. We would then be able to demonstrate stability for the two years before membership of the single currency.

Those are my thoughts on our relations with Europe. I am delighted that, despite last weekend's difficulties, the single currency will be launched on target on 1 January next year. I am convinced that it will be a great success and that we should join it. As the Foreign Secretary and the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson), said earlier, when we look back on our presidency, we can be proud of many achievements in the past six months. It was never going to be an easy task because of our inheritance of Euro-scepticism from the previous Government. Relations with our European partners were badly damaged during the period of non-co-operation over the beef ban, and we have tried to repair that damage in the past 12 or 18 months.

Let us look forward three, five or 10 years. I hope that there will be a change of Government in Germany and that the new Administration will be more centrist or centre left. The days of President Chirac in France are numbered, and I hope that we shall see a new social democratic or centre-left Government. In three or five years' time, I hope that the European Union will lean more to the centre left and will be very much in tune with the philosophy of the new Labour party. I believe that our influence will become stronger over the years and that we shall pull Britain back into the heart of Europe.

7.1 pm

Mr. Bowen Wells (Hertford and Stortford): In preparing my remarks for today's debate, I sought not to offend the Government because I want them to work enthusiastically towards achieving some objectives—particularly in development and including the renegotiation of the Lomé convention—before our presidency ends at the end of June. The Government set themselves the objective of agreeing the European Union's negotiating mandate for the renewal of the Lomé convention, which expires at the end of 2000. I understand that a ministerial meeting took place on Monday in an attempt to settle the matter, but I have not heard that real progress has been made. If it has, I hope that the Minister will inform the House what has been achieved. That is one item that I wish to highlight.

I was provoked by the speech of the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. I have rarely heard in the House such a self-satisfied and smug speech about the Government's achievements during our presidency. There has clearly been modest progress in some areas, but it is very modest. Let us take the issue of arms exports, about which we are all concerned. The Foreign Secretary heralded the agreement on the European Union's conduct of arms sales as a great achievement, but he over-egged the pudding. I suppose that we should be used to that from the Labour party, which trumpets the most modest progress to the press and the media as a great triumph.

I do not wish to upset the Government: they have tried, but they have made only a modest achievement. The Foreign Secretary did not give any details of that achievement. It has been agreed that, if any European nation refuses a licence to export arms, it must inform the other member states. That is progress—and we hope to build upon it—but it is very slight progress; we cannot claim that it is a huge advance. Let us be modest about it: we have a huge way to go in controlling arms sales and ensuring that arms are not sold to people with genocidal intentions or to countries that wish to control their populations by military means, such as Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Indonesia or anywhere else. We have a long way to go before we secure agreement on that matter, but some progress has been made.

The Foreign Secretary trumpeted the achievement of the subsidiarity letter of Kohl and Chirac. It is mind-boggling that we are asked to believe that that represents progress. The hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Mr. Williams) and the Foreign Secretary extolled the virtues of economic and monetary union, but there is no more centralising policy adopted by the European Union than the decision to form a single currency. West Wales will rue the day that it had an advocate such as the hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr, who believes in the single currency. If the people of west Wales think that they are isolated from economic decision making in Britain, they will be even more isolated in Europe.

The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) and I are in passionate agreement about subsidiarity: we welcome it. However, the Amsterdam treaty allows the European Commission to veto the appointment of Commissioners. That is a huge accretion of power to the centralised bureaucracy and to the President of the European Union. Let us see these great declarations for what they are: a mechanism for controlling political activity in Europe that is hostile to the increasing accretion of power in Brussels. In France and in Germany, they say, "Don't worry, old chaps, we believe that decisions should be taken as near to the people as possible, but we won't do anything about it. We shall do the reverse." We should not be fooled by the great declarations.

I return to the question of the management of aid under the Lomé convention, the renegotiation of that convention and the mandate that we must give to our European Union

negotiators. I share the Government's ambition to achieve agreement during the United Kingdom presidency. That aim has not yet been realised, but there is still time. The International Development Committee has published a report on the matter—which I commend strongly to the House—which suggests that the European Union's approach to the issue is seriously flawed. I hope that I am right in assuming that the Government have not made progress because there is serious disagreement about the way in which the European Union should negotiate with the African, Caribbean and Pacific nations, which are the other parties to the Lomé convention.

The trade proposals are particularly damaging. The European Union proposes to enter into trade agreements with some of the poorest countries—which are African, Caribbean and Pacific nations—only if it can enter reciprocal free trade areas. The Lomé convention gives European Union countries free trade access to the European market, but they are now demanding free access to other markets. It has been calculated that, if that occurs, the value of 40 per cent. of European Union aid to vulnerable countries will disappear.

Under the agreement, which it has proposed, the EU will achieve huge trade advantages in respect of those small countries. What will that do to those vulnerable countries? South Africa is not as vulnerable in trade terms as countries such as Mozambique and Rwanda, but we should consider the EU's negotiations with it. At present, they have taken three years, and there is still no agreement. The EU is to give only five years for all those countries to enter into free trade agreements, yet it has not reached agreement with South Africa in three years.

Let us consider a little homespun story: the EU subsidises the production of tinned tomatoes, which it over-produces. Subsidised tinned tomatoes are exported to South Africa, now that it has opened up its markets at the request of the EU. What has that done to the tinned tomato factories of South Africa, which have traditionally exported to this country, to Europe and around the world? It has closed one factory and put more than 400 people out of work. That is an example of what the EU is trying to negotiate, not only with middle-income countries such as South Africa, but with the poorest countries of this world.

There has been a serious reversal of the trade policy that this country has offered to certain countries, some of which have been associated with us for 450 to 500 years. The EU wants us to abandon them and wants to force them into integrated free trade areas. We would then negotiate from the position of what I would characterise as the EU's seriously imperial ambitions in such areas, turning them into dependent countries and reducing them to producing only primary products at prices dictated by the hugely powerful EU.

That is not the right way to negotiate with such vulnerable countries, and the report of the International Development Committee makes that clear. I commend the report to the House and to the Government, because if the mandate is allowed to be settled on such a basis, we shall have a settlement that will be damaging to the countries about which we should be most concerned—the poorest countries.

I particularly want to discuss the banana protocol. Agriculture Ministers and Foreign Ministers have said to the Select Committee that they want the completion of a new agreement safeguarding the small farmers of the Windward Islands from being overrun by the big companies in the banana world, such as Chiquita and Dole. Few people are involved in comparison with the number at Chiquita, Dole and Del Monte, the huge companies which dominate the world banana trade. We are dealing with a tiny number of people—in St. Lucia, St. Vincent and Dominica—whose livelihoods are based on the industry. The sale of relatively few bananas accounts for 70 per cent. of Dominica's export earnings.

We must safeguard that trade. It is no good calling on such countries to diversify—diversify into what? Drugs? No. Into other agricultural crops? No, because the competitors are much more efficient. It would be much more sensible and practical to find a way to produce a formula. I believe that Ministers had the ambition to do so and that EU officials think that they can achieve one, but none has been forthcoming so far. Therefore, I ask Ministers to make another effort in the next six weeks. In particular, I ask them not to accept the advice that they are receiving from their civil servants, who are saying that the agreement has to be compatible with World Trade Organisation criteria. It does not. If Ministers decided so to do as a matter of policy, they could apply to the WTO to be absolved from its general rules. That evidence was given to the International Development Committee by WTO officials in charge of trade with developing countries and is spelled out in the report.

The EU has it in its power to get a waiver from the WTO, if, politically, it wants to do so. In European Standing Committee B, the Minister of State was unable to answer a question on the waiver, about which I have had correspondence with him. He revealed in a letter that he is under advice from civil servants—not only from this country, but from Europe—that they do not want to go down the policy route of seeking a waiver, to safeguard banana producers in the Windward Islands. That policy is wrong, unless an agreement can be produced to safeguard those producers by other means. The current proposals would simply benefit large producers—Del Monte, in particular—on the west African coast and would exclude and eventually eliminate the banana trade from the West Indies. I beg the Government to consider that seriously.

In respect of the report on Lomé, we must ensure that the management of European aid is improved vastly. It is constantly the subject of adverse Court of Auditors reports, and delivery of aid is slow—way behind the Lomé IV target. Aid that we are supposed to be disbursing now has not even begun to be disbursed, because we have not fully signed up to Lomé IV. European offices in recipient countries are short of staff and have to refer every decision to Brussels, because ministerial meetings must decide every nuance of policy. That must be decentralised, and there should be more competent staff in the field.

The report also suggests that EU nation states' bilateral aid programmes should be co-ordinated and should work together with EU efforts. Tomorrow, we are meeting at Westminster the chairmen of the equivalents of the International Development Committee from 11 of the 15 nation states to discuss how we can do that. Mr. Rocard, the chairman of the European Parliament Development Committee, is also attending, so we hope to contribute to the co-ordination of aid policy and its efficient delivery. I ask Ministers to redouble their efforts to reach agreement on the negotiating mandate for the Lomé convention before the end of our presidency.

7.17 pm

Mr. Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): It is a pleasure to speak after the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells), who made an interesting reference to the World Trade Organisation. Although my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary did not refer to it in his speech, the European Union, under the British presidency, has moved to resolve the long-standing dispute with the United States about the Helms-Burton provisions, extra-territoriality and attempts, through American domestic legislation, to penalise European companies for trading with Cuba, Libya and Iran. Alone, this country or any other European country would not be able to achieve anything on that issue. We have made progress only through the strength of the EU, under the leadership of our Labour Government.

I shall refer to several matters that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary mentioned. First, I draw attention to the prodigious efforts of Ministers over the past six months. This week, our Prime Minister has done a massive amount of Henry Kissinger-style shuttle diplomacy around Europe. He was in three Scandinavian capitals in one day. Yesterday, I met a senior figure from the Swedish Social Democratic party, who was in London and had been in Stockholm when the Prime Minister was there. That person said that, although the Nordic model had always strongly emphasised partnership between the private and the public sector, and although the Nordic model had many similarities with policies that we were pursuing, our Prime Minister's visit received enormous coverage. The visit was regarded as significant in the context of building a new alliance between the British Government and Sweden, Finland and Denmark—the three countries which were visited during one part of the tour that has taken the Prime Minister all over Europe during the past week or so.

The Kohl-Chirac letter has already been mentioned, but I want to emphasise its importance. Earlier, in an intervention on the shadow Foreign Secretary, I said that such letters were nothing new. When they had leaders in different countries, the Christian Democrats often organised joint initiatives before European summits. President Mitterrand organised joint initiatives with Chancellor Kohl before a number of such summits, including Maastricht in 1991. What is significant about this initiative is the presence of so many themes that are similar to the policies being pursued in this country under the British presidency, which will be submitted to the meeting of Heads of Government at the end of next week.

Under a Conservative Government, we were pleased to be the odd one out—because we had "Madame No" as Prime Minister, or because, as happened in March 1997 in the last Parliament, our then Foreign Secretary told the Foreign Affairs Select Committee that the British Government had a list of so-called show stoppers. That seemed to be a growing list: every time the Foreign Secretary answered a question, something was added to that list of show stoppers, designed to prevent any agreement at the Amsterdam summit. Those days seem very long ago.

I look around the Chamber—particularly at the Conservative Benches—and ask: where are the Euro-sceptics? I recognise the Opposition Whip, but I am not sure where the rest of them are. I have regularly participated in European debates during the past six years, and I do not think that I have missed many: I was present for the Committee stage of the Bill dealing with the ratification of the Maastricht treaty, and for our debates on the Amsterdam treaty. I remember speaking at midnight, and being berated by nine or 10 hon. Members who harangued me with intervention after intervention. Where are they today? I am waiting for them, but they are not here.

The fact is that the debate has changed. It has moved on. *[Interruption.]* The Opposition Whip should understand that the debate has moved on. The Euro-sceptics were partly routed at the last general election. I see that a Europhile has joined us: I am pleased that Conservative Europhiles are coming into the Chamber.

Euro-sceptics not only lost a number of seats; they no longer seem to have the arguments. The truth is that Europhobia and xenophobia are not popular policies with the British people. The British people want a pragmatic Government who get things done—a Government who co-operate with our European neighbours. That is what they have, and that means that, as the Austrian presidency takes over from the British presidency, there will be a very good period of co-operation between the two Governments during the transition. The Austrian presidency will continue to pursue many of the aims that we have pursued during the past few months, especially preparation for enlargement.

There is a lengthy agenda for the European summit. Many items on that agenda are very complex, and some, inevitably, are for the long term. It is ridiculous to think that any six-month presidency of an organisation such as the European Union, comprising 15 states, can make a massive difference to the process. With a bad presidency, things can go badly wrong; with a good presidency, things can be dealt with efficiently. What needs to be done can be done, and the agenda can be taken forward—which is what the British presidency has done, in a number of important ways.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Mr. Williams), who said that the country would incur costs by remaining outside the single European currency. I was pleased that, in his interesting statement today, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer specifically said that the Government would

"meet the fiscal criteria laid down in the Maastricht Treaty."

That is important: it means that, when the time is right, there should be no arguments about unnecessary delays in regard to British engagement in, and membership of, the European single currency. I believe that, when we meet the necessary economic conditions, and have reached a political judgment that the time is appropriate and a popular mandate is there, we should join quickly.

As the letter from Chancellor Kohl and President Chirac points out, the issue that must be discussed—it is one of the issues that they want to be raised in Cardiff—is the further development of political union

"in tandem with the Economic and Monetary Union".

Discussions on that are proceeding now—informally—among a number of European Union countries. If we are not part of the formal process within economic and monetary union, there is a danger that, in the long term, political discussions and developments that may impinge on this country will go ahead, and we shall not be part of

them to the extent that we could be if we joined the 11 who are in economic and monetary union, as well as being one of the 15 members of the European Union.

Let me also say something about relationships between European Union countries. The letter from President Chirac and Chancellor Kohl is a sign of the close bonds between Germany and France. Those close bonds have been built up for long-term historical reasons. We need to recall only a few dates—1870, 1914 and 1940—to appreciate the reasons why, after 1945, democratic politicians decided that that relationship had to be built for the future peace and stability of the continent.

It is a mistake—some commentators have referred to this—to think that it is in Britain's and Europe's interests to try to break the relationship between Germany and France. It would be very dangerous and short-sighted for us, as British politicians, to take the view that we should be friendly with either Germany or France. It is essential for Britain to play a full role—alongside Germany and France—at the motor of the European Union, while retaining our historically excellent relationships with other European Union countries such as the Netherlands and Portugal, and our good relationships with countries outside the EU. An example is Norway, which, unfortunately, made the wrong decision in its referendum.

The victory of Gerhard Schröder in September will be a great boost to the new centre-left politics in Europe. Philip Stephens, in the *Financial Times*, pointed out that a Chancellor Schröder in Germany would take a more Atlanticist and northern approach than the present German Government. That remains to be seen, but it raises an interesting point. There might be less tension if the British Government had excellent relations with the United States and improving relations with the European Union, and the German Government had a similar approach.

Our approach should not be at the expense of our relationship with Lionel Jospin and the socialist party in France. The two countries have a different electoral system, and there are differences in the nature of the majorities. Prime Minister Jospin has a difficult coalition to manage, yet many of his policies are similar—leaving aside the rhetoric—to those that we have been pursuing. Over the next three, four or five years there will be significant cross-fertilisation. We shall learn from each other's experiences and build together coherent and constructive policies to create a new, dynamic, open, effective, efficient and more democratic western European and all-European political structure.

One of the difficult areas that we shall have to consider and which will cause great problems in the enlargement negotiations is the nature of the institutional framework for an enlarged European Union. It is absurd to think that we could continue the present structure and have an efficient decision-making process in a European Union of 25 or 27 member states. Therefore, there must be serious change. Everyone is agreeable in principle to change, except when it affects what they perceive to be their own vital national interests.

At the moment, we have two Commissioners, because we are a large country. It has been argued that the weighted vote of larger countries should be increased, because the present undemocratic system gives Luxembourg a large vote in European Union institutions. The voting system bears no relationship to the population distribution in the European Union. If Cyprus, Slovenia, Estonia and Latvia accede to the European Union, the problem will be compounded. However, we shall face difficulties if we move too far down that road.

How can the democratic legitimacy of decision making reflect the diversity of the different nation states in the European Union? We are not creating a single, centralised Euro state. That is also the contention of Kohl and Chirac. They are calling for more subsidiarity, less regulation and decision making that is more sensitive to the needs of particular countries. I thought that that was the agenda of the previous Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major), or so we were told. The best way to achieve that would be to use the process of enlargement to bring about the required institutional changes.

Mr. Robert Walter (North Dorset): Given that the Prime Minister came back from Amsterdam in great triumph, why was this matter not addressed in that treaty, because enlargement was on the agenda?

Mr. Gapes: I am grateful that at least one Euro-sceptic is present.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): The hon. Gentleman is one of us.

Mr. Gapes: I apologise to the hon. Member for North Dorset (Mr. Walter). I have embarrassed him. I assumed that he followed his party's official policy. I am sorry if I have slurred him, and I withdraw that remark.

The previous Government were in office until 1 May 1997. The Amsterdam negotiations were to come to a conclusion some six weeks later. The process had reached an impasse. Amsterdam was designed as an interim development before the discussions on enlargement. The Amsterdam agreement stated that negotiations would open six months after the signing of the treaty. It was important to get an agreement at Amsterdam so as to open up the process for enlargement. If the Conservatives had still been in government, we should have had no agreement at Amsterdam, so enlargement would have been a purely theoretical, hypothetical, distant question for the future.

Difficult decisions will have to be taken in the next few years. There will be arguments about objective 1 status for our regions. Objective 1 money has been important in the highlands and islands, in parts of England and in Northern Ireland. Many people have become more positive about the European Union because they have had the economic benefits of funding from Brussels.

As the EU is enlarged, the funding formula will have to change. As unemployment in this country is falling, it is questionable whether funding for some of our regions will be maintained for the future. It is important to emphasise not just the economic arguments for European Union membership, but the vital arguments about stability, security, environmental co-operation and the political integrity and democracy that come from having an organisation that gives us such a peaceful continent.

Mention was made of the crisis in Kosovo. I shall not go into that, but I believe that it is vital that the European Union does not allow ethnic and religious conflicts once again to develop across our continent. Extremists and fanatics in various communities want to foster hatred and

[Mr. Gapes]

animosity. The Balkan region—from Kosovo to Macedonia and involving Turkey, Greece and Bulgaria—could become another cauldron leading to a generalised regional conflict. It is vital that we act economically, politically and, if necessary, militarily to contain, control and prevent such regional conflict. The European Union has a vital role in such developments, and I am pleased that our Government are playing such a positive role to strengthen the European Union over the coming years.

7.39 pm

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): I am glad to follow the hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Gapes) and to pick up on his point about the importance of the European Union as a vehicle for peace. Twice in this century, this continent has torn itself apart in two bloody wars. The basic reason for the EU's existence is to ensure that that never happens again. There are, of course, important economic arguments, but the political imperative brought that vision about. That is what we must always retain in our minds.

I welcome this opportunity to speak briefly in a debate before the European Council meeting in Cardiff, the capital city of Wales. I would rather, of course, that it was coming to Wales in its own right—that Wales was inviting the European Council and had the presidency. I may have to wait a little longer for that. In the meantime, the meeting is well worth having and I am glad, as are the overwhelming majority of the people of Wales, that it is happening now, at an important time in the EU's development.

In listening to the Foreign Secretary, what came home to me was that six months is a very short period and that one cannot expect miracles to happen. Perhaps he was dressing up many of the things that have happened to create a background of achievement by the Government, but no Government or presidency can be expected to change things overnight. Progress has been made on some issues. The most important issue has been brought out in this debate—indeed; it is brought out when we consider the hon. Members who are present. There has been a change in attitude towards the European Union and that can be only for the good.

There is no doubt that, in working with the grain of Europe, we have a greater chance of finding solutions to our problems—or at least acceptable compromises with which we can live—than we would if we just took Europe on, issue after issue. Whatever may have been the arguments in the 1980s for making a stand on certain issues, certain lessons must be learned.

In the opening comments of the debate, reference was made to the expansion of Europe. I am glad that we are considering the possibility of countries from the east coming in. I am glad that some of the small countries are coming in. Yes, there will be problems when Slovenia and Estonia come in, but they are part of Europe, and we have to adapt the structures to ensure that they have a proper place, while not disrupting the balance of current structures.

I hoped that progress might have been made with one or two of the other states that wish to come in, particularly Lithuania. I am sad that it is not in the tranche that is being considered. I should like to have seen Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia knocking on the door together. I hope that progress can be made in that direction as we look towards expansion.

The point about the dangers in Kosovo has been made. Surely we have learnt some lessons from the experience of Bosnia. There is a will in Europe to try to avoid an escalation of those conflicts. We should, if we have to, make a stand to try to ensure that no inch is given to undemocratic, totalitarian and fascist forces that may be using racist arguments to fan debates that would be better not heard. I hope that the European Union can take a positive lead in that direction—a more positive lead than was the case with Bosnia.

A little progress, which we welcome, has been made this week on an issue that has dominated the economic argument in large parts of Wales: the bovine spongiform encephalopathy crisis, which has led to a rural crisis, with a real-terms drop in farming incomes per head of 45 per cent; the actual figures have been quoted as over 90 per cent. Farms in Wales are small and family run. Farmers there are not barley barons who pull in hundreds of thousands of pounds; there is subsistence farming. Experiences such as those over the past couple of years can undermine the viability of those farms. A solution is desperately needed to the BSE crisis.

Good progress is being made on the date-based scheme. I hope that the veterinary committee that considers the matter next will support the moves, that support will then be found in the Council of Ministers, and that assurances to those in Germany and in other countries who are fearful about the quality of the food—one accepts those fears entirely—will be enough to ensure not only that we have the right to export, but that those other markets will have the confidence to want to buy our products.

In the meantime, not only beef farmers but dairy farmers need to take advantage of the resources that are available from the European Union for this financial year to compensate for the effect of the value of the pound against the green pound. There is no doubt that the agriculture sector is suffering enormously because of the pound's high level. It is suffering in terms of the value of aid coming through from Europe in subsidies. It is also suffering because countries such as the Republic of Ireland are selling their dairy produce to the United Kingdom, including Wales, and undercutting our produce with the benefit of assistance from the European Union, benefit that is available to our farmers, but which we have not taken up fully yet; it has certainly not been taken up in the dairy sector. I hope that the Minister and his colleagues will give thought to that as discussions take place in Cardiff.

The parity of the pound has been of concern not only to farmers but to manufacturers. In my constituency, some 30 or 40 jobs are in danger of being lost this week at the old Ferodo factory, the Dynamex factory as it is now known, which depends largely on exports. It is finding that its markets have been undercut because of the value of the pound. That underlines the need for us to move towards the European single currency. Unless we do so, this problem will continue and possibly be exacerbated in the coming period.

Large companies in Wales are already preparing to deal in euros. Companies such as British Steel, Sony, Toyota, Nissan and Pilkington are already preparing to do so. We shall find ourselves with parallel currencies. As they

do that—for good reasons—they will want transparency in their dealings and all the rest of it, and they will put pressure on their suppliers to deal in euros as well. Therefore, companies that want to sell products, components and other items to the large companies will be under pressure to deal in euros. It is likely that parallel currencies will operate in the UK, as they do in central America, where large companies deal in dollars and small companies in the local currency.

There are dangers that, when the euro has started up and there is a lot of international money moving around, some dealers will want to hedge their bets and come into sterling because they are not too sure about euros. Sterling's value could go up in that period again, causing even greater problems for our agriculture sector and manufacturing industry.

Of course, I am conscious of the fact that, in areas such as Wales, where we have severe economic problems in the old coal-mining areas and where, recently, those problems have arisen in some agricultural areas in particular, the advent of the euro will restrict some of the tools that have traditionally been available to Government to help depressed areas, where economic performance has not been so good. There will not be the option of devaluation, of playing around with interest rates, of deficit budgeting and of some of the Keynesian approach that we have had in the past. That is what makes objective 1 funding so important, to follow up the point that has been made by the hon. Members for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Mr. Williams) and for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson).

No part of Wales has ever been designated for objective 1 purposes despite the fact that the only criterion for objective 1 eligibility is to be below 75 per cent. of the average European GDP per head. Unemployment is not a criterion for objective 1 status. We need areas of national statistics—nomenclature of units of territorial statistics, or NUTS 2 areas—that fall below the 75 per cent threshold. As we have had a rather stupid map—a north-south map—in NUTS 2 areas in Wales, neither the north nor the south has qualified, although there are large areas in both that would qualify. The east-west analysis in Wales is much more meaningful in terms of economic problems and development. If a NUTS 2 map were accepted that was based on the two old counties of Gwynedd and Dyfed through the coalfields of west Glamorgan and Mid-Glamorgan to Gwent—areas that have common problems—that area would have 72 per cent. of average European GDP and would qualify for objective 1 funding.

Northern Ireland, the highlands and islands of Scotland, Merseyside and South Yorkshire have had objective 1 funding, and I wish them the best of luck, but areas in Wales that have a low income per head desperately need assistance.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Grantham and Stamford): The right hon. Gentleman should think carefully about his suggestion that the criteria for eligibility for objective 1 funding should include unemployment, rather than being based on GDP per capita. If such a criterion were imposed on the system, it would end up subsidising people and regions who might have priced themselves out of employment by demanding too high and unrealistic wages and penalising parts of the Union where labour markets were more flexible and people were prepared to work for more realistic levels of income.

Mr. Wigley: The hon. Gentleman has misunderstood me. I was referring to the current rules, and we have to work within the rules unless they are changed. The only relevant factor is GDP per capita. I am not advocating that unemployment should be a factor; I am saying that there is high unemployment in many areas, but the only criterion is GDP per head.

In the old county areas, three of the five counties with the lowest GDP per head in the United Kingdom are in Wales—Mid-Glamorgan, Dyfed and Gwynedd. Wales has the lowest GDP per head of any country or region in Britain, yet no part of Wales has ever qualified for objective 1 benefit which depends on the factor of GDP per head. Surely there must be something wrong.

I urge the Government, in their negotiations with our European partners and the agencies of government—from the Office for National Statistics, through to Eurostat in Brussels—to turn every stone to get it right. It is not that we have a begging bowl mentality. I hope that the economy of Wales develops in the same way as the economy of Ireland to a point at which we do not need assistance, but, at the moment, we most certainly do in order to overcome our problems. That is one of the themes that will come through from the people of Wales to our friends from various parts of Europe who meet in Cardiff. They will get a strong message that we need that assistance to overcome our problems.

I hope that everyone who comes to Wales has a constructive and happy time and leaves with a feeling of greater cohesion, a vision for the future of Europe, ready to deal with the difficult problems ahead in a positive and co-operative manner that will give greater hope to our continent.

7.52 pm

Mr. Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): Earlier this week, I took part in a Radio 4 round-table debate about a publication by DEMOS. This trailed a series of extensive surveys into public attitudes towards the European project and attempted to explain why there has been falling interest in or support for that project in recent years.

The panel comprised a representative from DEMOS, the former European Union ambassador to the United States and myself. We all took different views. The DEMOS line was that Europe's leaders had lost touch with their populations about the European ideal, or the European dream, and had pursued priorities that appeared to be bureaucratic and remote from people's lives. It suggested that a new agenda was emerging, embracing concerns such as crime and the environment. The only thing lacking was a bit more enthusiasm and leadership in Europe. If leaders would lead, the public would follow.

The European ambassadors' line was that the European project's fall in popularity was really no more than a press conspiracy—that a sustained attack on everything European had resulted in the growth of scepticism and hostility. My response is that it is difficult to describe 18 million people out of work in Europe as a press conspiracy. It could be described as a tragedy or a scandal. It ought not be described as something marginal to the lives of people in the United Kingdom or any other part of Europe.

[Mr. Alan Simpson]

I believe that the fall in enthusiasm was caused by a quite healthy doubt about the credibility and accountability of European institutions, and a legitimate concern that its economics do not work. I am looking forward to going to Cardiff as part of the alternative summit that has been organised on a broad, pan-European basis, bringing together trade unions, environmentalists and various non-governmental organisations. These all seek to take issue with what may be the agenda of the summit the leaders are addressing, and seek to define a different European agenda that is not narrowly nationalistic, xenophobic or anti-European. The alternative summit simply opposes the monetarism currently driving the European project and is anti-Maastricht in character.

Hon. Members have already warned about the dangers of unleashing new tides of xenophobia and, in that sense, the alternative summit is anti-xenophobic. This in itself is a minor tragedy as it echoes what happened last year around the Amsterdam summit, when I took part in organising marches from every part of Europe, including eastern Europe. We wanted to say that we were not at odds with each other; we are not each other's enemies. The real enemies of the European project are unemployment, social exclusion, job insecurity and environmental instability. The alternative summit in Amsterdam was structured around those key themes, and the alternative Cardiff summit will have the same agenda.

I should like to flag up four key issues that will be discussed in a pan-European context outside the main summit. The first is the presumption that the economics that are currently driving the European project are wrong. The single currency will either be inadequately underpinned or divisive and inherently unstable. The democratic deficit is rapidly turning into a democratic deceit, and the agenda for jobs, the environment and sustainability will be sacrificed on the altar of international competitiveness.

Many of us argue that Europe's economics are wrong because, although many of our debates, both on Europe and generally, are still being conducted on the presumption that inflation is the big threat to our economy, the world teeters dangerously on the edge of a global recession. Events in south-east Asia and the collapse in eastern Europe show a series of economies in deep crisis. Moreover, many aspects of the crisis in other parts the world will make their way to Europe and to the United Kingdom. This is the same crisis that has affected the strength of the pound, and damaged United Kingdom manufacturing and exports. As manufacturing and exports are hit, so, too, are people's jobs, earnings, sense of inclusion and confidence about the future.

In response to the crisis, around the world, many major political and economic thinkers have been saying that we have to begin to deal with the economics of reflation—that we should not be obsessed with convergence terms established in the Maastricht treaty. This will require a shift in thinking that parallels the tragic misjudgments made at the end of the first world war.

France provides an important lesson to us all. At the end of the first world war, France decided that it would never again be invaded by Germany. It would protect its land frontiers so that no similar invasion would ever again be possible. It invested in an enormous project. The Maginot line had reinforced concrete that was tougher than anything Europe had ever seen, and a services and communications infrastructure that was unparalleled in many of France's cities. However, at the beginning of the second world war, German aeroplanes flew over the line, and German troops went round it.

My fear is that monetarism will be the Maginot line of the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century. To squeeze ourselves into an economics of absurdity, we are putting at risk the whole sense of positive Europeanism. Rather than pursuing monetarist obsessions, we should go back and question whether those obsessions are leading us down sensible paths.

Monetarism is changing the way in which we perceive culture, society and economics. We have had many debates in this Chamber about the nature of public debt. Today's statement made it clear that the reconstruction of local government and changes in public spending and public debt are being undertaken to fit in with our Maastricht obligations. We have somehow blandly accepted that public debt is bad debt, that private debt is good debt, and that the private finance initiative is a way of taking spending off the books. We seem to accept that partnerships, which may leave the public sector with long-term financial obligations, will somehow be better if the debt is private rather than public.

I have to confess that I have never understood why having 40 or 50 per cent. of the economy in public debt—and thereby publicly accountable—should be a problem. I have always worried that more of the economy was not held to public account. The real risk arises when we push responsibility and accountability beyond public reach—which, under the terms of the Maastricht treaty, will happen when we are all left in hock to the private sector, and will cost us more.

It has never been cheaper to borrow personally and privately than to borrow collectively and publicly. Nevertheless, that is the ideology which is driving our view of the economy and society. We are all, therefore, part of the sacrifices demanded by Maastricht. The sacrifices have been called for on the presumption that—no matter how unpleasant the medicine—they will make everything better.

Before I was elected to the House, one of the last pieces of research I was involved in was on the sequence of invitations, expectations and deliveries in successive waves of the European jobs project. Beginning with the 1992 Ceccini report on the single European legislation, 1.8 million jobs were promised as part of the first wave of changes after the passage of that legislation. Although much fuss and publicity was given to Ceccini, two or three years later, the Neuberger report pointed out that rationalisation of European industry had caused massive job losses in smaller and medium-sized firms. We then realised that almost exactly the number of jobs promised by Ceccini were lost with passage of the Single European Act 1985.

We are now being promised that, if we can all pull together under the terms of Maastricht, Europe's 18 million unemployed people will disappear or be absorbed within the system. It is a wish, but it is not based on practical economics that will deliver jobs paying a living wage and offering secure prospects for the future.

I am, therefore, deeply worried about the single currency—although I accept the good faith in which hon. Members on both sides of the House believe that the single currency will be the answer to European instability. It is, of course, possible for a single currency to work. A single currency works in America, and one works in Germany—where the former West Germany's amazing commitment to reinvesting in reunification has been underpinned by a massive solidarity tax of 7 per cent. The tax is raised in the west and transferred to the east, and will probably continue for another generation. It is an enormous tribute to Germany's commitment to that process.

If we are to make Europe work, we shall require a similar fiscal transfer system. In 1977, in the MacDougall report, the European Parliament made its first and only attempt to spell out what such a system would mean in the European context. The report set out the different stages Europe would have to undergo to reach a stable and integrated European theatre in which we all felt that we had a place.

I should like to deal with two aspects of the MacDougall report. The MacDougall committee's conclusions on the nature of an integrated Europe described two possible scenarios—one in which Europe had a small public sector, and another in which it had a more substantial and integrated public sector. The committee pointed out that the Community budget necessary for a small public sector on the Community level would be about 5 to 7 per cent. of Europe's gross domestic product. I should say at this point that the United Kingdom's current contribution to the Union is 1.27 per cent. of GDP.

The Macdougall committee stated that spending of about 20 to 25 per cent. of Europe's GDP would have to be spent to create a more integrated approach in Community provision, to deal with external shock or internal inequalities of economic impact. Although I do not object to those who wish such a scenario to be realised, I have yet to find a politician of any persuasion who will knock on his or her constituents' doors and say, "To create the single currency, we would like you to pay an amount that is a four-fold increase in Britain's tax contributions to the European Union. But that is the good news. If you want more provision from the European Union, you might have to pay a 12 or 20-fold increase in contributions."

If people want to pay for that, that is fine, but we should be honest about how we would have to fund the process. If we are not honest, we shall set people against one another because of the deficits that we build into the process. We cannot make something work on an economics that is based on a fraud. What terrifies me is that people who are not hostile to one another may end up saying, "If insufficiency is built into the common European pot, why the hell should we in Merseyside pay taxes so that jobs can be transferred to southern Spain?" People will see themselves stealing jobs from one another. Those who want to embrace a European ideal quickly have to be honest enough to say not only how they would achieve the ends, but how they would will the means of delivering those ends.

I am worried that that problem exists in the European Union even before it is expanded. Moreover, this applies against a backcloth of Germany having declared a desire to reduce its contributions to the European budget. My fear is that European states will end up locked in a fixed exchange rate mechanism, on the most suitable possible terms for the deutschmark, with fewer resources for fiscal transfers and a magnet effect that will suck resources into those areas that already have the greatest reserves.

That would be massively destabilising for a single currency zone. We must address the mechanisms of redistribution if the single currency is to have any prospect of working. Personally, I do not believe that it will be possible, given the different cultures and economies in Europe. There are, though, other very exciting ways in which these can be made compatible, just as a car has a clutch system that enables the gears to change. However, such compatibility will not be achieved in the context of a lumpen project that drives together and squeezes ideas in an assumption that if they can all somehow be put in the box, they will stay there for ever.

European institutions have been the central architects of the current proposals. When I was researching the resurgence of European racism and fascism, I spent some time in Brussels going through the commentaries on the re-emergence of far right organisations both within and outside the political system. The most interesting part of that experience was being inside the European Commission. Many people have spoken about the democratic deficit, but I was astonished by the fleet of corporate lobbyists who lay permanent siege to the European Union institutions. On one occasion during my time there, some trade unionists turned up. It was such a rare event that MEPs from the different parties of the left were really pleased. They rang one another up to say, "This is wonderful. Some trade unions are here; come and meet them."

We sometimes think that the House of Commons is inaccessible to the public, but the European institutions—the Commission and the Parliament—may as well be on another planet. That does not apply for corporate Europe, however, whose agenda is, I believe, putting at risk the agenda of civic Europe.

There are some interesting divisions of opinion on this. I pay a back-handed tribute to the work done by the European Round Table, an organisation pulled together by Agnelli of Fiat in the early 1980s. It comprises the chief executives of Europe's 45 biggest multinationals. The organisation has been engaged in a project systematically and insidiously to inveigle itself into the policy-making frameworks and decision-making structures of the European Union and of every Government in Europe. It has been incredibly successful in its aim. But what suits corporate Europe may be far removed from what suits civic and democratic Europe.

Divisions are opening up—I doubt whether the Cardiff summit will address them—between business and big business. Corporate demands are often in conflict with the interest of small and medium businesses, which underpin almost all our communities. Big business is becoming less and less interested in loyalty or obligation to the nation states in which they happen to reside. They are more interested in the subsidies they can secure from national Governments. When they receive a better offer, they hot-foot it to another country to pursue the cash waved in front of them.

Similar conflicts can be seen in agriculture. I am probably as non-rural as anyone can be, but in my discussions with farmers, many of whom have been

[Mr. Alan Simpson]

committed to traditional farming practices, I have been told of the despair at the weighting of European policy in favour of big farming—agribusiness rather than agriculture—and at the incentives to overproduce and to overuse fertilisers, growth hormones and antibiotics, which increase the risks to all sections of our societies. That is part of the conflict that we are trying to address in the alternative summit.

On jobs and environmental sustainability, although I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and his European colleagues on banning the wall-of-death netting, I should point out that that is not the only big environmental issue that Europe has to address. In many ways, the real pressure is shown in the absence of a European challenge to the rise of companies such as Monsanto, which want to dump genetically modified crops in Britain and other parts of Europe. I congratulate Austria on being the one country so far to have adopted the precautionary principle and to have banned the import of genetically modified products. It is somewhat rare for me to occupy the same intellectual space as Britain's most famous organic gardener—the Prince of Wales—but his newspaper article has set the tone for the debate on the subject. The House should follow suit in recognising the dangers to European agriculture of being driven by a big business, rather than an agricultural, agenda.

We have an opportunity to create a different, inclusive Europe. We cannot do so without central reference to the 18 million people in Europe who are out of work. If we are to set an agenda through which they can find sustainable jobs, we shall have to challenge the pillars of free-market assumptions that are driving not only the Maastricht agenda, but the dialogue between Europe and the World Trade Organisation. If we are really serious about sustainability, we can find ways in which to create full employment in all our localities, and in all the European Union countries, without having to steal jobs from one another.

We need to create a politics and an economics of redistribution, not to remove the barriers to the private sector, to deregulate Europe's economies or to pursue international competitiveness so as to risk employment and environmental sustainability. I do not expect the Foreign Secretary to address that agenda, but I ask him to use his intellectual power and courage at least to remind the leaders in Cardiff this weekend of the people's Europe debate, which is taking place outside the summit. It is a debate waiting to be let inside.

8.19 pm

Mr. Robert Walter (North Dorset): I am delighted that at least one Euro-sceptic Back Bencher managed to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, albeit from the Government Benches.

Mr. Simpson: I am not a Euro-sceptic, but a monetarist-sceptic and a Maastricht-sceptic. I am sceptic about—no, an opponent of—capitalism, but I am not a sceptic about Europe.

Mr. Walter: I stand corrected.

At several stages, I got the impression that this would be a Welsh debate. I strongly share the emotion of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), who expressed pleasure at the summit being held in the capital city of our country of birth, but I also echo the thoughts of the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson), who expressed regret at its not being held in the city of my birth.

With 15 members of the European Union, the presidency does not come around that often. If nothing changed, it would be another seven and a half years before we occupied that position again. If, as I sincerely hope, we enlarge before then, it will be somewhat longer. What a disappointment, then, that so little has been achieved in the six months in which Britain has been able to set the European agenda.

There was much fanfare at the beginning of our presidency, with funny stars made of pizza, and ties for all those who wanted to be on message, but so determined were the Government to demonstrate the break with the past that they played down the 25th anniversary of our membership of the European Union, which fell just as we assumed the presidency. The failure to celebrate the silver jubilee of the great achievement of my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) in any meaningful way signified a break not with the past but with reality and with the realpolitik of today's Europe.

As we approach the summit, there is much shuttling between capitals, but the reality, which Cardiff will not address, is of a missed opportunity and the failure of Europe, led for the past six months by the Government, to address the great challenges of today: the consequences of enlargement; the reform of the common agricultural policy; and, for Britain itself, a response to monetary union and the single currency.

On enlargement, we all welcome progress in opening negotiations with the applicant states, but one has to regret the somewhat cynical assumption in some quarters that the negotiations will take so long that the consequences for the existing members need not yet be addressed. At Amsterdam, all the European Governments failed to address the institutional consequences of enlargement. Changes in the size of the Commission, voting rights and the Council of Ministers will all require another intergovernmental conference if we take the enlarged membership beyond a further five states.

The position of Turkey remains largely unresolved and must be linked with the negotiations with Cyprus. It would be totally unacceptable to negotiate with the people of only one side of the green line.

The greatest unresolved obstacle to enlargement is the common agricultural policy. Agenda 2000 fails to address the key reforms that are needed. I declare an interest as a farmer and a beneficiary of the CAP, but I echo what my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe said earlier: at the launch of the UK presidency in December, the Prime Minister criticised the

"cost and waste of the Common Agricultural Policy"

which

"continue to grow year by year".

My right hon. and learned Friend also quoted the Foreign Secretary, who, in Warsaw last November, said:

"We need a reformed CAP which gives a better deal all round—fair prices for consumers, flexibility for farmers, protection for the environment".

Agenda 2000, in either its original or its revised form, fails to cut the cost to the taxpayer. In fact, on the Commission's own figures, it ends up costing the taxpayer

more. It fails to take into account the pressures on us in the next world trade round. The Foreign Secretary failed today even to mention that next round and what position the European Union will take in it. Agenda 2000 will be a building block, but I am not sure whether it will be one that is acceptable to those with whom we are negotiating.

If the Cardiff summit agenda were to tackle the key targets that the Government have set themselves, we could look forward to reading next week of a Europe genuinely making progress toward a realistic agricultural policy for the next century. Instead, we have a deceitful fudge: Agenda 2000 does not address enlargement, because there is a hope that, at best, the negotiations will last so long that the new states will not enter before 2006 or, at worst, a transitional arrangement will delay their accession to the common agricultural policy at least until after that date.

Agenda 2000 envisages a common agricultural policy costing more rather than less, because the Government, in setting their agenda, failed to convince the other member states that expenditure on agriculture has to be reduced. It may be that the forthcoming elections in Germany have made the subject sensitive. Well, so be it—with 15 democracies in the Union, tough decisions will always be inconvenient to one member state or another.

Those are internal matters. We must all wish for success in the next world trade round, but there can be no successful outcome with the kind of subsidised agriculture still envisaged in Agenda 2000. Over-subsidised agriculture serves no one well, least of all the efficient British farmer, who merely wants a level playing field.

The UK presidency and the Government have failed to deal with the consequences of the single currency for the United Kingdom. It has been said before that economic and monetary union is a reality. It will happen on 1 January next year: 11 member states of the European Union will merge their currencies and operate a single zone of monetary stability.

Those countries constitute our largest market, and the effect of the scheme will be the most significant monetary event since Bretton Woods. There are those in Britain who wish that it would go away, and those who are convinced that it will not work and that the original European Community Six, with some of the fastest-growing and richest smaller states of Europe, are rushing over the precipice.

There are those who so totally misunderstand the project that they do not believe that it starts until Frau Schmidt collects her pension from the post office in euros in 2002. The effect on Britain and British monetary policy will be greater than any of the post-war monetary shocks.

I am not advocating our joining on day one. I am warning that the effect of the monetary bloc on our nearest continent will give the lie to any concept of monetary sovereignty. That may seem to be the same old argument about Britain always getting on the train after it has left the station, and that is probably as true of monetary union as it was of many aspects of our post-war European adventure. However, that argument is not good enough for an intelligent electorate. Our press has failed to give the British people any guidance, save for rubbishing the whole project.

The Government must begin to rehearse for the electorate the arguments about why a single currency is a good or bad thing for Britain and for international trade, and for why economic and monetary union is the solution. I may differ from some of my right hon. and hon. Friends on the matter, but I approach it from a monetarist standpoint. What is money? More specifically in this context, what should money be? It should be a means of exchange and a store of value. The value of sterling since Bretton Woods broke down in the 1960s was a one-way bet until the late 1980s. We then manipulated the currency to an unsustainable level, and we joined the exchange rate mechanism at the wrong rate at the wrong time. The policy was not without benefits—inflation halved, and interest rates dropped from 15 to 10 per cent.—but the ERM ended in failure.

Today, we are back at an exchange rate that is unsustainable—perhaps, I should say unstable—against those of our major competitors, the problem being compounded by a not unrelated uncompetitive interest rate. I part company with those monetarists who believe that effective monetary policy and parliamentary democracy are somehow indissoluble, for the same reasons that I believe in an independent judiciary and would not want politicians to make clinical judgments in the national health service. In central banks that are independent of day-to-day political control, the central bankers should be accountable, but the experience of Germany and the United States shows that, when they are left to get on with the job, they have a much better effect than any succession of Chancellors of the Exchequer.

Why would the euro deliver the objective of independent monetary policy? Why not have a British solution? The Chancellor has attempted to answer that with the Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee, but that solution is not sustainable. British industry lives by international trade. The firms that make things and sell them on the world market—unlike the retailers who import cheap goods from the far east, and who finance Labour party campaigns—demand monetary stability. The chief executive of a United Kingdom-based multinational said to me the other day that he has eight manufacturing plants in the European Union in five countries for 15 markets. Which currency should he use next year? He will be pricing and accounting in the euro. His case is replicated across British industry. The Confederation of British Industry admits that the most enthusiastic supporters of early entry are medium-sized manufacturing exporters.

Who cares if British industry uses the euro? Manufacturers, the City and agriculture are, by the nature of their business, already committed to using it. However, it is an odd kind of sovereignty to abdicate monetary policy that determines the activities of major sectors of the economy to foreign central bankers. Such an abdication did us no harm during the period of our greatest imperial and industrial glory, when we all used gold. However, the experience of the gold standard during the inter-war years should tell us that a successful economy must work within a sensitive monetary framework. An independent European central bank could provide such a framework at some time in future.

The Government have a duty to prepare the industry and the people of Britain for the consequences of EMU. There is still no serious, informed debate on British membership. The promise of the razzmatazz around the UK presidency has fallen very flat. I still hope—a little—that the Government will address some real issues facing Europe and Britain in the dying days of our presidency. I hope that they will place the consequences of

[Mr. Walter]

enlargement high on the agenda, along with a real discussion of genuine reform of the common agricultural policy that will go further than anything envisaged in Agenda 2000. I hope that they will encourage a domestic debate on monetary union.

8.34 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): In the bygone world when I was a new Member of Parliament and the father of the Opposition winder up—the hon. Member for Windsor (Mr. Trend)—was a distinguished Cabinet Secretary, a debate such as this would have been absolutely packed. I want to register, as did the right hon. Member for Wales—I mean the right hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley)—that it is good to have a pre-summit debate. However, there was a time when Members of the House of Commons would have tumbled over each other to have some input to such a debate.

I understand well that the pressures of the presidency are such that the Foreign Secretary, who has Kosovo and other problems on his hands, cannot be here. However, I lay down a marker to the effect that, if there are further debates after we have given up our presidency, it will behove the Foreign Secretary and senior Foreign Office Ministers to listen to what the House of Commons has to say on such important matters. If they do not, they will dig at the root of the whole set-up of parliamentary democracy. That said, it is good that we are having the debate, which gives us an opportunity to ask a number of questions about what will be raised in Cardiff.

I listened carefully to the hon. Member for North Dorset (Mr. Walter), who raised matters of great importance on the world trade round and agricultural prices. The farmers in my constituency wonder about milk prices, and hill farmers wonder how the price of tups—sheep meat—which was £58 last year, has fallen to £32 this year. My question is general. What will happen to hill farmers and milk producers when the Community expands and we take on possibly massive obligations to the farmers of Poland and Lithuania? Has that been discussed and worked out? After Cardiff, some of us will ask what was said there about the strain on the agricultural kitty caused by expansion of the Community. We should start thinking about that now rather than later.

I do not often agree with nationalists, but what the right hon. Member for Caernarfon said about firms in Wales being already involved in the ecu also applies to firms in my constituency, including Motorola, Hewlett Packard, Sun Electronics, Nippon Electric and Quintiles, where my constituents and those of my parliamentary neighbour the Foreign Secretary work. The Foreign Secretary says that the decision will be made in the hard-headed economic interests of the British people, if I have quoted him correctly. I make no bones about being one of those who would, even now, go in at the first opportunity.

I want to ask a factual question about a most succinct report on page 16 of *The Independent* on 5 June, referring to 4 June, under the byline of Katherine Butler in Luxembourg. The headline was

"Euro club shows Brown the door".

I do not know whether it is true. If it is, it is very serious. If it is not true, we should be told in no uncertain terms that it is a load of rubbish.

The report states:

"Gordon Brown, the Chancellor, subjected himself to formal humiliation last night as ministers from the 11 euro-zone countries gathered at a chateau in Luxembourg for the inaugural meeting of their single currency inner circle, Euro-XI."

I am very interested in the whole question of the crucial Euro X. The report continues:

"As representative of Britain's European Union presidency Mr. Brown was insisting on his right to attend the opening formalities at Senningen castle, but was told he would have to leave the room almost immediately. He was not allowed to attend a dinner that followed the first meeting of the new G8-style body which will co-ordinate economic policy in the euro-area."

Was he told to leave a dinner?

The report continues:

"Senior officials of the euro-zone countries expressed amazement at his decision to muscle in on the informal meeting in the light of Britain's decision to opt out of the single currency. It merely highlighted Britain's political marginalisation, they said."

Katherine Butler goes on: "'He"— that is the Chancellor—

"is a gatecrasher', said a Bonn source, 'he is bringing himself down to a level even ambassadors would not accept.'"

Was that said? The report continues:

"Another senior EU diplomat described British strategy as 'naive' and said it reflected the difficulty London has had in understanding"—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. The hon. Gentleman and I have had discussions before about reading full articles into the record. That is not what is required. He could perhaps give us an abridged version.

Mr. Dalyell: You are quite right, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have said enough on that. Is there any question of British marginalisation? If there is, should not the matter be frankly addressed at Cardiff next week? It is not merely a question of going or not going in, but a decision whereby the world will be altered by what is happening in Europe.

I return to the fact that, in all our constituencies, firms are taking it into their own hands to trade in ecus. We are in a different position. This is a matter of enormous importance to jobs and prosperity. Part of the reason for my concern is that I was exiled for four years from this House to the European Parliament. I was a member of the budget committee and the budget sub-committee with colleagues such as Martin Bangemann, Erwin Langer and others, and I know how they react. If we are not going to be in the club, they will make sure that we do not attend its meetings. I want to know what exactly the position is at Cardiff. If the article that I quoted is factually wrong, no doubt the Minister will say so.

I should like to raise a third question. In November, a delegation concerned with the environment will go to Buenos Aires. I understand that we go as the immediate past-President and that the delegation will be led by the Austrians, who are very anti-nuclear. I am open about the fact that I am totally pro-nuclear. I am dismayed by what has happened on the north coast of Scotland. The press has been wicked in its descriptions of Dounreay, which is a whipping boy for everything. In fact, technically, the position is not nearly as bad as is being made out widely in Britain. Leaving that aside, nuclear energy is the only way to produce energy without large quantities of CO_2 being put into the atmosphere.

Is policy for Buenos Aires going to be discussed at Cardiff? Unlike Kyoto, are representatives of the Department of Trade and Industry, who, it might be hoped, would put the nuclear side of the argument, going to go to Buenos Aires? When I first knew the Minister, he was an effective official of the GMB union, and many of his members are much concerned because they work in the nuclear industry. I should like a comment in his reply or by letter on Buenos Aires.

My fourth question concerns Kosovo. I listened carefully to the Foreign Secretary and agreed with what the hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) said about consulting the Russians. However, I do not think that I am wrong in saying that the military option was not ruled out because of the appalling things that are happening. Last May, I stayed with my former national service regiment, now the Royal Scots Dragoon Guards, in Bosnia. It was the tank regiment in Bosnia at the time. As one who never wanted us to go into Bosnia in the first place, I must say, having seen the situation, that we cannot possibly withdraw from Bosnia in the foreseeable future. I am not prepared to sit on green Benches and be involved in the former Yugoslavia without our having heavy armour there. Without it, there will be a repeat of what happened to the sappers who were taken hostage. Unless heavy armour is present, one does not have the perceived authority to carry out the job.

In the discussions in Cardiff, I hope that no one will think that air strikes will be at all effective. Air strikes are counterproductive. They simply unite those who are hit against those who are doing the striking. In Cardiff, will there be discussions, if action is to be taken in Kosovo, on sending armour? For Britain, that means sending what I understand from those who have to drive them in the way that I did 40 years ago, excellent Challenger tanks. I am told that driving the great, heavy Challenger tank is much easier than driving the Centurion, which some of us had to do, with mixed success.

Fifthly, there may be discussions of European policy on Iran. As one who was in Iran on holiday last October, I strongly hope that the Minister of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett), representing the European presidency, will go, if only to show support for the mayor of Tehran and the many other enlightened people in that country.

Sixthly, will there be a discussion of European policy towards the former Soviet republics of central Asia? My hon. Friend came to give an excellent speech to the Kyrgyzi delegation that was over here. He knows a lot about this and clearly takes an interest in this aspect of affairs. He will know how important it is that Europe has some policy towards the emerging republics, such as Kyrgyzstan, if I may put it that way.

Will there be a discussion of NATO expansion? I will not pursue the matter further if the Minister stands up and says that that is not on the agenda. Some of us think that it should be on the agenda, given the letter to the Prime Minister signed by Sir Hugh Beach, Dr. Helga Graham, Sir John Killick, Sir Michael Atiyah, Sir Michael Beetham, Frank Blackaby, Field Marshal the Lord Bramall, Field Marshal the Lord Carver, Sir Frank Cooper and many others—I have only reached the Cs—who are expressing extreme concern about the expansion of NATO to the Russian borders. Did I interpret the Minister as saying that that will not be discussed? I am not sure what the signals mean. The European Community must discuss the matter in relation to its own problems with the Soviet Union.

I warned the Foreign Secretary and others that I wished to raise the matter of European relations with Libya. I have had 14 Adjournment debates on the subject. It is not just a matter of obligations to the relatives; it is a matter of our whole relationship with the Arab world. This will be known to the Foreign Secretary because he has recently had meetings with Dr. Mudenge representing the Organisation of African Unity and, indeed, the African states.

On 21 December it will be 10 long years since that airliner went down over Lockerbie—10 long years of agony for the relatives and of increasingly festering relations not only with Libya but with many Arab countries. In these circumstances, should there not be a discussion, particularly with the Italians who have ceased to have any inhibitions about breaking sanctions? Italian Ministers have trade relations with Libya. Should not Europe discuss the whole position of the United States in relation to Lockerbie? After all, it is the United States that is driving the policy.

There is a growing belief among the relatives that certain leading Americans—Vincent Cannistraro, Buck Revell and Oliver North—had a kind of Faustian agreement with some unpleasant elements after the Vincennes shot down the Iranian airliner carrying pilgrims to Mecca. It may be most serious to say this in the House of Commons, but serious people believe that when Ali Akbar Mohtashemi, the Iranian Minister of the Interior at the time, raised the spectre of half a dozen, 10 or a dozen airliners being blown up in revenge for what the Vincennes had done, there was a tacit agreement that if one American airliner went down that would be tit for tat—the end of the matter. It would not be right to go in to all the details now and one has to be a professor of Lockerbie studies, but I would argue a case for this being taken seriously with any Foreign Office official.

Tonight, I ask that there be a frank discussion over lunch at Cardiff about how on earth the situation with Libya is to be resolved. It can be resolved, as Dr. Swire and Professor Black found out, by the Libyans sending those two alleged criminals—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It is one matter to say that European allies can try to help with Lockerbie, but to go into great detail about Lockerbie now is to go outwith the scope of the debate.

Mr. Dalyell: I do not wish to abuse the debate.

My final crisp point is this: at Cardiff I hope that this whole Lockerbie saga will be discussed with a view to resolving it.

8.55 pm

Mr. Michael Trend (Windsor): I join those who paid tribute to Cardiff, especially the hon. Members for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) and for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Mr. Williams) and the right hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley), and I congratulate Cardiff on hosting this important event at the weekend and next week.

This evening's speeches have covered a wide variety of areas; I want to concentrate particularly on the road that the Government have taken to Cardiff. My hon. Friend the

[Mr. Michael Trend]

Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells) made a splendid contribution and put a convincing case on the review of the Lomé convention and, in particular, economic relations with the West Indies. He is the House's expert on the banana regime and it was good to hear the subject raised again tonight. We have just heard a characteristically thoughtful contribution from the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell).

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) struck the right tone in his comprehensive and highly effective attack on what he rightly described as a flop of a presidency. He was spot-on in underlining several specific areas in which the Government have achieved little or nothing during their tenure of the presidency of the Council of the European Union.

On jobs, enlargement, human rights and reform of the common agricultural policy—the areas that matter for Cardiff—we remain at the same square one as when the Prime Minister embarked on his radiant, starry-eyed launch of the British presidency.

The road to Cardiff began at the PR launch for the British presidency. That was, we have heard, at Waterloo station. It was our first glimpse of the style-without-substance presidency. How many times have we heard the overworked metaphor about the necessity of being on the Euro train and not being left behind at the station, in the sidings or on the slow track? At Waterloo that day, the train finally turned up and it was a PR special. Two things hugely amused the Journalists that day: when the train turned up, it was empty; and when it left, it went nowhere. There was some powerful symbolism in that, so perhaps that was the last we shall hear of the wretched train.

The House will recall the rhetoric of that launch. The Prime Minister, ever mindful of the improvement that a group of children make to a photo call, was surrounded by the children who had painted the logo for the presidency. He told us:

"The children who produced the stars worked in teams. We want a Europe that works together as a team."

A new metaphor, one to replace the train, was born—the team. However, judged by that, the Prime Minister has not done well with his European partners in the six months of the presidency. According to the French Finance Minister, Britain—our team—has now been relegated to the second division. On another occasion, one of the Commissioners told the Prime Minister that he was no longer even in the game; he was on the touchline, and

"You cannot lead the game from the touchline."

During our debates, we have heard about the reception given to the Chancellor of the Exchequer at Senningen. He was deliberately left out of the team photograph, as the hon. Member for Linlithgow pointed out.

What has happened in the past six months is that reality has caught up with rhetoric, and the Government will pay a high price for a problem that is entirely of their own making. By exciting high expectations, but falling well below them, the Government have made a rod for Britain's back. It was not necessary to do that. More realistic ambitions and more tempered language would have served British interests much better.

Let us return, for the last time, to those heady days, early in the new Government, when the Prime Minister said that he wanted to shape a new Europe. He told us that we were heading for a new era, a new millennium, a new Europe; Government insiders told the press that the children's logo was "very cool"; a think-tank was commissioned to "rebrand" Europe using focus groups. The message was: new Labour, new Britain, new Europe—next stop, new Jerusalem. That almost Messianic fervour inspired one Italian newspaper to declare the Prime Minister to be "Tony Blair Superstar"—perhaps Lord Lloyd-Webber is working on the musical.

Those were heady days—the days before the Prime Minister encountered the big players in Europe. The big players have cut him and the Government of this country down to size. The agenda was overblown; as the hon. Member for Swansea, East rightly said, any presidency is part of a continuum, which is why the Government made a mistake in making such claims in the first place. It was all part of the propaganda effort that is so characteristic of the Labour Government in all areas of activity.

I am glad to say that the spin doctors were also put in their place in Europe: *The Sunday Times* tells us that one Austrian journalist described Mr. Alastair Campbell as

"the tall, arrogant Brit with the coarse tone."

The overblown expectations encouraged by the Government's spin doctors and the arrogance with which they have approached their task in Europe were neatly summed up this week by Martin Walker in *The Guardian*, who wrote:

"Fair Europeans . . . conclude that the main problem was the inflation of expectations."

Marc Champion of *The European* said that, in his view, the UK presidency emerges from its six months

"bruised by a mix of hubris and political naivety."

We could not have put it better ourselves.

Another verdict on the presidency should not go unnoticed. Less than a month ago, at a conference in Brussels of the European Movement, the Minister without Portfolio, on another of his excursions to Europe, told his listeners:

"Europe lacks leadership and a sense of mission and too many people don't feel part of it."

Is that the Europe being led by his right hon. Friend the Prime Minister? Is that the view of a politician who plays a central role in the propaganda surrounding the Government? There was an opportunity for the Government to do something about leading opinion in Europe. There was an opportunity to bring forward policies that would force down the people's unemployment that so bedevils Europe. That opportunity is about to pass away at Cardiff and it is no use complaining or blaming others at precisely the moment when the Government have had a chance to do something—a chance to put forward or fight for a concrete idea.

Presidencies and Governments can have big ideas and two of the biggest in recent years came from Britain: the single market and subsidiarity, both of which came from and were driven by the Conservatives. Both are now taken for granted—indeed, they are trumpeted by the Labour Government and even by Chancellor Kohl, who has an appointment with the voters—but those ideas had to be

fought for. That shows that real achievements are possible and that big ideas—real ideas—can be pursued. What a marked contrast with the current presidency.

Only today, the Foreign Secretary told the *Daily Express* that, at Cardiff,

"We are going to look at the future of Europe and address the big questions"—

about time too, we on the Conservative Benches say. That is what the Government should have been doing over the past six months.

I shall go into the lion's den on one issue, about which we heard earlier: the common agricultural policy. I should like to set the context. The Foreign Secretary, on numerous occasions—particularly in a speech at Warsaw, as my hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset (Mr. Walter) mentioned in his excellent speech—the Deputy Prime Minister, during the Queen's Speech, and the Prime Minister himself, in a speech at the Mansion House, all made considerable reference to reforming the common agricultural policy. They said that it would be a central aim of their presidency. What happened? On 1 April, *The Daily Telegraph* told the story:

"EU throws out farm reform plans".

Perhaps it is understandable that my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe and I missed the Foreign Secretary's reference to the CAP today. As it was such an important issue for the Government, we assumed that somebody in the Foreign Office would have written a section, a couple of paragraphs or a brief on CAP reform during our presidency. In fact, we heard less than a sentence—11 words—on the subject. I am told that the Foreign Secretary said that the Government have a

"clear sense of direction for reform of the common agricultural policy".

There are two things wrong with that. First, it is wrong, and secondly, does it really cover the importance of the Government's top priority? Is the throwing away of a handful of words in the middle of a speech the right response at the end of a presidency to a matter that was thought to be at the top of the agenda at the beginning of it?

Let us go to another matter: the appointment of the president of the European central bank. My right hon. and learned Friend cited a vast array of criticisms that were levelled at the British presidency at that time. It is astonishing that Britain's Government and Prime Minister were criticised by, among others, the President of the European Parliament, the Prime Ministers of Luxembourg and Italy and the Austrian Chancellor, who said:

"We have now learnt . . . how not to organise a summit".

That phrase will haunt the Government throughout their tenure of office.

The Government have fared little better in the press. As the Foreign Secretary will know, he had a very hard time when he visited Turkey and Italy—and when he went to Strasbourg, as well as when he did not go to Strasbourg, even though he was expected there in February. When he did go to Strasbourg, as we have heard, the fawning motion put before the Parliament was too clever by half, and it was lost. It was a spin too far for Members of the European Parliament.

I am sure that the Foreign Secretary will pack his bags for Cardiff with a huge sense of relief that the ordeal is almost over. I hope that he enjoys his brainstorming lunch, which appears to be the major feature of the occasion, for when the Government as a whole get to Wales this weekend, they will have very little to show for their presidency of the Council. I am sure that there will be many photo opportunities; it is always good to welcome President Mandela to our country. I am sure that it will not be unhelpful to the Prime Minister for the President of South Africa to join the President of the European Council for the cameras. It is probably a matter of great relief for the Government that they can hold the presidency only once in the lifetime of a Parliament, on a rota basis, rather as we get tickets for the Gallery.

The summit in Cardiff will be the last opportunity for the Euro-President Prime Minister to be centre stage. I am sure that the occasion will be made to work for all its worth. Many of the important issues that hon. Members have aired in this debate will not be touched on; many important concerns about the development of Europe will not be touched on. It will be a gigantic photo opportunity for the Prime Minister, and an attempt to paper over the cracks of the presidency.

We may well see a Welsh walkabout, which will, perhaps, be better organised than the visit by the Chancellor of the Exchequer and his partners to the great city of York, where he marched them up and down the street to the accompaniment not of the cheers, but of the jeers of the burghers of York, who know that many of the great figures of Europe are not exactly marching in tune with the peoples of Europe.

The Government's gigantic public relations exercise and their attempt to spin-manage Europe are getting Britain into serious trouble with our friends, partners and colleagues in Europe. That trouble is entirely of the Government's making. If that is how much influence Britain can wield and how much respect we can command in Europe while we hold the presidency, heaven help us when we are no longer in that potentially powerful position.

Whatever happens at Cardiff, it can only be a matter of time before the lessons learned about this Government in the past six months by the political leaders of Europe filter down to the people who matter most to us in this House—our constituents. Politicians cannot live by style alone. A realisation of the Government's failure in their presidency of the European Council, which mirrors a lack of achievement in so many aspects of their performance, will soon break through to the public at large.

9.10 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Doug Henderson): I welcome the hon. Member for Windsor (Mr. Trend) to his post and congratulate him on his appointment. I am not one of those politicians who like to give advice to other politicians, but if the hon. Gentleman is to stay in his job, he was misplaced in criticising Eurostar, because he may find that he has to avail himself of its services from time to time, as I shall tomorrow morning at 6.14 on my way to Brussels.

We have had a thoughtful debate, which is different from past debates on Europe in which I have taken part, both in this capacity and when in opposition. Previous debates were characterised by ideology and zealotry. I am pleased to say that today's debate heralds a new approach, and there have been many thoughtful contributions from

[Mr. Doug Henderson]

hon. Members on both sides of the House. The absence of ideology on the Opposition Front Bench has not been too obvious, but several contributions from Conservative Back Benchers have examined the issues that we face in Europe. I find it interesting that the Opposition, of all people, should be fond of quoting the press in their defence. That is a strange reversal of a role that I have known some Conservative Members to adopt in the past.

My hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) said that he believed that the presidency would be the busiest period for British foreign policy in peacetime. I do not know whether that is true, but it certainly feels as if it is. We have had an active and productive six months during our presidency, which has one or two weeks to run.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Gapes) said that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has been deeply involved in European issues, which is the protocol for European matters when there is a summit at the end of the six-month presidency. My right hon. Friend has visited all the countries in the European Union over the past two weeks to examine the issues relating to the development of the European Union that are considered important not only by the presidency, but by other partner states.

My hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East said that he had detected more warmth in Europe towards the Government. I cannot resist saying that that is not a difficult achievement when one considers the temperatures that existed before 1 May last year. There is a new warmth and a feeling that everyone in Europe is in a family. That does not mean that everyone always agrees on every issue or that one does not fight one's corner hard, but there are many issues on which we must look beyond Europe and decide how we can best co-operate. That has been a strong theme during the past six months.

Mr. Howard: Is that why the Chancellor of the Exchequer was treated as he was, just a few days ago?

Mr. Henderson: The right hon. and learned Gentleman, like one of my hon. Friends, reads too much into newspaper reports. The rules on the relationship of the various nations to ECOFIN and Euro X were clearly defined at the Luxembourg summit, when there was no doubt that the major issues of macro-economic policy in Europe are determined by ECOFIN, and that the Euro X committee deals with the details of the currency and its relationship to other currencies. There are occasions when it is appropriate for the four non-members of the currency to be present, and other occasions when it would be inappropriate. The right hon. and learned Gentleman refers to a situation when it was recognised that the 11 members wished to discuss matters specific to the currency.

The main focus of the presidency, and a topic that will feature prominently in Cardiff, is the enlargement of the European Union. An historic decision was taken in Luxembourg and has been driven hard by the British presidency over the past six months. It will change the future shape of Europe, uniting a Europe that was previously divided.

There are different views on the issue. In his introductory remarks, the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) expressed the view that we had gone backwards over the past 12 months. The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) thought that the session had been well managed. Any objective person would recognise that the mandate that was given to the presidency by the Luxembourg summit has been fulfilled in its entirety.

That is the strong view of the states that want to join the EU. The Romanian European Minister said that it was an historic day and that the European conference had further added to that process. Indeed, some of the negotiators for countries that want to accede to the EU criticised me six or eight weeks ago because we had brought forward the screening process too quickly and they could not meet some of the detailed requirements set by the Commission officials. I pleaded guilty, because that is what they had asked for. They have worked hard, and I think that they are pleased now that considerable progress has been made on the screening process.

Mr. David Heath: When I said that the process was well managed, I meant that as a compliment. I hope that the Minister will agree that to start the accession process without a clear timetable for CAP reform, institutional reform and structural and cohesion fund reform is to invite the applicant countries to apply on the basis of a false prospectus. It is essential for the timetable to be in place.

Mr. Henderson: I am pleased that the hon. Gentleman is not retracting his support for the accession process. I agree that it is essential to recognise that the enlargement of the EU entails not just the changes that those countries must make if they want to accede to the EU; it also involves the changes that the existing members of the EU must make to respond to that challenge. That has been one of the important aspects of our presidency and will be discussed at Cardiff on Monday afternoon, when the leaders of the nations of Europe will seek a formula that will allow that process to go forward.

From a presidency position, we shall push forward the reform of the common agricultural policy, a key issue which several hon. Members raised. After the German elections in September, we shall be able to address the paper issued by the Commission for reform initially in cereals and beef. If carried through, that alone would save British consumers about £1 billion a year, so it is worth while. There is support for some of the proposals in the farming industry.

On structural funds, there is a need for reform if funding is to be available to assist the countries that want to accede to the EU. In the future, from the total pool of structural funds, there will be fewer resources available proportionally to be distributed to existing members of the EU. That is also recognised.

I shall return to the specifics of the structural funds, to which hon. Members on both sides of the House have referred. At Cardiff, we hope to make a commitment to work hard to try to bring those issues to a conclusion by March next year. The European Parliament, through its procedures, can then give assent to the aspects of any deal to which it is required by treaty to agree before the European elections next June. If the matter is not resolved by April, there will be no time to consider it until October or November—which is nearing the end of the existing structural funds regime. There are many reasons why we want to put the timetable in place, and we shall strive hard to do that in Cardiff.

My hon. Friend the Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Mr. Williams) and the right hon. Member for Dyfed asked what reforms are taking place in structural fund procedures. There must be a fair system if there is to be acceptance and understanding on the part of the 15 nations that wish to accede to the European Union. Areas in Europe that have the same characteristics should receive the same sort of support, regardless of their location. As the right hon. Member for Dyfed—

Mr. Wigley: Caernarfon.

Mr. Henderson: I apologise. My geography of Wales tends to be a bit anglicised. I must do some homework, lest I get into trouble with the right hon. Gentleman and others.

As the right hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) said, it is not simply a matter of the new structural funds regime—although that is important to the whole United Kingdom. In some places in Wales, England and Scotland, the description of the area is a key factor. The right hon. Gentleman explained how one can calculate different GDP per capita definitions depending on whether Wales is divided north-south or east-west. The statisticians at Eurostat and the Commission must deal with that matter on the basis of what is fair and reasonably objective.

We have given our people a mandate to negotiate, and we are seeking a fair system. We must be able to say that areas that are classified as objective 1 in the United Kingdom are, broadly speaking, comparable to similar classifications made in other European Union countries. If that is achieved, it will be a fair settlement. I do not wish to comment on the specifics of any areas while the negotiating process is continuing—I am sure that hon. Members will understand why. The Government take a firm view and will try to advance the process.

We have been active on many other issues during our presidency.

Mr. Donald Anderson: Before my hon. Friend moves on, will he refer to the proposals for institutional reform? Have the Government made specific proposals in respect of a conference concerning institutional reform? What are the prospects of that occurring?

Mr. Henderson: My hon. Friend is moving ahead of me. I shall turn to that issue. There will be a discussion over lunch involving the Heads of Government—*[Interruption.]* I assure hon. Members that lunches are not perks in a European context. It means that one gets indigestion while eating at a meeting—and the Heads of Government are no more exempt than my right hon. Friend or I.

There will be an open discussion during which any contributor may lay any issue on the table. There is a desire to explore to what extent further integration is necessary if there is to be effective decision making and to what extent subsidiarity must be redefined and worked out in a way that is acceptable to member nations and will serve us well in the future. Those are the philosophical parameters of the discussion. It may go into institutional issues such as the role of national Governments, of the European Parliament and of the Commission, the size of the Commission, the scrutiny process and many others.

There is a wide agenda, and we shall aim to take it forward to the Vienna summit in December, where it could be progressed a little further along the line. Hon. Members on both sides of the House understand that there is no magic formula for reforming an organisation as complicated as the EU, and that reform does not happen quickly, because consent is essential for lasting agreement.

We have been active in many other areas, such as improving action against crime at an international level. On the environment, we have achieved discussion of the Kyoto obligations at the EU and practical decisions on new regulations on landfill and on drift nets. On the single market, there have been agreements on a research and development framework, which is important for British scientific institutes and universities, on mobile phones and on the introduction of a scoreboard system, so that we are not only saying that we are committed to the single market, but making everyone else aware of what we have done to achieve that. National obstacles to the single market will become transparent under the system, which is an important development.

Hon. Members will be pleased that there has been progress on beef this week, as was acknowledged in some of the speeches tonight. The Government will be pushing the Commission proposal through the various channels to achieve acceptance at the earliest stage.

The new arms code is a major achievement. The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome asked why it was not announced in the March half-time report. It was not agreed then, but only three or four weeks ago. I believe that it is a significant achievement and puts huge pressure on member states to play the game, not to act unreasonably and not to undercut foreign policy positions on those matters. That is an important move forward, which has been acknowledged by hon. Members on both sides of the House.

Mr. Dalyell: Is this a convenient point to ask my hon. Friend about Kosovo, or will he come to it later? If not, may I repeat my question about air strikes? Some of us feel strongly that if there is to be a military option, which has not been ruled out, it should not be air strikes, but infantry supported by armour, which is totally different from counter-productive air strikes. Can he say anything about the thinking on air strikes?

Mr. Henderson: I had hoped that hon. Members were satisfied with the response of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, who intervened on the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe to answer his points relating to those matters. Nothing is ruled out. We are considering the situation, and, as my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary said, there is a G8 Foreign Ministers meeting tomorrow and there has been a Defence Ministers meeting today. European Foreign Ministers will have an opportunity to discuss those matters at their lunch on Monday. There is a build up in the United Nations for seeking as much consensus as can be achieved to get the necessary resolution through.

Mr. Howard: May I bring the Minister back to the code of conduct on arms sales, which he was dealing with before he gave way to the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell)? Is not the most significant new feature that the EU code will introduce the obligation on a country to

[Mr. Howard]

notify other countries when it has refused to grant a licence for the export of particular arms? Will that not present such an order, on a plate, to any other country that chooses to adopt a different interpretation of the code? For the first time, if a country refuses to grant a licence for an order, it will have to notify everyone else, and any other country could notify its industry to take advantage of the order.

Mr. Henderson: I understand why the right hon. and learned Gentleman is worried about that, but, given my understanding of the defence industry—I have been involved in it a bit; in fact, I once worked for Rolls-Royce—I can say that the main contractors are large-scale operators, who generally know who seeks what kind of purchase and the type of offer that will be made. I believe that they already have access to such information.

What the code of conduct does is inform those people and others that there is a reason why a sale has been rejected by one country, and that, if they are then going to undercut the politics of that decision, they will have to do so publicly, and justify their stance. I believe that that will have a major impact, in that, when there is a need to stop the sale of a particular weapon for a particular political reason, that reason will—hopefully—be upheld by those who were potentially alternative suppliers.

Mr. David Heath: At what point does the hon. Gentleman consider that it would be appropriate to return to the European Union negotiating table to strengthen the code of conduct, making it into something nearer what was originally envisaged?

Does the hon. Gentleman envisage any discussions with the United States about the code, with a view to reaching some agreement with the US about American arms manufacturers?

Mr. Henderson: I think common sense will suggest to the hon. Gentleman that we need to see how the code works. There is a commitment to review its procedures every 12 months.

It clearly makes sense to secure as much agreement as possible with the United States, so that the same policies are adopted by defence industries throughout the part of the world where there is the capacity to make the goods that we are normally discussing. We want to achieve that.

The hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells) referred to the Lomé mandate, which was discussed at this week's General Affairs Council. Considerable progress was made, and officials are now looking at some of the detail. The principles of the British position are as I described them to the hon. Gentleman when I gave evidence to the Select Committee, and we are pushing hard on them. The banana issue has been taken on board, but I must tell the hon. Gentleman that any decision must be consistent with World Trade Organisation rules. Otherwise, in the long term, it will not stick, and there will be problems. We shall return to that issue on 29 June, at the next meeting of the General Affairs Council. I hope that we shall be able to conclude the mandate then.

Much is expected of the weekend's proceedings in Wales. We are all looking forward to going to Cardiff. I always enjoy my visits to Wales, to see some of my old friends and some of my new friends. I believe that this will be a busy and productive summit. Important improvements will be made, and important progress will be made on economic reform, on enlargement and on Agenda 2000. There will be an important dialogue on the future of the European Union, and that that dialogue will concentrate on making the EU relevant to what people feel and to issues that they know are crucial to them. I believe that, at Cardiff, there will be a desire to provide continuity through to the Austrian presidency.

I must say that I think it was a little unworthy of the hon. Member for Windsor to demean the meeting between President Mandela and the Heads of Government. I think it very fitting that that meeting is taking place.

Mr. Trend: I am delighted that President Mandela is coming to the country: he is a hugely distinguished international politician. I merely sought to make the point that it was unlikely that he would not take advantage of a photo opportunity with the Prime Minister. I cannot help feeling that there may just be a slight amount of contrivance in this matter—but, as I have said, we shall be delighted to see President Mandela.

Mr. Henderson: I am grateful that we have managed to draw the tooth from the hon. Gentleman on that issue. It is fitting that President Mandela is meeting the 15 leaders of Europe. That is an important dialogue and an occasion to celebrate President Mandela's great contribution to democracy and freedom in the 20th century. The values that he felt were important to fight for over his years of political life are the principles and values that will set the European Union in good stead for the future. I look forward to that occasion in Cardiff on Tuesday.

Ms Bridget Prentice (Lewisham, East): I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion, by leave, withdrawn.

NORTHERN IRELAND (SENTENCES) BILL (PROGRAMME)

Ordered,

That the following provisions shall apply to proceedings on the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Bill.

Committee of the whole House

1.—(1) Proceedings in Committee of the whole House shall be completed at two sittings.

(2) The following proceedings shall be brought to a conclusion, unless previously concluded, in accordance with the following table:

Proceedings	*Time, after commencement of proceedings in Committee at the first sitting, at which proceedings to be concluded.*
Amendments up to page 2, line 22.	2 hours
Amendments up to page 2, line 47, other than amendments inserting words at the end of line 47.	4 hours
Amendments inserting words at end of line 47.	5 hours
Remaining proceedings on Clause 3 and proceedings on Clauses 4 to 7.	6½ hours

(3) Proceedings in Committee shall be brought to a conclusion, unless previously concluded, 3 hours after the commencement of proceedings in Committee at the second sitting.

(4) Standing Order No. 15(1) (Exempted business) shall apply to proceedings in Committee for any part of the periods of—

(a) 6½ hours, at the first sitting, and

(b) 3 hours, at the second sitting,

which fall after Ten o'clock.

Report and Third Reading

2.—(1) Proceedings on consideration and Third Reading shall be completed at one sitting and shall, unless previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion three hours after commencement.

(2) Standing Order No. 15(1) (Exempted business) shall apply to those proceedings for any part of the period of three hours after commencement which falls after Ten o'clock.

Conclusion of proceedings

3.—(1) For the purpose of concluding any proceedings which are to be brought to a conclusion at a time appointed by this Order, the Chairman or Speaker shall forthwith put the following Questions (but no others):—

(a) any Question already proposed from the Chair;

(b) any Question necessary to bring to a decision a Question so proposed;

(c) the Question on any amendment moved or Motion made by a Minister of the Crown;

(d) any other Question necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded.

(2) Proceedings under sub-paragraph (1) shall not be interrupted under any Standing Order relating to sittings of the House and may be decided, though opposed, at any hour.

(3) On a Motion made for a new Clause or a new Schedule, the Chairman or Speaker shall put only the Question that the Clause or Schedule be added to the Bill.

(4) If two or more Questions would fall to be put under sub-paragraph (1)(c) on amendments moved or Motions made by a Minister of the Crown, or under sub-paragraph (1)(d) in relation to successive provisions of the Bill, the Chairman or Speaker shall instead put a single question in relation to those amendments, Motions or provisions.

Miscellaneous

4. Standing Order No. 82 (Business Committee) shall not apply to proceedings on the Bill.

5. No Motion shall be made, except by a Minister of the Crown, to alter the order in which proceedings on the Bill are taken.

6. If on an allotted day a Motion for the adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 24 (Adjournment on specific and important matters that should have urgent consideration) stands over from an earlier day or to Seven o'clock—

(a) the bringing to a conclusion of any proceedings on the Bill which under or by virtue of this Order are to be brought to a conclusion after that time shall be postponed for a period equal to the duration of the proceedings on the Motion, and

(b) Standing Order No. 15(1) (Exempted business) shall apply to proceedings on the Bill for the period after Ten o'clock for which sub-paragraph (a) permits them to continue.

7.—(1) If a Motion is made by a Minister of the Crown to amend this Order and an effect of the Motion would be to provide a greater amount of time for proceedings on the Bill, the Question on the Motion shall be put forthwith and may be decided, though opposed, at any hour.

(2) If a Motion is made by a Minister of the Crown to supplement the provisions of this Order in respect of further proceedings on the Bill, the Motion may be proceeded with, though opposed, at any hour and the proceedings, if not previously concluded, shall be brought to a conclusion three-quarters of an hour after they have been commenced.

—*[Ms Bridget Prentice.]*

Professor David Lowery

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Ms Bridget Prentice.]*

9.35 pm

Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone): I am aware that some hon. Members have already had meetings about this case with the Minister of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson). I have become involved because it transpires that Professor Lowery has a home in my constituency; if he were living in the United Kingdom, he would be in my constituency. Consequently, to all intents and purposes he is my constituent.

I discussed the matter with the Minister of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) two or three weeks ago before his visit to Portugal. He was kind enough to tell me that he would try to ensure that the case was on the agenda, and that he would raise the matter if he got the opportunity. Unfortunately, in his discussions, he was unable to get to that item on the agenda, so the matter was not raised. I appreciate the fact that he tried to raise it.

I shall describe Professor Lowery's character by referring to his background. He is an academic; he graduated from Queen's university in Belfast in 1969. Since then, he has worked at a number of colleges in the United Kingdom, lastly at Warwick university where he worked with my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley, North (Mr. Cranston). After that, he left for America, and, while working at colleges and universities there, he was awarded a professorship. Since then, he has moved to work in Portugal.

I contend that my constituent is being treated unfairly by the Portuguese authorities, who have refused him bail on several occasions. They have even refused to contemplate house arrest. It is clear that he is being treated much worse than a Portuguese national would be treated; it seems that he is being discriminated against because he is a foreigner. I say that because we can make comparisons with similar cases in which Portuguese nationals have been treated differently.

I should like to bring to the House's attention the case of Pedro Caldeira, who was charged with white collar crime; it was a similar charge to the one that Professor Lowery faces. That man was given bail despite the fact that there was evidence that he might flee the jurisdiction, as he had previously absconded. I am told that the man even confessed to his crime on a national television programme. The Portuguese authorities saw fit to give him bail, whereas my constituent has been refused bail. Therefore, it appears that my constituent is being refused bail simply because he is a foreigner. From what I have been told by his legal advisers, there is a strong indication that he has not been treated as innocent until proven guilty, the concept that is supposed to underlie the Portuguese legal system.

My constituent was arrested in April 1997 and held for a year before charges were made. That is in accord with the Portuguese legal code; a person can be held for 12 months before charges are made. In this case, my constituent was charged on the 365th day. In such a situation, it becomes very difficult for defence lawyers because they are not able in that 12-month period to see

[Mr. Michael Clapham]

prosecution evidence. Therefore, they are unable to mount—this was true of the lawyers in this case—a substantial challenge against a refusal of bail.

In this case, there have been five applications for bail, and five appeals have been rejected. My constituent's applications were accompanied on each occasion, I understand, by a statement from his doctors pointing out that he should be released on bail or on house arrest for health reasons. The prison doctor service has rejected that evidence. I am told by my constituent's legal advisers that it did so without even giving him a cursory medical examination. The medical evidence has just been disregarded.

No evidence has been provided by the Portuguese authorities that my constituent is violent, that he would be likely to flee the country if given bail or that he would interfere with the investigation. Those tend to be the reasons why a judge would decide against giving bail, but my constituent is not of that nature. It would seem, therefore, that there is no good reason to refuse him bail.

My constituent has already surrendered his passport, I am told. He has offered sureties and agreed to report frequently to a police station if given bail. Additionally, he has a genuine, long-standing relationship with a Portuguese woman, so he has every reason to remain behind to see this thing through. Therefore, there is no reason why he should have been refused bail.

As a result of the difficult situation that my constituent has been put in, he has become so frustrated that he has started the process of making a complaint to the European Commission of Human Rights, with the help of his legal advisers, Gudrun Parasie of the European legal advice service and Edward Fitzgerald QC. Those violations of my constituent's basic human rights seem to be legal in Portugal because, according to its penal code, a person can be held for a year, with no charges made until the 365th day, and there is no way in which his defence can have sight of prosecution documents. That tends to suggest a violation of human rights. I understand that it is on that aspect that the complaint will be made.

It seems that the contradiction within the Portuguese legal code comes about because of an outdated system, which needs to be thoroughly reviewed. I understand that it has been in place since the days of Salazar. One can understand why such a legal system operated in the days of that dictatorship, but it needs to be reviewed and brought into accord with the rest of Europe.

I am told that, although the Portuguese authorities have had a year to prepare their case, the documentation that has now become available has been shabbily put together, and there appears to have been a complete mix up. The prosecution evidence refers to no fewer than three individuals called David Lowery. What appears to have happened is that the Portuguese police asked Interpol and other police services for information on David Lowery without providing a date of birth. Consequently, the documents refer to three separate individuals. That does not inspire confidence that justice will be done.

I reiterate that, based on the information available, it appears that Professor Lowery is being discriminated against and that bail is being disallowed simply because he is a foreigner. When one bears in mind the mix up in the prosecution documentation, one fears that justice will not be done. It is all the worse for Professor Lowery because his health is failing. He is 54 years of age and the conditions in Portuguese prisons are notoriously bad. His family went out to visit him at the bank holiday and they are most concerned about him, although he has been seen by a doctor. They feel that his health is beginning to fail.

I am advised that the death rate in Portuguese prisons is 125 times the national average. The average age of prisoners is 30 and Professor Lowery is 54. Bearing in mind the conditions and the death rate in Portuguese prisons, and the age of Professor Lowery and the fact that he has a health problem, it is obvious why his family are extremely concerned.

Recently, the Portuguese newspaper *Público* likened a prison sentence in Portugal to a death sentence. That gives some indication of the severe and harsh conditions in Portuguese prisons. The case has attracted a great deal of attention because of the human rights violations that seem to be built into the Portuguese penal code, such as the right to hold a person for a year without bringing charges. A prominent English QC has written a 17-page report listing the human rights violations in this case alone.

In conclusion, Professor Lowery is 54 years of age. He is not very robust and his family feel that if he has to wait more years in prison, his health may fail. Therefore, I should be pleased if my hon. Friend did his utmost to raise the case of my constituent as a matter of urgency with his Portuguese counterpart, with a view to pressing for either bail or house arrest. Although house arrest would confine him to his home, he would be in an environment in which his health was not in jeopardy, as it is now. He could remain there until his case was dealt with.

9.49 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Derek Fatchett): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham) for bringing Professor Lowery's case to the attention of the House. I should like to respond by explaining some of the background detail in the case, the way in which the Foreign Office has supported Professor Lowery, and, specifically, the role in it played by our embassy and consular staff.

I tell my hon. Friend that the Government are committed—as any United Kingdom Government would be—to supporting and helping all British nationals who are detained in overseas prisons. We shall ensure that we meet that broad commitment in the case of my hon. Friend's constituent, Professor Lowery.

The House might find it useful if I were to give some of the background to Professor Lowery's case. Although my hon. Friend briefly mentioned some of the points, hon. Members may gain a greater understanding of the case if I provide that background.

Professor Lowery was working in Portugal as the director of a company involved in buying and selling stocks and shares, collecting commercial information and conducting telemarketing. The company was called Paramount Portugal Consultadoria Commercial Limitada, and was established with the majority of the initial capital provided by Paramount Securities and Trust SA, of Switzerland, and the remainder by Professor Lowery himself.

As my hon. Friend said, Professor Lowery was arrested on 22 April 1997, following complaints received by the Portuguese authorities from one or more investors in Ireland that share certificates marketed by Professor Lowery's company had been forged and were valueless. Professor Lowery was then detained in Caxias prison, pending police investigations into the complaints against him and the company.

Remand custody may be applied only if bail is considered inadequate, if there is a strong indication that a crime punishable with a maximum term of imprisonment of more than three years has been committed, and if the court considers that there is a danger that the defendant might flee. My hon. Friend has made some points on those criteria, but the court decided that, in this case, Professor Lowery came within some of those criteria. He was consequently held in detention without bail.

It might be useful if I were to explain some of the aspects of the Portuguese criminal procedural code. The code limits the length of custody on remand to six months, to allow the authorities to investigate accusations. The term can be increased to 12 months when the process is exceptionally complex because of the number of defendants, the number of plaintiffs or the highly organised nature of the alleged crime. The period can be lengthened also if crimes such as forgery of currency or credit instruments fraud are involved.

As my hon. Friend said, Professor Lowery was formally charged, in accordance with Portuguese law, on 21 April 1998. He was charged with criminal association, falsification of titles of credit, aggravated fraud and misuse of computerised data.

My hon. Friend may wish to know that the British embassy in Lisbon became aware of Professor Lowery's detention on 9 May 1997. The Portuguese authorities confirmed his arrest with the embassy on the same day. I am happy to report that consular staff sought immediate access, and visited Professor Lowery on 13 May. I can therefore tell my hon. Friend that—despite the points that he has made on legal procedures in Portugal and the nature of Portuguese law—consular staff were quick to respond as soon as they had information that Professor Lowery had been detained.

As my hon. Friend rightly said, it is now the responsibility of the Portuguese authorities to set a date for Professor Lowery's trial. Under Portuguese law, the maximum time that any prisoner can be held on remand is four years in total. In this case, that will include the time that Professor Lowery spent on remand before being charged.

That is the some of the background to the case. I am sure that hon. Members who are familiar with our consular role will be interested to know how we have responded to Professor Lowery's case. The job of our consular staff is to ensure that British prisoners overseas receive the same treatment as other prisoners, that they have proper and full access to a lawyer, that they have information about the legal and prison systems and that any medical problems are dealt with quickly. Moreover, if we learn of a justified and serious complaint about ill treatment, we take it up vigorously with the police or prison authorities. We are concerned that all British nationals who are detained overseas are dealt with in accordance with local laws; we take appropriate measures to ensure that they are.

As I have now answered a number of Adjournment debates on consular cases, I can tell my hon. Friend that we have responsibility—which we carry out—for looking after the well-being of British citizens in prison overseas and for ensuring that they receive their full rights in the context of the local law. However, as the UK Government, we cannot interfere with a country's legal system—in this case, the country is another member of the European Union.

It is crucial that we understand that the role of the consular service is to safeguard the welfare of British prisoners overseas. Our consular staff in Portugal aim to visit British prisoners on a regular basis. Consular staff in Lisbon have visited Professor Lowery four times since his arrest on 22 April 1997, most recently on 14 April this year. The ambassador in Lisbon has also agreed to visit Professor Lowery in prison; he will be in contact with him in the very near future about the proposed timing.

My hon. Friend referred to my recent visit to Lisbon. Unfortunately, because of the programme—I was there to visit Expo 98—I was unable to arrange to meet the Portuguese Foreign Minister, but I took the opportunity to express again to our ambassador in Lisbon the interest of my hon. Friend and other hon. Members in Professor Lowery's case. I know that the ambassador is keeping a close eye on the case, as is shown by the fact that he will visit Professor Lowery in prison, largely as a result of the excellent representation that my hon. Friend has made for his constituent; the embassy's commitment and interest are demonstrated by the fact that it is rare for an ambassador to pay a prison visit.

Since Professor Lowery's arrest, our consular staff in Lisbon have maintained close contact with the prison authorities and with Professor Lowery's legal representatives. I understand that Professor Lowery is in close contact with his family and is visited regularly by his friends. If he wants our consular staff at any time to pass on any information to his family, they will be glad to do so.

My hon. Friend talked about Professor Lowery's health, and we fully understand the problems. We know that Professor Lowery suffers from high blood pressure; he told our consular staff when they visited him on 20 January this year that he had developed two lumps in his throat and had seen a private doctor. Since being informed of that development, our consular staff in Lisbon have pressed the prison authorities vigorously to ensure that Professor Lowery receives the medical attention that he needs and deserves.

The ambassador in Lisbon has written to the Minister of Justice on three occasions about Professor Lowery's health. Professor Lowery has now been seen by a specialist; he has also undergone tests in a private clinic outside the prison. He has been seen at the prison on a number of occasions by his own doctor, and he has also been seen by a dentist. The ambassador also wrote to the Minister of Justice on 17 February—on a humanitarian,

[Mr. Derek Fatchett]

rather than a legal, basis—to express concern at the length of time that Professor Lowery had been detained without charge.

I hope that all those points will convey to my hon. Friend that the consular staff and the ambassador have been extremely busy and fully involved. The consular staff will continue to monitor Professor Lowery's case and to do all that they appropriately can to help.

Professor Lowery's case has to remain a matter for the Portuguese legal system. That is how such cases are dealt with. It is not right or proper for us to try to interfere in that process, as I am sure my hon. Friend will understand. The legal system is independent of the Government in the Portuguese system, so the question of bail or release is for that system. The role of the Foreign Office and our consular staff is to ensure that Professor Lowery gets all his rights.

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Ms Bridget Prentice.]*

Mr. Fatchett: We will ensure that Professor Lowery receives all the support that he can from consular staff. If my hon. Friend feels that the professor's rights are being violated and that the embassy could help him, will he please let us know?

We heard what my hon. Friend said about possible legal action under human rights charters of the European Union, and we will be interested to see how that proceeds. We understand his concern, and will continue to take an interest in the case and do what we can to assist his constituent. We understand in particular the concerns about Professor Lowery's health and the prison conditions, and I assure my hon. Friend that the Foreign Office and our consular staff in Lisbon will be vigilant.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at one minute past Ten o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 1 June 1998

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Better Regulation Task Force

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many civil servants work in the Better Regulation Department; and how many of them previously worked in the Deregulation Unit. [43732]

Dr. David Clark: Currently, 40 civil servants work in the Better Regulation Unit. This number includes 17 civil servants who previously worked in the Deregulation Unit.

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many members of the Better Regulation Task Force are representatives of *(a)* business, *(b)* enforcement agencies and *(c)* consumer and other non-Government organisations; and if he will publish a comparable breakdown for the composition of the Deregulation Task Force in April 1997. [43625]

Dr. David Clark: I appointed 15 members of the Better Regulation Task Force in September 1997 and one further member in February 1998.

Members of the Task Force are appointed for their experience in different areas of regulation. They should not be categorised as business, enforcement or consumer representatives. A number of those with business backgrounds are active in the voluntary sector or with non-government organisations. Ten members come from a business background, and in line with our manifesto commitment, eight of these are drawn from the small business community. Two members come from the enforcement community and four have a consumer or a non-governmental organisation background.

The Deregulation Task Force had 11 members in April 1997. Of those all came from a business background except one from the voluntary sector.

Standards in Public Life

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the Government's response to the fourth report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life. [44072]

Dr. David Clark: The Government welcomed the Committee on Standards' Fourth Report, which reviewed progress on the implementation of the Committee's First and Second Reports. Government have prepared an Action Plan setting out the work to take forward the observations made by the Committee. My right hon. Friend, the Prime Minister, has sent this to Lord Neill, and copies have been placed in the libraries of the House. The Action Plan is also available on the Cabinet Office website, on www.open.gov.uk/co/cohome.htm.

Consultation Papers

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the consultation papers published since 1 May 1997 giving the date of publication, closing date for submissions and the number of respondents. [42247]

Mr. Kilfoyle: The table gives the details for all consultation papers published to the private sector or members of the public since 1 May 1997 by the Office of Public Service and its agencies, and the Central Office for Information.

Consultation paper title	*Publication date*	*Closing date for submissions*	*Number of respondents*
The Citizen's Charter—A Consultation Exercise	16 September 1997	21 November 1997	274
Local Charter Guide: A Consultation Exercise	20 October 1997	30 January 1998	116
Opening Up Quangos—A Consultation Paper	11 November 1997	31 December 1997	405
Your Right to Know—Freedom of Information (White Paper—Cm 3818)	11 December 1997	28 February 1998	557
Crown Copyright in the Information Age: A Consultation Paper on Access to Public Sector Information (Cm 3819)	19 January 1998	31 March 1998	70

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Marine Conservation

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what arrangements are being made to ensure that the management groups for candidate marine special areas of conservation incorporate the views of the advisory groups in developing their conservation objectives and management schemes. [42617]

Angela Eagle: The nature conservation agencies are responsible for advising relevant authorities as to the conservation objectives of such sites. Relevant authorities have the statutory responsibility for establishing management schemes. The Government consider that it is essential that owners and occupiers, rightholders, local interests, user groups and conservation groups, in the form of an advisory group, should all be encouraged to participate in the process of implementing the objectives and developing the scheme at the earliest opportunity. Relevant authorities should consult widely and regular cycles of meetings should be established, the frequency of which would be dependent on the particular needs of each site. This advice will be contained in a guidance document to be published very shortly. The formation of advisory groups is at various stages among the marine sites.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many and which of the United Kingdom's candidate marine special areas of conservation have begun to draft (i) conservation objectives and (ii) management schemes. [42618]

Angela Eagle: The Government's nature conservation bodies, whose duty is to advise relevant authorities of an SAC's nature conservation objectives, have undertaken a considerable amount of work in preparing the way for drafting objectives, and some sites have a draft in preparation. The statutory requirement for a management scheme does not arise until sites are agreed as Sites of Community Interest. However, we are encouraging relevant authorities to establish shadow schemes in anticipation of the formal requirement. I will write to my hon. Friend shortly explaining more fully the position on each of the sites in the UK.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many and which of the United Kingdom's candidate marine special areas of conservation have established management and advisory groups. [42622]

Angela Eagle: Establishing advisory groups is dependent on having a management group in place so, while many of the sites now have a management group established, the advisory groups are at different stages of formation. I will write to my hon. Friend shortly, setting out the position on each of the marine sites.

Public Appointments

Jackie Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when his Department's action plan for increasing the number of women holding public appointments will be published; and if he will place a copy in the Library. [42837]

Angela Eagle: My Department's action plan will be published as soon as possible. Copies will be placed in the Library of the House at that time.

Public Bodies

Jackie Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what is the average attendance fee of *(a)* male and *(b)* female members of boards of non-departmental public bodies responsible to his Department; [42836]

(2) what is the average salary of *(a)* male and *(b)* female members of boards of non-departmental public bodies responsible to his Department. [42835]

Angela Eagle: Some board members of non-departmental public bodies give their time and services voluntarily and receive no payment other than normal travel and subsistence expenses. Where members do receive remuneration, this can be an annual salary or an attendance fee. Individuals' remuneration therefore is not directly comparable. Full details of all payments to board members of non-departmental bodies, by gender, are given in the Cabinet Office publication "Public Bodies". Copies of "Public Bodies 1997" are available in the Library of the House.

Deaf and Blind Pedestrians

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) if he will support proposals to inform each person who passes the driving test that pedestrians carrying red and white striped canes are both deaf and blind; [42802]

(2) if he will take steps to promote awareness amongst drivers of motor vehicles that a pedestrian carrying a red and white striped cane is both deaf and blind. [42801]

Ms Glenda Jackson: General guidance on consideration for vulnerable road users is published in the Highway Code and driving test manuals. Rule 64 of the Highway Code advises drivers to be aware of blind and partially sighted people. Particular attention is drawn to deafblind people who may be using red and white striped canes.

Structural Funds

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the scope and nature of his responsibilities in relation to the review of European structural funds in respect of Wales, indicating the timetable for action by his Department. [42472]

Angela Eagle: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to him by my hon. Friend, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on 21 May 1998, *Official Report*, columns *543–44*.

Accident Inquiries

Maria Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what percentage of public money disbursed to assist families and relatives of victims was provided *(a)* to individual victims and families, *(b)* to family support groups and *(c)* collectively in respect of the (i) Piper Alpha disaster, (ii) King's Cross fire, (iii) Marchioness disaster, (iv) Clapham rail crash and (v) MV Derbyshire, (first public inquiry); and by what method the allocations were determined; [42982]

(2) what provisions were made out of public funds in respect of costs to *(a)* commission expert evidence and *(b)* challenge expert evidence put by another party at the public inquiries into the (i) Piper Alpha disaster, (ii) King's Cross fire, (iii) 'Marchioness' disaster, (iv) Clapham rail crash and (v) loss of the MV 'Derbyshire' (first inquiry); what was the outturn cost to public funds of such assistance for each inquiry; and how were costs agreed, verified and disbursed. [42980]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I regret that the information requested is not obtainable except at disproportionate cost.

Millennium Compliance

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions to what extent the additional costs to local authorities of millennium compliance were built into the 1998–99 local government finance system. [43084]

Angela Eagle: The 1998–99 local government finance settlement took into account the Local Government Association's estimate of a spending pressure on English local authorities in the current financial year of £100 million for the costs of preparing for millennium computer compliance. The preliminary indication of the amount councils have budgeted in 1998–99 on

millennium compliance, based on budget returns submitted to the Department by local authorities, is between £60 million and £70 million.

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the additional costs to local authorities of ensuring that IT and embedded systems are millennium compliant. [43085]

Angela Eagle: The Local Government Association estimated the total additional costs to local authorities in preparing for millennium compliance in its paper for the Department on cost pressures facing local authorities in England ih 1998–99. Their estimate of £100 million for the current financial year was taken into account in the 1998–99 local government finance settlement. The Association has again highlighted the cost pressures faced by councils during preliminary discussions between officials on pressures in 1999–2000, and we will again be taking its estimate into account in the settlement for the coming financial year.

Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will review the *(a)* membership, *(b)* remit, *(c)* scope and *(d)* operation of the Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment. [42988]

Angela Eagle: A five-yearly Finance, Management and Policy Review of ACRE is currently under way and will be reporting shortly. The term of office of current ACRE members expires in June 1999. The process for reviewing membership, remit, scope and operation of the Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment is set out in the *DETR Non-Departmental Public Bodies Sponsorship Handbook*, a copy of which is in the House of Commons Library.

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the procedure for appointing members to the Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment. [42987]

Angela Eagle: The procedures for appointing ACRE or any other Non-Departmental Public Body are set out in the *DETR Non-Departmental Public Bodies Sponsorship Handbook*, a copy of which is in the House of Commons Library. Members of ACRE are appointed by the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions following agreement by the Secretary of State for Scotland, the Secretary of State for Wales and the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Genetically Modified Organisms

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to the answer of 30 April 1998, *Official Report*, column *179*, how many of the consents for the release of the GMOs were under *(a)* standard, *(b)* stream-lined, *(c)* fast-track and *(d)* any other procedures. [42990]

Angela Eagle: The 147 consents issued to date comprised of 56 Standard, 36 Stream-lined and 55 Fast-track applications. The terms 'Standard', 'Stream-lined' and 'Fast track' refer to different administrative procedures used to process consent applications under the Genetically Modified Organisms (Deliberate Release) Regulations 1992 (amended 1995 and 1997). The amount of information required to consider an application is the same in each case. The stream-lined procedure has not been used since 1995, but when operational it allowed the Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment to provide expert advice by post rather than at a meeting.

Of the Standard and Fast-track applications, since 8 March 1995, 41 were dealt with under the First-Simplified Procedure. The First Simplified Procedure takes account of European Commission Decision 94/730/EC which enables a single release consent to cover a programme of work over a number of years. The provisions of the First Simplified Procedure, the criteria for qualification and the duty of the consent holder are published in DOE/ACRE Guidance Note 7 Guidance to the Genetically Modified Organisms (Deliberate Release) Regulations 1995. A copy of this has been placed in the House of Commons Library.

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions under which procedure GMO release consent 95/R13/6 was granted. [42991]

Angela Eagle: The application was processed as a standard application and granted a consent under the procedure laid down in Commission Decision 94/730/EC (the First Simplified Procedure).

The provisions of the First Simplified Procedure, the criteria for qualification and the duty of the consent holder are published in DOE/ACRE Guidance Note 7 "Guidance to the Genetically Modified Organisms (Deliberate Release) Regulations 1995". This has been placed in the House of Commons Library.

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions for what reasons his Department does not require the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and its contractors to apply for release consents under Part VI of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 in respect of national list trials of genetically-modified seeds. [42992]

Angela Eagle: The holder of a consent to conduct experimental trials under our deliberate release regulations may delegate third parties to conduct releases on their behalf. In all cases, the consent holder is legally responsible for ensuring that the trial is carried out in accordance with the conditions and limitations of their consent.

MAFF-PVRO (Plant Variety Rights Office) undertake statutory tests and trials on plant varieties in respect of applications for plant breeder's rights or addition to the National List. MAFF-PVRO will not allow genetically modified plant material to enter trials unless the material is covered by a consent issued to the plant breeder by the Secretary of State under the Genetically Modified Organisms (Deliberate Release) Regulations 1992 (as amended in 1995 and 1997) and the trials can comply with any conditions attached to the consent.

When an application for release is made, the applicant is required to supply information on the name, qualifications and experience of the scientist and every

other person who will be responsible for planning and carrying out the release of the genetically modified organism and for supervision and safety of the release. This includes applications for consent to release material into National List trials.

Energy Efficiency (Domestic Appliances)

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he is taking to encourage the purchase of energy-efficient domestic appliances; and what contribution he estimates this encouragement will make to reducing carbon dioxide emissions. [43038]

Angela Eagle: My Department supports and is developing a range of measures at European and national levels, including mandatory energy labelling, promotional initiatives, negotiated agreements with manufacturers to encourage the increased availability and purchase of energy efficient domestic appliances and lighting. Estimating the impact of such measures is complicated but some experts put the potential UK savings from an integrated programme of measures to be as high as 2 million tonnes of carbon emissions. In April my Department launched a series of published discussion papers and formal consultation rounds, starting with the lighting sector, as part of a market transformation strategy to build a consensus on what practical and acceptable measures could deliver those savings.

My Department also promotes the installation of energy saving measures by means of grants provided under the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme and "cashbacks" under the range of schemes developed and managed by the Energy Saving Trust.

My Department has also contributed to and supported promotional campaigns aimed at encouraging consumers to purchase energy efficient appliances, including, most recently, the Energy Saving Trust's "Energy Efficiency" programme.

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will introduce legislation to require minimum standards of energy efficiency for domestic appliances. [43037]

Angela Eagle: Legislation has already been introduced to set minimum standards of energy efficiency for central heating boilers, which came fully into effect on 1 January 1998, and for domestic refrigeration appliances, which will come into force on 3 September 1999, to enforce European Directives applying to these products. There are no immediate plans for further legislation. However, my Department is pressing the Commission to develop an action plan of common and co-ordinated measures, as part of its response to the legally binding Kyoto climate change targets, which could include measures to require manufacturers of domestic appliances to improve the energy efficiency of their products.

Heathrow Airport

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received on plans for a sixth terminal at Heathrow Airport. [43144]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Government are not aware of any plans for a sixth terminal at Heathrow Airport. Nor have we received any representations on plans for a sixth terminal.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how the costs of the Terminal 5 inquiry incurred by BAA are being treated *(a)* for tax purposes and *(b)* under the Civil Aviation Authority's regulatory regime. [43145]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The treatment for tax purposes of the costs of the Heathrow Terminal 5 Inquiry is a matter for BAA plc. Under the CAA's regulatory regime, the costs estimated as being incurred during the current quinquennium (1997–98 to 2001–02) are included in the total allowable investment costs which are taken into account in calculating the cap imposed by the CAA on the charges to airlines levied by BAA. The cap will however be reviewed by the CAA before the end of the quinquennium if Terminal 5 does not go ahead, or if, for reasons connected to the planning permission granted, it proceeds on a significantly different scale.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will review the Monopolies and Mergers Commission decision to accept BAA's figures on expenditure on Terminal 5 at Heathrow, allowing BAA to keep profits to pay for Terminal 5; and if he will make a statement. [43442]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Civil Aviation Authority determined, on the basis of recommendations from the Monopolies and Mergers Commission, that the calculation of the price cap to be applied to BAA plc's London Airports for the period 1997–98 to 2001–02 should take into account the costs estimated as being incurred in the planning of Terminal 5 at Heathrow. The Government have no power to instruct the CAA to reopen its decision, nor has the CAA the power to do so unilaterally. However, with BAA's agreement, the price cap is to be reviewed by the CAA before the end of the five-year period if Terminal 5 does not go ahead, or if, for reasons connected to the planning permission granted, it proceeds on a significantly different scale.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will ensure that the consortium of local authorities opposing Terminal 5 at Heathrow are able to make closing submissions to the inquiry. [43455]

Mr. Caborn: It has been a long established feature of planning inquiries that the main parties make closing submissions and meet their own costs. It is for the Local Authorities Against Heathrow Terminal 5 (LAHT5) Group to decide how much they wish to allocate for this purpose.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions which employees of his Department appeared as expert witnesses for BAA at the public inquiry into Terminal 5 at Heathrow. [43452]

Ms Glenda Jackson: None. However, I understand that a number of independent consultants and National Air Traffic Service (NATS) Ltd. employees have appeared as expert witnesses for both the Department and BAA on various matters.

Housebuilding (West Sussex)

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Worthing, East and Shoreham (Mr. Loughton) of 5 May 1998, *Official Report*, column *311*, if he will list the petitions he has received objecting to new house building in West Sussex, indicating the number of signatures on each petition. [43147]

Mr. Raynsford: Two petitions have been received. One from residents of Mid Sussex district with about 9,700 signatures and the other from residents of the Horsham district area with some 14,000 signatures.

Mr. Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 5 May 1998, *Official Report*, column *311*, if the number of 3,000 objections includes *(a)* petitions and *(b)* multiple signature letters; and if he will publish the number of individuals who have raised objections with him. [43616]

Mr. Raynsford: The number of 3,000 objections includes: *(a)* 718 postcards in response to a campaign sponsored by the CPRE Sussex Branch and about 1,100 responses to a campaign organised by a local newspaper; and *(b)* about 1,100 letters some of which are signed by more than one member of a household.

Microbiological Contamination

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to issue guidelines to those authorities seeking to remove microbiological contamination from brownfield sites on which micro-organisms have been identified as contaminated. [43139]

Angela Eagle: The Department has no plans to issue guidelines on microbiological contamination.

Chemical Pollution

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what research he has commissioned to determine the effects of low levels of *(a)* PCBs, *(b)* organic chemicals, *(c)* dioxins and *(d)* radon on the health of communities. [43136]

Angela Eagle:

(a) PCBs and (c) Dioxins

The toxicity of both dioxins and PCBs has been reviewed by the Department of Health's advisory Committee on the Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment (COT). COT has recommended that a tolerable daily intake (TDI) of 10 picograms per kilogram of body weight should be employed to assess the health risks of combinations of dioxins and dioxin-like PCBs. A recent MAFF survey showed that for UK adults dietary intakes of dioxins and PCBs are declining and are below the TDI recommended by COT. My Department, together with MAFF, Department of Health and HSE are supporting further research on infant exposure to dioxins, PCBs and other organic chemicals via human milk.

Research on potential health effects of exposure to a wider range of environmental chemicals is funded through several joint programmes by Government Departments, Agencies and industry. Plans are already underway to look at the health effects of chemicals in the environment and to investigate the effects of potential endocrine disrupting chemicals on male reproductive health. The Government also support the work of the Small Area Health Statistics Unit, based at Imperial College of Science and Technology in London, which examines the possible relationship between human health and environmental contamination from point and small area sources.

(d) Radon

A study of lung cancer and radon gas in the home has been carried out by the Imperial Cancer Research Fund (ICRF). The study was partly funded by my Department, the Department of Health, the National Radiological Protection Board and ICRF. The results of the study were announced on 19 May 1998, and will be published in the July edition of the British Journal of Cancer.

(b) Organic Chemicals

The Expert Panel on Air Quality Standards (EPAQs) has recommended air quality standards for benzene and 1,3 butadiene. These standards, of 5 parts per billion for benzene and 1 part per billion for 1,3 butadiene, both as a running annual averages, have been adopted in the Government's National Air Quality Strategy. Last year the Government prescribed a national objective for these standards to be achieved by the end of 2005.

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will introduce universal standards for the assessment of organic chemical and gas pollution levels before building permission is granted on brownfield sites. [43135]

Angela Eagle: The potential risks arising from contamination of land can be fully assessed only on a site-specific basis. The risks which might be caused by any given level of contamination will vary greatly from site to site, depending on the proposed land use, the details of design and construction of any proposed buildings, and variability in the underlying soil and geology of the site. This means that it is not practical to create universal standards, expressed in terms of mandatory limit values for different contaminants.

However, my Department is developing a new framework for indicative soil guideline values to assist in the site-specific assessment of potential risks to human health. I expect to be able to publish the first output from this programme in the Autumn.

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to inform potential home buyers of local levels of *(a)* radon, *(b)* PCBs, *(c)* organic chemicals and *(d)* dioxin levels. [43134]

Angela Eagle: The information is as follows.

(a) Radon

The maps published by the National Radiological Protection Board in 1996, based on 5 km ordnance survey grid squares, showing the percentage probability of homes

being above the radon "Action Level" (the level above which we recommend that remedial action should be taken) allow householders and their advisers to identify the areas where radon is most likely to be found.

(b) PCBs and (d) Dioxins

There are no plans to specifically inform home buyers of local levels of dioxins and PCBs since all monitoring data is in the public domain. Most of the processes with the potential to produce dioxins are controlled under the Environmental Protection Act (1990) and are regulated by the Environment Agency and Local Authorities. Information on authorisations and the associated monitoring data are maintained on public registers and are available for public scrutiny. Information on airborne concentrations of PCBs measured in the national network is published in periodic reports and is on the Department's Internet site.

(c) Organic Chemicals

Real time information on airborne concentrations of benzene and 1,3 butadiene are available on television text services, the Internet and a freephone. Information on other organic chemicals monitored in the national network are published annually and are available on the Department's Internet site:
http://www.environment.detr.gov.uk/airq/aqinfo.htm

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has made to identify the location of areas with high levels of *(a)* dioxins, *(b)* PCBs, *(c)* radon and *(d)* organic chemicals. [43133]

Angela Eagle: The information is as follows.

(a) Dioxins and (b) PCBs

Dioxins and PCBs are ubiquitous pollutants which are found at low levels in the environment across the country. Small areas of elevated dioxin levels may be detected in the vicinity of processes which produce these chemicals as unwanted by-products. The Environment Agency (and formerly Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Pollution) have identified those processes with the potential to produce dioxins in order to regulate their emissions. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) has, since 1993, analysed for dioxins in samples of cows' milk collected from individual farms in the vicinity of potential industrial sources of these chemicals. Samples collected since 1994 have also been analysed for polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs); all results have been published.

Polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) have not been manufactured in the UK since the late 1970s and their sole remaining use is sealed inside some electrical equipment. Their presence in the environment is likely to be due to historical uses. However, my Department and the Environment Agency are supporting research to identify the main sources of PCBs for human exposure.

(c) Radon

Since 1987 my Department has funded a programme to identify the areas of England affected by radon, and to offer free radon measurements to householders in the most affected areas. Similar programmes are undertaken in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, and are the responsibilities of the respective Secretaries of State. In 1996, as a result of this programme, the National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB) published maps of England, based on 5 km ordnance survey grid squares, showing the percentage probability of homes being above the radon "Action Level" (the level above which we recommend that remedial action should be taken). In January of this year, invitations for free measurement were issued in order to complete a two-year programme to offer such measurements to every home in England with a greater than 5 per cent. probability of being above the Action Level.

(d) Organic Chemicals

My Department has funded the continuous real time measurement of 25 organic chemicals in the air since 1993. The compounds measured have been selected because of their photochemical oxidant formation potential and possible health impacts. There are 13 sites in the network, including roadside, urban background and rural locations. Results of the monitoring are published annually in the Department's Digest of Environmental Statistics, and are available on the Department's Internet site. In addition my Department has recently begun work to investigate the levels of benzene in the vicinity of petrol stations.

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he is taking to detect background levels of *(a)* PCBs, *(b)* radon, *(c)* organic chemicals and *(d)* dioxins; and if he will publish them. [43138]

Angela Eagle: The information is as follows.

(a) PCBs and (d) Dioxins

Work is already underway to establish background levels of dioxins and PCBs in air, soil and foods. The Environment Agency is continually reviewing levels of these chemicals in the environment and reports findings to the public. The last comprehensive survey of dioxins in UK soils was published by HM Inspectorate of Pollution in 1989. PCBs were not included in this survey. The Environment Agency is planning to carry out further background work on soils. Monitoring for dioxins and PCBs in UK air is carried out through the Toxic Organic MicroPollutants (TOMPs) network. The network has been in operation since 1991 and currently collects samples from 3 urban and 3 rural sites. Results of these monitoring programmes are published annually in the Department's Digest of Environmental Statistics, and are available on the Department's Internet site. MAFF also monitors the levels of dioxins, PCBs and other organic chemicals in foodstuffs; all results are published.

(b) Radon

Since 1987 my Department has funded a programme to identify the areas of England affected by radon, and to offer free radon measurements to householders in the most affected areas. Similar programmes are undertaken in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, and are the responsibilities of the respective Secretaries of State. In 1996, as a result of this programme, the National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB) published maps of England, based on 5 km ordnance survey grid squares, showing the percentage probability of homes being above

the radon "Action Level" (the level above which we recommend that remedial action should be taken). In January of this year, invitations for free measurement were issued in order to complete a two-year programme to offer such measurements to every home in England with a greater than 5 per cent. probability of being above the Action Level.

(c) Organic Chemicals

My Department has funded the continuous real time measurement of 25 organic chemicals in the air since 1993. The compounds measured have been selected because of their photochemical oxidant formation potential and possible health impacts. There are 13 sites in the network, including roadside, urban background and rural locations. Results of the monitoring are published annually in the Department's Digest of Environmental Statistics, and are available on the Department's Internet site. In addition my Department has recently begun work to investigate the levels of benzene in the vicinity of petrol stations.

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he is taking to inform local authorities of various procedures and techniques available for brownfield site clean-up. [43137]

Angela Eagle: The Department has carried out research on remedial treatment for contaminated land in collaboration with various bodies and organisations and the results have been published for the use not only of local authorities but also developers and others interested in the subject. Partners in producing work have included the Construction Industry Research and Information Association, AEA Technology plc and BRE.

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what proposals his Department is evaluating for a high-speed direct rail link from the North West of England to Europe. [43146]

Ms Glenda Jackson: On 21 May my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister said that he had received revised proposals from London and Continental Railways on the Channel Tunnel Rail Link which are being discussed with the company. He will make a statement in due course.

Mediation UK

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions for what reasons his Department has decided to terminate its financial support for Mediation UK. [43195]

Angela Eagle: My Department made grants to Mediation UK amounting to £99,900 from the Environmental Action Fund (EAF) between April 1994 and March 1998. These grants helped Mediation UK establish, accredit and develop local mediation centres. In 1997 Mediation UK made an application for three more years of core support from the EAF. My Ministerial colleagues and I carefully considered this, along with all other applications. However there were vastly more high quality applications than we could possibly support, given the resources available for the Fund. Regretfully Mediation UK was one organisation to which we were not able to offer further assistance through the EAF in 1998–99.

Social Housing

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the investment needs of social housing providers over the next three years for *(a)* repair and refurbishment and *(b)* new build. [43197]

Mr. Raynsford: The Department makes annual assessments of local authorities' relative needs for investment through the Housing Investment Programme and the Housing Revenue Account Subsidy system. The need for investment in repair and refurbishment by Registered Social Landlords is a matter for the individual landlords who are largely responsible for meeting these costs from internal resources.

Future investment levels for social housing and the need for new build for social housing providers are being considered as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR). The Government's spending plans arising from the CSR will be announced later in the summer.

South Downs

Mr. Lepper: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects to receive the Countryside Commission's recommendations on the future management of the South Downs; and when he expects to make a decision on those recommendations. [42900]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 21 May 1998]:* The Countryside Commission intends to present its formal advice to Ministers on its work on the designated landscape areas, including the South Downs, by mid June. We will need to look at the Commission's recommendations very carefully, together with all the information available, before taking any final decisions. We hope to be able to announce our conclusions in the autumn.

Bicycles

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make it a legal requirement for the manufacturers and retailers of bicycles to provide machines with *(a)* fitted rear and front lights and *(b)* a bell or other audible warning device. [43312]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Issues concerning the fitment of bells and lights to pedal cycles were the subject of a recent public consultation exercise carried out by the Department. Various proposals were presented, including the mandatory fitment of bells and lights to new bicycles at the point of sale.

The views received are currently being analysed. When this process is complete, the Government will be in a better position to consider whether any change to the legislation in this area is necessary.

Refrigerants

Dr. Whitehead: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what

research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the environmental benefits of adopting HCs as the standard refrigerants; [43173]

(2) what alternative refrigerants to HFCs which produce lower greenhouse gas emissions and do not deplete the ozone layer his Department is currently evaluating. [43168]

Angela Eagle: Hydrocarbons (Hcs) are one of a number of refrigerants which can be used in some refrigeration systems as an alternative to ozone depleting substances and HFCs. The Government do not promote one refrigerant over another but encourage users to choose the safest, most environmentally acceptable and energy efficient system for each particular refrigerant application.

The DETR through its Energy Efficiency Best Practice Programme has carried out a small project investigating the energy efficiency benefits of HC refrigerants compared to HFCs and is also producing a guide on absorption refrigeration (refrigeration that is powered by waste heat). The programme also keeps abreast of developments in international collaborative research.

In addition there are a number of projects being looked at under DETR's Partners in Technology scheme and at the Buildings Research Establishment aimed at encouraging the use of natural ventilation, as opposed to use of refrigerant based air-conditioning systems. The main thrust of this work is improved energy efficiency, but the spin-off benefit is less use of refrigerants.

Dr. Whitehead: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimates he has made of the amount of CFCs released into the atmosphere annually as a result of the dumping of refrigerators in the United Kingdom. [43172]

Angela Eagle: Based on a study being carried out for my Department, the Government estimate that domestic refrigerators containing about 450 tonnes of CFC refrigerant are taken out of use each year. Around 300 tonnes of this may be emitted to the atmosphere, either from refrigerators that are not returned for recycling or from the residue of CFCs that remain in the refrigerator after the refrigerant has been recovered.

Dr. Whitehead: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to review the environmental impact of the use of HFC as substitutes for ozone-depleting gases in refrigeration equipment. [43171]

Angela Eagle: The Government are currently planning to fund some research this year to update our estimates of current and likely future emissions of HFCs from the UK. This work will include consideration of the use of HFCs in all sectors including the refrigeration sector.

Dr. Whitehead: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what percentage of the United Kingdom's greenhouse gas emissions he estimates HFCs will contribute in the year 2010. [43167]

Angela Eagle: The Government estimate that HFCs will contribute approximately 1% of total UK greenhouse gas emissions calculated in terms of the global warming contribution in 2010.

Unleaded Petrol

Ms Rosie Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is his estimate of the number of motor vehicles running on *(a)* leaded and *(b)* unleaded petrol in (i) 1997–98 and (ii) 1998–99. [43190]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The estimated number of vehicles (millions) is as follows:

	Year ending		
	1997	*1998*	*1999*
Total using leaded petrol	7.7	6.5	5.3
Requiring leaded petrol[1]	3.8	3.0	2.6
Total using unleaded petrol	14.2	15.4	16.5

[1] Number of vehicles included in the total using leaded petrol which require it for valve seat protection

Cleaner Vehicles Task Force

Ms Rosie Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will publish the terms of reference for the Cleaner Vehicles Task Force. [43191]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The aims of the Cleaner Vehicles Task Force were announced on 14 November 1997 in DETR Press Notice 274/Transport. Its overall aim is to create a new partnership between Government and the private sector to promote environmentally friendly vehicles people actually want to drive and buy. It specifically aims to:

- promote research and development that will keep Britain at the leading edge of cleaner vehicle technology;
- encourage people and business to buy greener vehicles and use them efficiently;
- consider the contribution that cleaner vehicle technology can make to meeting local air quality objectives, reducing noise and cutting carbon dioxide emissions to avoid global warming;
- increase the proportion of components that are reused or recycled; and
- focus on European action during Britain's Presidency of the Council of the EU.

Motor Vehicle Fraud

Ms Rosie Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to give the DVLA responsibilities in respect of combating motor vehicle fraud. [43192]

Ms Glenda Jackson: DVLA works closely with the police and the insurance and salvage industries to help combat motor vehicle theft and fraud. The Agency is currently investigating a range of further measures to improve its contribution to consumer protection.

Land Spreading

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects the results of the Environment Agency's review of land spreading to be published. [43467]

Angela Eagle: The research project on "Investigation Of The Criteria For, And Guidance On, The Landspreading Of Industrial Waste" was completed on 30 April and copies of the report have been placed in the

Library of the House. The report's findings are now under consideration by my Department and the Environment Agency and our conclusions will be announced in due course.

Sewage Treatment

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on Government policy on sewage treatment of water released into inland waters. [43547]

Angela Eagle: The Government require sewage discharges to inland waters to meet the requirements of the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive. This means that all relevant discharges to inland waters serving a population equivalent of 15,000 or more must receive at least secondary treatment by 2000. Those serving between 2000 and 15,000 population equivalent must reach this standard by 2005. Discharges below 2000 population equivalent must receive "appropriate treatment" by 2005. In fact the vast majority of discharges of all sizes to inland waters already receive at least secondary treatment.

Discharges to sensitive areas designated under the Directive must receive more stringent treatment, typically tertiary treatment to remove nutrients, by the end of 1998. The Government intend to set out more fully its policy on this and related matters, first in its response to the second report of the Environment sub-committee of the House of Commons Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee, due shortly and, later in the summer, in guidance to the Director General of OFWAT on priorities for investment in environmental improvement within the current Periodic Review of water company price limits.

Domestic Water

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the role of recycled domestic waste water from baths and sinks in reducing water consumption. [43549]

Angela Eagle: A number of commercial systems are available which allow the re-use of rainwater and waste water from baths and sinks for WC flushing and external use. The Government continue to monitor the development of such systems and customer acceptability, but are supportive of the more widespread use of recycled water where it poses no threat to public health.

Older People

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what response he has made to the recommendations of Age Concern's report, "Disability Facilities, Grants and Older People". [43162]

Mr. Raynsford: We have assured Age Concern that the points raised in their report will be fully taken into account as we develop our policies on disabled facilities grants.

International Programme of Chemical Safety

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions for what reasons the report of July 1996 produced by international experts within the framework of the International Programme of Chemical Safety has remained confidential; if he will *(a)* publish it and *(b)* place it in the Library; and if he will make a statement on its conclusions in respect of the impact on public health of chrysolite. [43606]

Angela Eagle: The Government do not control, or have responsibility for, the publications of the International Programme for Chemical Safety (IPCS). IPCS is a joint venture of the United Nations Environment Programme, the International Labour Organisation and the World Health Organisation. It produced a draft Environmental Health Criteria document on chrysotile following a meeting of its Task Group held in July 1996. The final report is due to be published in Autumn 1998, following revisions and translations. It is not confidential, and details of the Health Evaluation, the Conclusions and the Recommendations are available either from the IPCS in Geneva or on the Internet. I shall arrange for the Library to obtain details of the draft report and to obtain a copy of the final report once it is published.

The draft report contains a number of conclusions which are consistent with current Government policy on asbestos.

Merchant Shipping

Mr. Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what action he plans to take to support the British merchant shipping industry, with particular reference to *(a)* encouraging investment and *(b)* increasing training. [43975]

Ms Glenda Jackson: My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister established a Shipping Working Group late last year to examine ways to promote the interests of British shipping and British seafarers. The Deputy Prime Minister is currently considering the recommendations of the Shipping Working Group. We have also introduced a new seafarer training support scheme—SMarT—which consolidates and expands on the previous training support schemes.

Trunk Roads (Greater London)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what trunk road construction is scheduled to commence in the Greater London area during 1998; and what is the total cost of the work. [43654]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Three construction schemes are planned to commence in 1998 in the Greater London area. These are as follows: the first two phases of the London Primary Route Signing scheme to replace some 4,800 primary route direction signs; the Greenwich Peninsula A102 (M) Access Improvements to the Millennium site; the M41 White City new access road for the shopping centre. The total cost of these works is £42 million, of which £19 million will be funded by developers.

Red Routes

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many miles of red route there are in the Greater London area. [43655]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I refer to the answer I gave my hon. Friend on 4 December 1997, *Official Report*, column *286*.

Disused Railway Land

Mrs. Ann Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to improve the consultative process conducted by British Railways Board prior to the selling off of disused railway land, including track bed and goods yards. [43614]

Ms Glenda Jackson: This is primarily a matter for the British Railways Board (BRB), which has held discussions with Railtrack, EWS and others about general sales and individual sites. BRB also routinely sends out auction brochures in advance to Railtrack, EWS, Freightliner, local authorities and a wide range of other interested parties.

BRB has held discussions with Railtrack about the disposal of former railway lines, as a result of which negotiations to transfer another six lengths have begun. Other closed lines are the subject of discussions about transfer to local authorities or railway preservation societies, or have been leased to Sustrans, the cycling charity, for the National Cycle Network (with the potential for future rail use preserved). That leaves BRB with about 70 miles of trackbed in more than 100 separate sites.

BRB welcomes approaches from railway businesses or other interested parties who wish to discuss general sales or individual sites.

National Cycle Network

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what progress is being made with regard to the proposed national cycle network; and what proposals he has for 1998–99 for the extension of cycle routes in the West Midlands Region. [43016]

Ms Glenda Jackson: My Department welcomes the initiative to develop the National Cycle Network being promoted by Sustrans. The Network is making good progress and now embraces about 600 miles. The first 3,000 miles are due for completion by the year 2000, well ahead of the original target of 2,500 miles.

In the West Midlands, the Millennium route runs from Stratford-on-Avon through Redditch, Bromsgrove, Birmingham, Sandwell, Walsall and on to Lichfield. This is due to be completed by Easter 2000.

Coventry City Council has been actively involved with the provision of routes for cyclists, in particular a north-south route which links the University of Warwick to the city centre. A number of transport packages in the region, including those for the metropolitan area, North Staffordshire, Worcester, Stafford and Warwick/Leamington/Kenilworth also incorporate a range of measures to encourage cycle use, including cycle routes.

Rough Sleepers Initiative

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how much has been allocated to tackling homelessness in the West Midlands under the Rough Sleepers Initiative since 1990. [43014]

Mr. Raynsford: Since 1996 the Rough Sleepers Initiative has been extended to 27 areas outside London. Following guidance issued by my Department three local authorities in the West Midlands carried out single night street counts of rough sleepers and found a significant problem. As a result, strategies to tackle rough sleeping were drawn up by the authorities in consultation with the voluntary sector and bids for funding were made to my Department. We have offered almost £200,000 in pump-priming funding in 1998–99 for outreach and resettlement services to four voluntary sector organisations working in Birmingham, Stoke on Trent, and Newcastle-under-Lyme.

Drink-driving

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many drink-driving accidents occurred in (i) 1994, (ii) 1995, (iii) 1996 and (iv) 1997. [43483]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The estimated number of accidents resulting in injury which involved illegal alcohol levels was:

1994: 9,900

1995: 10,180

1996: 10,850[1]

[1] Provisional data. 1997 figures are not yet available. All estimates are shown rounded to the nearest 10.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many drink-driving related deaths occurred in (i) 1994, (ii) 1995, (iii) 1996 and (iv) 1997. [43484]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The estimated number of fatalities in accidents which involved illegal alcohol levels was:

1994: 540

1995: 540

1996: 540[1]

[1] Provisional data. 1997 figures are not yet available. All estimates are shown rounded to the nearest 10.

Drug-related Road Accidents

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many non-alcohol-related road accidents involving drugs occurred in *(a)* 1994, *(b)* 1995, *(c)* 1996 and *(d)* 1997. [43479]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Data on non-alcohol-related accidents involving drugs are not routinely collected and the information requested is not available.

Town Centre Management

Mr. Michael J. Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will initiate a consultation exercise on town centre management. [43731]

Mr. Raynsford: Town Centre Management is essentially about creating local partnerships which involve all the key stakeholders. The Government support and encourage town centre management through advice in planning policy guidance, a guide on vital and viable town

centres and by publishing and distributing good practice guidance. We also support initiatives by the Association of Town Centre Management and the Civic Trust.

We have no proposal to initiate a consultation exercise.

Car Rear Lamps

Mr. Michael J. Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will amend the road vehicle lighting regulations to allow the use of red, rear LED lamps emitting a flashing light. [43679]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Road Vehicles Lighting Regulations 1989 as amended, prohibit vehicle lamps (apart from certain specified lamps) from automatically emitting a flashing light. LED lamps may be fitted to vehicles provided they show a steady light.

Research is being carried out to try to identify potential safety benefits associated with the use of flashing rear lamps, solely with regard to pedal cycles. This work is due to be completed in the first half of next year. In the light of the findings of this research programme the Department will consider whether any change to the Regulations is appropriate.

School Crossing Patrols

Mr. Michael J. Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received on amending the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, with particular reference to school crossing patrols. [43678]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The then Department of Transport issued a consultation document on review of road traffic regulation law in 1996. This contained a wide range of proposals for amending the 1984 Act. Over 400 responses were received. The Government are considering how to take matters forward in the various areas covered.

One of the subjects discussed in the consultation was school crossing patrols. In the light of the responses received, my right hon. Friend the Minister for Transport announced on 21 May that the Government propose, when a suitable legislative opportunity arises, to remove the current restrictions on the hours during which these can operate, and to ensure that school crossing patrols can escort any person across the road. They also propose to consult on a further amendment, that would enable crossing patrols to be provided at any location where the local traffic authority considered it desirable to do so in order to help any pedestrians to cross the road.

Duty Free

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what assessment he has made of the effect on air fares of the abolition of duty free in the first year after abolition; [43363]

(2) what assessment he has made of the effect on the viability of regional airports of the abolition of duty free in the first year after abolition. [43364]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 13 May 1998, *Official Report*, columns *117–18*.

Bear Hide Imports

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what regulations govern the import of the *(a)* hides and *(b)* trophies of (i) polar, (ii) brown, (iii) black and (iv) grizzly bears into the United Kingdom. [43211]

Angela Eagle: Import of these species into the United Kingdom is controlled under European Council Regulation No. 338/97, which implements the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora within the Community. The Regulation prohibits commercial imports of all products of the Brown bear, the Grizzly bear and the Asiatic Black bear. Import of personal effects and the commercial import of other bear species is regulated by a system of import and export permits which are subject to strict conservation criteria and may only be issued where certain conditions are met.

Circus Animals

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what regulations govern the use of endangered species in travelling circuses. [43212]

Angela Eagle: Under the terms of Council Regulation EC No. 338/97, which implements the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) within the Community, it is an offence to use for commercial gain, or display for commercial purposes, any of the species listed as endangered in Annex A of the Regulation unless this Department has issued a certificate for that purpose. This list includes many animals commonly found in travelling circuses, including tigers and elephants.

Road Accidents

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many motorists in England and Wales were involved in incidents involving fatal, serious and slight injury; and of these how many were found to have been disqualified from driving at the time of the incident, in the last year for which data are available. [43988]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The information requested regarding driver involvement is shown in the table. Data relating to the involvement of disqualified drivers in reported road accidents are not recorded on the national road accident database.

Number of motorists involved in road accidents, by severity in England and Wales: 1996

Drivers

Road user type	*Fatal*	*Serious*	*Slight*
Car drivers	3,411	41,309	265,128
Other motorists[1]	1,466	12,600	52,441

[1] Includes motorcyclists, goods vehicle and other motor vehicle drivers

Dr. Ladyman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many traffic accidents were recorded and in how many cases the driver

at fault was found to have blood alcohol levels *(a)* over 80 mg per 100 ml, *(b)* between 50 and 80 mg per 100 ml and *(c)* between 0 and 50 mg per 100 ml, in the last year for which figures are available. [43839]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The present accident reporting system does not identify whether a driver was at fault. However, some information on blood levels of drivers and motor cycle riders killed in road accidents is available from data supplied to the Department by Coroners in England and Wales and the Procurators Fiscal in Scotland. The table shows the percentage of drivers and motor cycle fatalities above given blood alcohol levels for a sample of 963 of the 1,612 riders and drivers who died in road accidents in 1995.

Blood alcohol levels	*Percentage of motor vehicle driver or rider fatalities*
Over 80 mg per 100 ml	19
Between 50 and 80 mg per 100 ml	2
Below 50 mg[1] per 100 ml	79

[1] Includes none.

Rights of Way

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will introduce measures to simplify the existing procedure for the diverting of rights of way. [43420]

Angela Eagle: We have no immediate plans to do so. The Countryside Commission is considering the operation and effectiveness of rights of way legislation and management, and intends to put recommendations to us in the near future.

Railways

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assistance his Department gives to *(a)* railway companies, *(b)* passenger transport executives and *(c)* local authorities for opening new railway lines and stations. [43419]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Department offers no assistance to train operating companies towards the cost of new railway lines or stations but train operators are free to contribute towards the cost if they wish to do so on a commercial basis. Last November, my right hon. Friend, the Minister of Transport announced new Objectives, Instructions and Guidance for the Franchising Director. These require him to offer local authorities (including Passenger Transport Authorities) and other potential promoters of railway investment, clear and well publicised guidance on securing finance for new projects and on how the benefits of these can be maximised. He also announced the interim criteria that the Franchising Director will use to appraise proposals to support new services which would not be commercially viable. Copies are available in the Library of the House. Capital resources are available to local authorities, including Passenger Transport Authorities, for local rail infrastructure proposals from the Department's local transport budget.

Housing Development

Mr. Tom King: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) if he will list the local planning authorities which have more than 10 years supply of land for new housing development; [43856]

(2) if he will list the local planning authorities which do not have a five-year supply of land for new housing development. [43855]

Mr. Raynsford: The information requested is not held centrally by the Department.

Mr. Tom King: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will estimate the impact of planned new housing development on the demand for construction aggregate during the period for which total numbers of new houses have been specified. [43826]

Mr. Raynsford: Aggregates demand forecasts undertaken to inform aggregates planning guidance issued by this Department cover all areas of demand, including housing. A forecast of demand will be undertaken during the review of this planning guidance which we intend to start later this year.

Mr. Tom King: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many dwellings could be accommodated on land already identified for new housing development in each English region. [43854]

Mr. Raynsford: The information requested is not held centrally by the Department, and could be compiled only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Tom King: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what guidance he has issued to local authorities on how to move away from a predict and provide approach to the planning of new housing development at a regional level. [43853]

Mr. Raynsford: Two pieces of guidance have been published by the Government so far. The first is the policy document, "Planning for the Communities of the Future", which was published in February. The second is an explanatory note, "Transitional Arrangements for Regional Planning Guidance and Development Plans", which was published in March.

Mr. Tom King: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if the guidance in Planning Policy Guidance note 3 Housing permits local planning authorities to make an allowance for windfall sites over one hectare when preparing *(a)* housing land availability studies and *(b)* development plans. [43825]

Mr. Raynsford: Since "windfall" sites are unexpected, it is, by definition, difficult to predict future supply levels. The current guidance in PPG3 advises local authorities to assess the future supply of windfall sites of less than 1 hectare on the basis of past trends. The guidance advises that authorities should not make assumptions about sites over 1 hectare. Authorities should strive to identify these sites individually in consultation with developers, who will have a reasonable idea of sites likely to come forward over the plan period. To attempt to make a generalised

allowance for larger windfall sites in the forward assessment of land supply is likely to introduce too great an element of uncertainty in the planning process.

As was made clear in the recently published policy document, "Planning for the Communities of the Future", the Government are aware that local planning authorities differ in their approach to the assessment of the potential contribution of windfall sites. They are also aware that in some areas windfall sites can make up a large proportion of the overall land used for housing. The Government will therefore look again at the guidance in PPG3 with a view to reassessing the potential contribution of this source of housing land.

Mr. Tom King: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many houses have been completed on windfall sites of over one hectare in each region since 1991. [43824]

Mr. Raynsford: The information requested is not currently collected centrally by the Department and would involve disproportionate cost to compile. However, the Department's recently announced National Land-Use Database should provide the basis for compiling this sort of information in the future.

Mr. Tom King: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what proportion of new housing completed between 1991 and 1996 in each region has three or more bedrooms. [43823]

Mr. Raynsford: The available figures are shown in the table.

Proportion of new houses and flats completed with three or more bedrooms

Percentage of total completions

Government Office Region	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
North East	63	60	59	64	67	66
Yorkshire and the Humber	60	59	57	61	63	69
East Midlands	57	61	61	63	64	70
Eastern	48	47	51	54	58	61
London	26	24	23	29	28	36
South East	44	47	47	54	59	62
South West	45	51	53	58	59	64
West Midlands	53	51	49	54	57	60
North West	62	63	58	65	63	64
Merseyside	60	64	66	68	72	67
England	49	51	51	56	57	61

Source:
"Housing and Construction Statistics 1986–1996"

Mr. Tom King: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the local planning authorities where the number of new houses constructed has exceeded that in adopted development plans in the last 10 years. [43857]

Mr. Raynsford: Such information is not held centrally and would involve disproportionate cost to compile.

Mr. Tom King: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the organisations which have been sent a copy of the statement, "Planning for the Communities of the Future: Transitional Arrangements for Regional Planning Guidance and Development Plans", issued on 1 April. [43827]

Mr. Raynsford: A new system to assess and cascade housing provision figures was set out in "Planning for the Communities of the Future" (Command 3885). The transitional arrangements which will apply where RPG is already being revised or where development plans are being replaced or altered before Regional Planning Guidance is revised are set out in paragraphs 33 and 34 of that document. The more detailed note, issued on 1 April, was sent to the following organisations:

The Local Government Association

The Planning Officers Society

Secretaries of the English Regional Associations

The Panel of Chairmen of Examinations in Public

Government Offices for the Regions

Copies were placed in the Library of the House of Commons. It has also been sent to individuals, local authorities and other organisations on request.

Structure Plans

Mr. Tom King: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) if he will list the criteria used to select the chairmen of structure plan examinations-in-public; [43851]

(2) what plans he has for changes in the way in which chairmen for structure plan examinations-in-public are selected. [43852]

Mr. Raynsford: Chairs of individual Structure Plan Examinations in Public (EIPs) are appointed, subject to availability, from a central list held by the Department. Chairs will not be appointed for an EIP where they either live or work in the area for which an EIP is being held, nor if they have worked in the past for the County Council holding the EIP.

This Department is currently recruiting a new panel of chairs through a process of open competition. The criteria for selection include an excellent knowledge of the planning system and current planning issues, and recent experience of strategic planning at a senior level, either in local or central Government or in a consultancy context. Successful applicants will also be required to demonstrate good analytical, communication and inter-personal skills.

Mr. Tom King: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will provide the names, ages, career background and qualifications of the chairmen of structure plan examinations-in-public and of other panel members whom he and his predecessors have appointed in the last five years. [43850]

Mr. Raynsford: The Secretary of State has a general duty of confidentiality in relation to his appointees and is not able to disclose personal information in respect of EIP Chairmen. However, the following information is that normally made public by the chairmen themselves at the commencement of individual EIPs:

Name	*Position prior to EIP chair appointment*	*EIPs chaired in last five years*
W. E. Barnett	Former County Planning Officer, Somerset County Council	North Yorkshire Structure Plan

Name	Position prior to EIP chair appointment	EIPs chaired in last five years
	Deputy County Planning Officer Suffolk County Council	Cleveland Structure Plan
	Deputy County Planning Officer, East Sussex County Council	West Sussex Structure Plan
W. J. S. Batho	Former Grade 3, Regional Director for DOE Eastern Region Office	Kent Structure Plan
A. G. Booth	Consultant in private practice	Northumberland Structure Plan
	Former Chief Planning Officer Essex County Council and President of RTPI	Wiltshire Structure Plan
G. Bowden	Barrister and former MP for Dulwich	Suffolk Structure Plan
Philip Critchley CB	Former Grade 3, Department of the Environment/Transport	Lancashire Structure Plan
		Hertfordshire Structure Plan
D. R. G. Hands QC	Queens Counsel	Somerset Structure Plan 1998
T. Hardy	Former Chief Executive Cambridge District Council	Bedfordshire Structure Plan
		Cheshire Structure Plan
T. L. Jones	Former Grade 3, Department of the Environment/Transport	Dorset Structure Plan
H. W. Marshall	Former Grade 3, Department of the Environment/Transport	Peak National Park Replacement Structure Plan
		Nottingham Replacement Structure Plan
		Cornwall Structure Plan
		Oxfordshire Structure Plan
		East Sussex Structure Plan
R. W. Phelps	Former General Manager Central Lancashire New Town Development Corporation	Cambridgeshire Structure Plan
		Hampshire Structure Plan
		Berkshire Structure Plan
Professor G. Shaylor	Visiting Professor of Town Planning UCE	Durham County Structure Plan
	Former Director of Development and Deputy Chief Executive Birmingham City Council, former City Planning Officer Birmingham City Council	Devon County Structure Plan
	Former Director of Planning Hillingdon London Borough	

Other Panel members are all members of the Planning Inspectorate.

Local Government Act 1988

Mr. Lepper: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on a timetable for repeal of section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988. [43742]

Mr. Raynsford: It is the Government's intention to repeal Section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988 as soon as a suitable legislative opportunity arises.

Paper Pulp Disposal

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) if he will make a statement on the disposal of paper pulp on agricultural land; [43638]

(2) how many breaches of regulations in respect of the disposal of paper pulp on agricultural land there have been in the last three years; and what action was taken against those responsible; [43640]

(3) what assessment he has made of the environmental risks associated with the disposal of paper pulp on agricultural land. [43639]

Angela Eagle: A statement of our views on the landspreading of waste paper pulp was made during an Adjournment Debate on 13 March 1998, *Official Report*, columns 926–930.

Most landspreading of waste is carried out under the terms of the exemption from waste management licensing in paragraph 7 of schedule 3 to the Waste Management Licensing Regulations 1994. We have given a commitment to review this exemption in the light of the findings of the research project to which I referred on 13 March. That research project was completed on 30 April and copies of the report on the "Investigation Of The Criteria For, And Guidance On, The Landspreading Of Industrial Waste" have been placed in the Library of the House. The report's findings are now under consideration by my Department and the Environment Agency. On conclusion of this consideration, our proposals to revise the current exemption will be the subject of a public consultation exercise.

Motor Cycles

Mr. McWalter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what measures he plans to use to ensure that within the Integrated Transport Strategy a proportion of journeys undertaken currently by motor cars will be undertaken by powered two-wheelers in future; [42332]

(2) if he will take steps to encourage young people to learn to use small-powered two-wheel vehicles, including power-assisted cycles, rather than motor cars; and if he will incorporate in the Integrated Policy for Transport mechanisms to enable young people to gain access to personal transport in this way. [42333]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given on 20 May 1998, *Official Report*, column *365*.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will change the formulae for local government financial settlements for 1999–2000 to incorporate a sparsity factor for rural county councils. [43384]

Mr. Raynsford: The existing standard spending assessment (SSA) formulae include a sparsity factor in the Education, Police and 'All Other Services' blocks for all relevant local authorities.

As part of our regular discussions of the SSA formulae with local government, we understand that the County Councils Network will present a paper proposing changes to the Personal Social Services block of the SSAs to include an indicator of sparsity of population. We shall consider with local government the arguments put forward.

Motorway Service Area (M4)

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects to publish the result of the recent public inquiry into the planning application to develop a motorway service area at junction 8/9 on the M4. [43214]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Inspector's Report has not yet been received in my Department. At this stage, therefore, I am not in a position to anticipate when the decision will be issued.

Rail Vehicle Accessibility

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he will announce the timetable for publication of the consultation document containing draft Rail Vehicle Accessibility Regulations; and when he will publish the regulations. [43554]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The consultation document was published on 15 May. Copies have been placed in the Library. We hope to lay the final regulations this summer.

Small Businesses

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the regulations that have been removed or amended to help small businesses since 1 May 1997. [42776]

Angela Eagle: Regulations to modernise the regulatory regime for business are not necessarily targeted on businesses of a particular size. The regulations set out in the table will apply to business irrespective of size.

Regulations	*Date*
The Oil Pollution (Compulsory Insurance) Regulations 1997	July 1997
The Motor Cycle (EC Type Approval) (Amendment) Regulations 1997	September 1997

Central Railway

Mr. Pound: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of plans by Central Railway to increase the amount of freight carried through Ealing, North and adjoining constituencies. [43595]

Ms Glenda Jackson: An application by Central Railway plc for an Order under the Transport and Works Act 1972 was rejected by this House in 1996. We have not received any subsequent proposals from the company.

Endangered Birds

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to extend the current bird registration scheme operated under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 to include critically endangered species listed under CITES. [43354]

Angela Eagle: There are no plans to extend the bird registration scheme at present, although we are considering whether to undertake a wider review of the registration process to see if it can be made more cost effective.

Tewkesbury Borough Council

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will upgrade Tewkesbury Borough Council to total cost indicator band C from band D. [43796]

Mr. Raynsford: Total Cost Indicators are the responsibility of the Housing Corporation. The Corporation groups local authority areas into broad cost bands based on independent evidence of the relative costs of land, construction and house prices in the area. The Corporation reviews Total Cost Indicators annually.

Parish and Town Councils

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if parish and town councils have an automatic right of representation as part of the elected member element of the regional chambers. [43797]

Mr. Caborn: We value the work of parish and town councils in representing and serving local communities, particularly in rural areas. However, regional chambers are not statutory bodies and how their members are selected is a matter for the chambers themselves to decide.

Greenwich Peninsula (Toxic Waste)

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the disposal of toxic waste from the Greenwich peninsula. [42022]

Angela Eagle: The statutory remediation of the Greenwich Peninsula has been undertaken by British Gas as the original polluter. Following the completion of the statutory work English Partnerships, which acquired the site in February 1997, has undertaken the development remediation to restore the site to a condition fit for its intended end use.

The remediation includes the removal or treatment on-site of contaminated soils, to depths of up to 14m in selected areas. Contaminated soil which cannot be reused on site is disposed of at licensed landfill sites. The contractors employed by English Partnerships are responsible for selecting the location of the landfill sites and a number of different sites have been used. All the sites used have been licensed by the relevant authority and are suitable for the material being disposed there.

The procedure for the disposal of soils which cannot be used on-site is part of the overall remediation strategy discussed and approved by both the Environment Agency and the London Borough of Greenwich and is consistent with Government policy.

Prison Site, Middleton Sands

Miss Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the effect of the proposal to site a prison at Middleton Sands, Morecambe on the *(a)* Morecambe and Heysham Local Plan and *(b)* draft Lancaster District Local Plan. [43662]

Mr. Raynsford: The Secretary of State announced his decision to agree to the proposed change of use of the disused Pontins Holiday Camp on 14 May. A copy of the decision letter, which summarises the Secretary of State's assessment of the proposal, is in the House Library.

Air Traffic Control

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement about problems encountered with the new air traffic control information technology system. [43457]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee recently published the report of its inquiry into air traffic control. The Government hope to make their response to the report within the next few weeks—part of the response will be on the subject of the problems encountered by National Air Traffic Services Ltd. (NATS) with the computer system at its new air traffic control centre at Swanwick in Hampshire.

I can inform the hon. Member that since the Committee's report was published, the system at the Swanwick centre has passed its site acceptance tests, and has been handed over to NATS by the contractor, Lockheed Martin.

Water Quality

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what groundwater resources in England are known to be contaminated with enteric bacteria and viruses; and what steps have been taken to identify the sources of that contamination. [43965]

Angela Eagle: Groundwater resources used for potable supply are monitored for microbiological parameters by the water service companies. These data are not held centrally. In general, groundwater is free of microbiological contaminants. Enteric bacteria and viruses are generally filtered out by the passage of water through strata before it reaches an aquifer, and therefore before such groundwater is abstracted. All drinking water is disinfected before being put into supply.

Sewerage

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to provide advice to local authorities on the problems associated with inadequate drains and private sewers. [43967]

Angela Eagle: The Department is currently consulting interested parties on a draft planning circular relating to cesspits and septic tanks. There are no plans at present to issue guidance to local authorities on private drains and sewers. The latter are subject to Building Regulation control to ensure that, when constructed, they meet certain minimum requirements in the interests of health.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when his Department responded to the Water Research Centre draft water industry specification for thermoplastic structured wall pipe systems for sewers; and if the Department's response will be made public. [43962]

Angela Eagle: Such specifications are matters for the water industry, and my Department has not commented on it.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he plans to respond to the second report of the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee on Sewage Treatment and Disposal (HC266); and if he will make a statement. [43964]

Angela Eagle: The Government are considering the recommendations of this report very carefully and intend to respond shortly.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 30 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *359*. what research studies he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated to establish whether or not leakage from (i) public and (ii) private sewers, is likely to cause health or pollution problems. [43963]

Angela Eagle: The Department has not commissioned any such studies relating to sewerage leakage. In 1996, a report produced by Construction Industry Research and Information Association (CIRIA) on behalf of various interests, including the National Rivers Authority, found no conclusive evidence that leaking sewers are a common cause of groundwater contamination.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what proposals he has to review the law relating to sewers and drains and the controls relating to their construction, materials and maintenance. [43966]

Angela Eagle: There are no plans at present to review the law relating to sewers and drains. A sewerage undertaker has a duty, to maintain sewers so as to ensure that the area for which it is responsible is and continues to be effectively drained. The specification of materials and the maintenance regime is the responsibility of the sewerage undertaker.

Polegate Bypass

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what figure has been *(a)* agreed and *(b)* paid in respect of compensation payments to tenderers for the DBFO project to build the Polegate Bypass. [43202]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The claims from the tenders for the cancelled Weald and Downland DBFO project, which included the Polegate Bypass, raise a number of detailed issues which will inevitably take some time to resolve. In the meantime, we have made interim payments on account totalling £1.3 million (excluding VAT); the final settlement will be published in due course.

Millennium Experience

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is the estimated cost of developing beaches round the Millennium Experience site; how many beaches are to be developed; and what will be their composition. [42984]

Angela Eagle: No new beaches are being developed around the Millennium Experience site.

River flood defences are being replaced by English Partnerships on the Greenwich Peninsula where the existing flood defences have only a limited remaining life.

The new flood defences are, in places, being rebuilt using stepped ecological tidal terraces rather than vertical steel sheet piles. The step terraces are being planted with reeds and other inter-tidal plants.

The cost of these tidal terrace works including the flood defences within the Millennium Experience site is £2.9 million. Part of this cost will be met by the Environment Agency.

There are a number of areas around the Greenwich Peninsula below high water which have naturally occurring sand and gravel banks forming what could be referred to as "beaches". These areas are being retained in their existing natural state but no new sands and gravels are being imported. These "beaches" will be accessible from the new river walkway.

Mr. Wilkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact of the Millennium Experience at Greenwich on the local transport system. [42016]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Planning permission for the Millennium Experience site in north Greenwich was granted on the clear understanding that general visitors would not be permitted to park cars at the site so as not to exacerbate existing road congestion in the area. This will be reinforced by a large Controlled Parking Zone. By the Millennium there will be additional and improved local transport interchanges and services serving the Exhibition and local area, including a station on the Jubilee Line Extension close to the gates of the Exhibition, a dedicated bus link from Charlton railway station and new river services.

I chair a new co-ordination group on Millennium Access matters which will have its first meeting next week. I will also be giving oral evidence on this subject to the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee of this House on 16 June.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Charity Taxation

41. **Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, what representations he has received concerning the Government review of charity taxation. [42030]

Mr. Stuart Bell: The Church Commissioners, working with other central bodies of the Church, have made submissions to the Government's ongoing review.

They have in turn received many representations from dioceses, parishes, individual clergy and lay members of the Church, all expressing concern about the effect of advance corporation tax changes and the importance of ensuring that the review is supportive of the charitable status and activities of the Church.

The General Synod of the Church of England has overwhelmingly endorsed a diocesan proposal for a reduction to 5 per cent. VAT on church building repairs.

Parishes (Assets)

42. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, what effect the recently announced rise in the value of their assets will have on the parishes. [42031]

Mr. Stuart Bell: The value of our assets has indeed grown strongly in recent years, and follows a change in investment policy away from a high-yielding low growth mix of assets to a fund based more on Stock Exchange investments which offers higher growth prospects over the long-term. The increased value of our assets will enable us to continue to work in partnership with the parishes to ensure stable and sustainable financial support for the Church into the next Millennium.

Millennium Dome (Christian Dimension)

43. **Mr. Rowe:** To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, what steps are being taken to ensure a Christian dimension to the Millennium dome. [42032]

Mr. Stuart Bell: The New Millennium Experience Company, which is responsible for the Dome's contents and funding, is in close touch with the Churches, and indeed members of other faiths, through the Lambeth Group. The detailed design for the "Spirit Zone" is being undertaken in close consultation with the Group and the Archbishops' Officer for the Millennium, and the Minister without Portfolio has made specific assurances that the Christian story will be a central part of the Millennium Experience.

Disestablishment

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, if he will make an assessment of the financial implications of disestablishment of the Church of England. [42025]

Mr. Stuart Bell: Disestablishment would not lie with the Commissioners to initiate and, without formal instructions and definitions, any estimates of costs are impractical.

However, for the record, the Prime Minister has indicated to me that neither he nor the Government generally have any policy for the disestablishment of the Church.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Debt

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what initiatives her Department is taking to reduce the need for hard currency to service the international debt of countries which are major producers of illicit drugs. [43169]

Clare Short: Such countries are not producing illicit drugs in order to generate the hard currency needed to service international debt. In general we are ready to consider using our bilateral aid programme into finance innovative mechanisms for converting debt into local currency, for example through debt swaps, if we are so requested. But we would need to be convinced that this was the best way of contributing to the reduction of poverty.

We remain strong supporters of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative, which by writing off unpayable debt will reduce the total debt of qualifying countries to an affordable level, thus reducing the amount of hard currency needed for debt service. Bolivia should receive $450 million of HIPC debt relief this September.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will calculate the total amount *(a)* of aid given to developing countries by the United Kingdom and *(b)* received from these countries by the United Kingdon in debt service in 1997. [43091]

Clare Short: The latest figures available for development assistance provided from Department for International Development programmes are for 1996–97, when development assistance (excluding administration costs, but including contributions to multilateral organisations) to developing countries amounted to £1,837.8 million. Figures for 1997–98 will not be available until the end of the year, when they will be published in the 1998 edition of "British Aid Statistics".

Debt service received by the Department for International Development in respect of outstanding bilateral aid loans amounted to £43 million in 1996–97: principal repaid is retained for use within the development assistance budget.

Other debt service repayments in respect of other bilateral debt agreements are a matter for the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Police Services

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development in which countries her Department is currently funding projects to help develop a responsible and accountable police service; and at what planned cost. [43124]

Clare Short: I refer the right hon. Gentleman to the answer provided to the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) on 5 May 1998, *Official Report*, columns *276–77*, which lists the support currently provided by DFID for police services by country. We do not keep centrally a record of our planned costs for police activities for 1998–99.

Legal Projects

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development by what criteria it is decided whether her Department or the FCO should fund projects in overseas countries to develop *(a)* alternatives to custodial sentences and *(b)* the rule of law. [43125]

Clare Short: The Department for International Development's aim is to improve access to justice, especially for poor and disadvantaged peoples. We also work to create an enabling environment for economic growth in states committed to poverty elimination. The ability to resolve disputes through the legal system with reasonable speed and without corruption has been shown to be an important factor in stimulating domestic and foreign investment. We support these activities where there is need and commitment and where we have a comparative advantage. We are also increasingly working to strengthen traditional systems and ways of settling disputes which can help provide a cheaper and more accessible justice and strengthen alternatives to custodial sentences.

Rule of law co-operation and prison reform are also among the priorities for the FCO's new Human Rights Project Fund.

Sudan

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what representations she has made to her EU counterparts about the need for additional assistance for Sudan; and if she will make a statement. [43121]

Clare Short: The crisis in Sudan was discussed during the EU Development Council meeting which I chaired on 18 May. We reaffirmed our intention to provide further assistance and to call upon the Government of Sudan and the Southern factions to agree a ceasefire and a peace settlement. It is clear that the cause of the crises is the war and without peace there will be continuing crises.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the present level of British aid to Sudan; to what sectors and categories it is apportioned; and to what jurisdictions and areas it is delivered. [42348]

Clare Short: Since February, we have given over £5 million to United Nations agencies and international NGOs in Sudan for the provision of food, nutrition and health support and survival kits for displaced families; the current crisis in Bahr El Ghazal region has been a key

focus for this assistance. I approved a further £5 million on 15 May which will be used over the coming months to meet urgent humanitarian needs in this region and other vulnerable areas in Sudan.

Human Rights

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development in which countries her Department is currently funding human rights education teams; and at what planned cost. [43123]

Clare Short: We support education on human rights as part of our support for human rights generally. For example, we support measures to raise awareness through education on the rights of the child. In Russia, we are piloting civic and human rights education in secondary schools. In Guyana, we are promoting a rights-based approach to children's education among AmerIndian populations. We also help to raise knowledge and awareness of democratic rights and responsibilities. In Zimbabwe, we are contributing to a four-year project of civic education, leading to the general election in 2000. As part of this, churches and leading human rights organisations are conducting a programme of education on democratic and electoral rights. We also support measures to educate and raise awareness about international humanitarian law (IHL). In the Commonwealth of Independent States, we provided funds to the ICRC to develop IHL materials, train IHL trainers and establish a lecture series in IHL at key law institutions.

Special Advisers

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many special advisers, political advisers and other political appointees are working in her Department; at what annual cost to the public purse including recruitment costs, salaries, pensions and National Insurance contributions; and what was the position in the last full year of the last Government. [43321]

Clare Short: There are two special advisers working in my Department, but no other political advisers or political appointees. The combined total cost of the two posts for the twelve month period up to 5 May 1998 was approximately £67,000. There were no special advisers, political advisers or political appointees working in the Overseas Development Administration in the last full year of the last government.

UN Agencies

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development for which UN agencies her Department's financial contribution will be less in 1998–99 than in 1997–98; and in each case by how much. [43127]

Clare Short: Total contributions, covering both core and extra-budgetary funding, to UN agencies for 1998/99 will not be known until the end of the financial year. Overall, DFID's core contributions to voluntary funded UN agencies have increased in 1998/99 over 1997/98.

Street Children

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development in which countries her Department is currently funding non-governmental organisation projects addressing the needs of street children; and at what planned cost. [43122]

Clare Short: The countries in which DFID is currently funding non governmental organisation projects addressing the needs of street children, and the costs of these projects, are as follows:

Country	*Partner agency*	*Support*	*Amount (£)*
Brazil	Jubilee Action	Street girls education, training centre and residence home	61,200
Ecuador	International Childcare Trust	Street children of Guayaquil	81,200—1998–99
Kenya	International Childcare Trust	Street children's project	47,100—1998–99
India	Homeless International	Support for street children	21,700—1998–99
South Africa	Childhope	Twilight children capacity building	21,700—1998–99
South Africa	Childhope	Capacity building at Claremont Children's Centre	23,100—1998–99
Brazil	Childhope	Projecto Ibeji for street children	49,100—1998–99
Brazil	Childhope	Judicial and institutional protection of children and adolescents	33,500—1998–99
Russia	European Network on street children	Conference in St. Petersburg on street children	5,000—1998–99
Bangladesh	Shioshab	Support for child domestic workers, including children from the streets	100,000—1998–99 rising to £800,000 if initial indicators met
Bangladesh	UCEP	Providing education for underprivileged children working in urban areas	900,000—Phase III
India	Don Bosco	Valsalya Project: Sexual health project for street children/youth of Cochin aims to integrate sexual health intervention with ongoing activities of Don Bosco	15,850—(period—1997 April to June 1998—likely to be extended through the substantive phase of the Partnerships for Sexual Health project)
India	Cini-Asha	Cini-Asha: Sexual Health Project for Street Children and working children in Central Calcutta	39,000—(Since August 1995 to date under the West Bengal sexual Health Project—likely to continue at an average of £12,000-£15,000 per annum)

We also support a number of projects for street children with the block grant agencies (SCF, Christian Aid, OXFAM, CAFOD) but do not yet have the exact allocations for this financial year.

Afghanistan

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of *(a)* the effectiveness of existing aid programmes, *(b)* future aid opportunities and *(c)* the conditions under which aid workers are operating following the visit in April of a European Union delegation to Afghanistan; what response Taliban made to the delegation's outlining of the European Union's Common Position on Afghanistan; and if she will make a statement. [43175]

Clare Short: As a result of the EU mission to Afghanistan and the subsequent Afghan Support Group meeting in London, chaired by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes), donors have concluded that the existing assistance programmes to Afghanistan are in need of revision. While valuable support has been provided to vulnerable groups, past assistance may have made it easier for other resources to be channelled towards the war effort, and certain types of relief programming may be deepening dependency and reducing local incentives for self-reliance.

The present situation poses difficult policy, strategic and operational dilemmas and makes it vital for agencies to adopt a common programming approach with a strong focus on human rights. Participants in the Afghan Support Group meeting agreed that future assistance should be better targeted and co-ordinated, and based on clear principles, with the aim of providing balanced and impartial support for the different ethnic groups and vulnerable populations, especially women and children. The problem of opium poppy production should also be addressed through the common programming approach. The aid and political processes should be in close synergy, and contribute to the common goal of sustainable peace.

Aid workers in Afghanistan continue to face difficult conditions. In the North they have to cope with an unstable security situation, and in some Taliban-controlled areas they have been subjected to harassment—restrictions placed on female staff are a particular problem. These difficulties forced the UN to withdraw international staff from Kandahar earlier this year, and to suspend its programmes in southern Afghanistan. Recent negotiations between the UN and the Taliban have produced an agreement which may improve matters, but some issues (notably the ban on foreign Muslim women from entering Afghanistan unless accompanied by a close male relative) have not been resolved, and it remains to see how effectively the agreement will work in practice.

The EU delegation made clear to the Taliban and other factions that they remained willing to assist Afghanistan but only on the basis of globally accepted principles. The delegation also expressed its full support for the UN. These messages were endorsed by the Afghan Support Group. This demonstration of solidarity helped to bring about the successful conclusion of the negotiations between the UN and the Taliban referred to.

India

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what representations she has made to the Indian Government concerning their nuclear capability. [42880]

Clare Short: I refer the hon. Member to the answer my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett), the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, gave her on 20 May 1998, *Official Report*, column 529.

Birmingham Summit

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if the multilateral untying of aid was on the agenda of the G8 Summit in Birmingham; and if she will make a statement. [43634]

Clare Short: The G8 Summit endorsed the important work on multilateral untying of aid being undertaken in the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, in particular a proposal on untying aid to the least developed countries with a view to proposing a text in 1999.

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what progress was made at the G8 Summit in Birmingham on *(a)* the multilateral untying of aid and *(b)* the phasing out of export subsidies. [43636]

Clare Short: The G8 Summit endorsed the important work on multilateral untying of aid being undertaken in the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, in particular a proposal on untying aid to the least developed countries with a view to proposing a text in 1999. There was no substantive discussion on export subsidies.

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the meetings which she has had since 1 May at which the multilateral untying of aid was on the agenda. [43637]

Clare Short: On 18 May I chaired the EU Development Council which agreed that Development and Finance Ministers should meet to prepare a note on EC untying to complement the work of the Development Assistance Committee. This will be submitted before the summer break.

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she has had with representatives from other G8 countries concerning the multilateral untying of aid. [43633]

Clare Short: I have had a number of useful discussions on untying of aid with colleagues from G8 countries. At the Birmingham Summit G8 countries pledged to work within the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) on a recommendation on untying aid to the least developed countries with a view to proposing a text in 1999.

Export Subsidies

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on her Department's policy towards the use of export subsidies. [43635]

Clare Short: My Department does not favour export subsidies. The Aid and Trade provision has been ended. The White Paper on International Development makes it clear that we will consider within country programmes whether mixed credits would contribute to our central goal of reducing poverty by encouraging appropriate economic growth and investment in human development.

Eastern Myanmar and Western Thailand

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the aid programmes in Eastern Myanmar and Western Thailand supported by her Department. [43864]

Clare Short: In the 1996–97 and 1997–98 financial years DFID has supported a number of NGO projects in Western Thailand and Eastern Myanmar:

	£	
Small Grants Scheme—1996/97	12,000	Ecoles Sans Frontieres Shoklo Malaria Research Unit Neo-Humanistic Foundation for Community Development Christ Church Karen Outreach Programme
Small Grants Scheme—1997/98	9,000	Karen Refugee Committee Burmese Border Consortium Open Society Institute Mae Tao Clinic
Humanitarian Assistance—Emergency Response 1996/97	22,000	CAFOD
Humanitarian Assistance—Emergency Response 1997/98	80,000	World Vision
Humanitarian Assistance—Refugees 1996/97	150,000	Burma Border Consortium
Humanitarian Assistance—Refugees 1997/98	267,000	Burma Border Consortium

Assistance includes food and essential items to Burmese refugees in border camps in both Thailand and Burma (Burmese Border Consortium) and reproductive health, education and medical equipment provided through the SGS.

Kosovo

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assistance her Department is currently giving to Kosovo. [43148]

Clare Short: My Department has provided assistance to Kosovo through grants to non-governmental organisations such as the International Federation of the Red Cross, Oxfam and the Save the Children Fund. It is currently funding two Oxfam projects worth over £100,000 to promote health education amongst rural women and to provide facilities and change attitudes towards disabled children, and an SCF Childrens Rights project. Officials are working up options for further assistance, including support for civil society and reconciliation.

Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent representations she has made to the G8 countries, in respect of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative. [43018]

Clare Short: Over the last few months, I have used bilateral contacts with most of the G8 countries, including France, Germany and the United States, as well as fellow European Union countries and the IMF and World Bank, to press the case for faster and more flexible implementation of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) debt Initiative. At last month's G8 Summit in Birmingham, leaders agreed to support the speedy and determined extension of debt relief to more countries, under the terms of the Initiative. They also recognised the particular difficulties of post conflict countries, and the need to consider debt relief mechanisms to release more and earlier resources for essential rehabilitation.

Ecologically Sensitive Areas

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will publish her Department's guidelines for UK multinationals investing in ecologically-sensitive areas overseas. [42561]

Mrs. Roche: I have been asked to reply.

A copy of the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, which call for high standards of corporate behaviour, including in the area of environmental protection, is available in the Library of the House.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Sport (Young People)

13. **Mr. McNulty:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how the Government are helping to develop participation in sport by young people. [41999]

Ms Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how the Government are helping to develop participation in sport by young people. [42007]

Mr. Banks: The English Sports Council's National Junior Sports Programme provides a framework through which schools can work with a number of organisations to provide real opportunities in sport. Also, participation rates of young people have risen by up to three times in some areas because of facilities provided by the Lottery Sports Fund.

25. **Mr. Gareth R. Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps he is taking to increase opportunities for young people in London to participate in sport. [42012]

Mr. Banks: The English Sports Council works closely with all London Boroughs to increase opportunities for young people to participate in sport through a number of

initiatives. The ESC is also part funding the London Youth Games, the finals of which take place on 11/12 July at Crystal Palace national Sports Centre.

Film Industry

14. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many films have been made on location in the United Kingdom in the past 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [42000]

Mr. Tom Clarke: In 1997, 112 feature films were wholly or partly filmed in the United Kingdom, with a total production cost of £560 million. The aim of our Film Policy Review "A Bigger Picture" is to sustain the current successes of our production sector and develop better links between production and distribution.

21. **Mr. Brooke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make a statement on his policy concerning taxation and the film industry. [42008]

Mr. Tom Clarke: In its first Budget the Government showed their recognition of the special needs and potential growth of the film industry by introducing 100 per cent. write-off for films on production and acquisition expenditure for films costing up to £15 million. In March this was extended from three to five years. Further developments are of course a matter for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

National Lottery Grants

16. **Helen Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans he has to ensure a more equitable distribution of heritage lottery fund grants between the different parts of the United Kingdom. [42002]

Mr. Chris Smith: The Government are determined to ensure that Lottery money is allocated fairly and equitably across the whole of the United Kingdom and between different groups in society. The National Lottery Bill gives the Heritage Lottery Fund and the other Lottery distributors important new powers in this respect; and later today I will be announcing the confirmation of new directions for the Lottery distributors, designed to achieve precisely this objective.

Press Regulation (Children)

18. **Mr. Soley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions he has held with the Press Complaints Commission on press regulation in respect of children. [42004]

Mr. Chris Smith: On 25 September 1997 I welcomed proposals from Lord Wakeham, Chairman of the Press Complaints Commission, for strengthening the newspaper industry's code of practice. His proposals for better protection of children were accepted by the industry and published on 19 December. I have urged the PCC to consider further measures to strengthen the process of self-regulation.

Film Task Force

19. **Mr. Corbett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what action he is taking to implement proposals made to him by the film task force. [42006]

Mr. Tom Clarke: I have set up an Action Committee, made up of representatives of key sectors of the British film industry, which will oversee the implementations of the recommendations of the Film Policy Review, which met on 12 May.

Public Buildings (Cologne)

22. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will evaluate the preservation and display of sites of archaeological significance in the vicinity of new public buildings in Cologne. [42009]

Mr. Fisher: No. I am aware that German law requires city authorities to aim to preserve archaeological monuments as much as possible, that there is a lot of public debate in Cologne about the preservation of sites, and that various solutions have been found for incorporating parts of remains into new buildings. In the UK, planning guidance stresses the importance of identifying potential archaeological remains at an early stage and that there should be a presumption in favour of in situ preservation of important remains which as in Cologne, can involve their incorporation in new developments.

Royal Parks

23. **Mr. White:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what proposals he has to allow the royal parks to generate more income through staging events. [42010]

Mr. Tom Clarke: I am keen that the parks should attract people who might not normally visit them, and that the Agency should benefit from any extra income. I have asked the Royal Parks Agency to draw up a comprehensive programme of events in the Royal Parks each year.

Creative Industries Task Force

24. **Mrs. Ellman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what measures he will take to ensure that his Department's creative industries task force works with the proposed regional development agencies to develop arts-based businesses. [42011]

Mr. Chris Smith: I am, of course, aware of the importance of the contribution made to the creative economy by artists and innovators in the regions and my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, South participates in his capacity as Minister for the Regions on the Creative Industries Task Force, to help ensure that the Government's policies for the creative industries take account of the regional dimension of cultural and creative activities.

Voluntary Sector (National Lottery Grants)

26. **Mr. Bill O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when he last met the National Lottery Charities Board to discuss grants to the voluntary sector; and if he will make a statement. [42013]

Mr. Chris Smith: I have not met the National Lottery Charities Board collectively to discuss grants to the voluntary sector, but regularly meet Chairs and Chief

Executives of all Lottery distributors to discuss Lottery distribution matters. The most recent of these meetings took place on 21 April.

Tourism

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what measures he has taken to support the British seaside tourist industry. [43869]

Mr. Tom Clarke: Seaside towns are an important part of the domestic tourism market. The Government's strategy for tourism will be effective, comprehensive and will benefit all areas, including seaside towns. One of the Forum Working Groups, which is helping with the development of the strategy for tourism, is looking particularly at issues relevant to resorts.

Mr. Maude: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when his Department's plan for tourism will be published. [43650]

Mr. Chris Smith: We plan to publish our strategy for tourism later this year.

Small Businesses

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will list the regulations that have been removed or amended to help small businesses since 1 May 1997. [42778]

Mr. Tom Clarke: No such Regulations have been removed or amended by this Department since 1 May 1997.

Broadcasting

Mr. Maude: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when his Department plans to publish a broadcasting consultation document. [43651]

Mr. Chris Smith: The Government are carefully considering future policy towards broadcasting and telecommunications in the light of the changes in technology which have the potential to transform these sectors and to erode current distinctions between them. My Department and the Department of Trade and Industry shall consult widely on these issues later this year, and shall be publishing a document for that purpose as soon as our current initial consideration has been completed.

Mr. Maude: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when he estimates analogue terrestrial broadcasts will cease in the United Kingdom. [43659]

Mr. Chris Smith: The Government's consultation paper "Television: the Digital Future"—published on 12 February 1998, *Official Report*, column *364*—seeks comments on a wide range of issues relating to the transition from analogue to digital broadcasting including the timing of closure of the analogue terrestrial network. Comments are invited by 4 September.

The Government will consider the timing and nature of an announcement on the closure of the analogue network in the light of the responses to that consultation document.

Arts Council

Mr. Maude: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans he has to review the activities of the Arts Council. [43653]

Mr. Chris Smith: The Departmental Spending Review which is currently under way at DCMS is looking at the full range of the Department's responsibilities, including the arts funding system and the role of the Arts Council within it. I expect to announce the conclusions of this review in the summer.

UK Sports Institute

Mr. Maude: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when the UK Sports Institute will open. [43661]

Mr. Chris Smith: The new buildings of the UK Sports Institute are expected to be open at the end of the year 2000. However, we expect to have services on-stream before then and very much hope that there will be benefits for the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games.

The UK Sports Council is already talking to individual sports about how their existing programmes can be enhanced.

Royal Opera House

Mr. Maude: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when the review of the Royal Opera House will be published. [43666]

Mr. Chris Smith: The Eyre report will be published shortly after I receive it from Sir Richard.

Museums

Mr. Maude: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when the results of the review of museum access will be made public. [43652]

Mr. Chris Smith: The access review is continuing in the context of the Departmental Spending Review, which includes a fundamental review of the museums and galleries sector.

This will conclude shortly and an announcement will be made in the Summer.

Sportsmatch

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much money has been granted to Sportsmatch projects in Chorley; and if he will list these projects. [43619]

Mr. Banks: Sportsmatch awarded £1,250 to Chorley Rugby Union Football Club in 1996 for a junior and mini coaching and development scheme. Bolton Wanderers Football in the Community Scheme was awarded £3,500 in March to extend its geographical coverage to benefit schools in the Chorley, Adlington, Anderton and Exuton areas.

Listed Sporting Events

Mr. Michael J. Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations he has received regarding the Gordon report on de-listing of sporting events. [43675]

Mr. Chris Smith: Lord Gordon's advisory group proposed various revisions to the arrangements, under Part IV of the Broadcasting Act 1996, for protecting universal broadcast of certain events. I am presently considering the group's recommendations. I have received 776 representations of this subject, including 132 from hon. Members, since the announcement of the group's report on 20 March.

Mr. Maude: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when he will publish his decision on the recommendations of the advisory body on listed sporting events. [43649]

Mr. Chris Smith: I am considering the recommendations of Lord Gordon's advisory group very carefully, taking account of the many representations made to me on the subject of the list of protected events. I shall announce my decisions in the next few weeks.

Employee Travel

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will estimate the cost of employee travel on office business, broken down into *(a)* fuel allowances, *(b)* unproductive time during travel, *(c)* other costs related to car transport and *(d)* costs related to public transport, for (i) 1994–95, (ii) 1995–96, (iii) 1996–97 and (iv) 1997–98. [32446]

Mr. Tom Clarke *[holding answer 3 March 1998]:* Information on employee travel is not available in the level of detail requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Neither do records before 1996–97 differentiate between Ministerial and official travel and related subsistence. The available information is given in the table.

£

	Total travel and subsistence	*Total official travel and subsistence*
1994–95 (actual)	266,092	n/a
1995–96 (actual)	280,104	n/a
1996–97 (actual)	242,031	182,142
1997–98 (provisional outturn)	292,328	245,360

Official Hospitality

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what is his current estimate of the expenditure of his Department, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies on hospitality since 1 May 1997. [27755]

Mr. Tom Clarke *[holding answer 5 February 1998]:* The available information is given in the following table.

£000

	1 May 1997 to 1 February 1998
Department for Culture, Media and Sport	13
Historic Royal Palaces Agency	23
Royal Parks Agency	18

It is not possible to distinguish, without incurring disproportionate cost, between NDPB's expenditure financed from grant-in-aid and that financed from other sources of income including sponsorships. However the total expenditure by the Department's NDPBs on hospitality from 1 May 1997 to 1 February is £997,000.

Sports Council

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what progress the Government have made in implementing their commitment to ensure that the UK Sports Council becomes the lead strategic body for sport in the UK. [42574]

Mr. Banks: As part of the Departmental Spending Review we have been reviewing the role and structure of the UK Sports Council and Government support for sport at UK level. We hope soon to be able to share our thoughts more widely.

Sport Governing Bodies

Mr. Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to his answer of 26 February, *Official Report*, column *322*, what proportion of the officers serving on the sports governing bodies listed are *(a)* under 25 years and *(b)* over 65 years of age; and what proportion are women. [33542]

Mr. Banks: In response to my hon. Friend's question, and following a meeting with me, the Central Council of Physical Recreation has agreed to conduct a survey of their membership to establish a profile of the officers serving on the sports governing bodies. This survey will address the questions raised by my hon. Friend and I have asked the CCPR to speak to him, and with my officials, about how this survey might best be conducted. The Chairman of the CCPR shares with me a desire to see the management of sports organisations fully representing the wide range of people who are keen on sport, and taking the increasingly professional approach which is needed for the management of these organisations as we enter the new century.

Cricket (Racism)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment he has made of the extent of racism in cricket; what negotiations he has had with the England and Wales Cricket Board in respect of racism in cricket; and what steps he proposes to reduce the incidence of racism in cricket. [42614]

Mr. Banks: The Government are committed to stamping out racism in all areas of sport, and the English Sports Council has established a Racial Equality Advisory Group to work with national governing bodies to encourage racial equality in sport. We support fully the initiatives undertaken by the England and Wales Cricket Board to reduce racism and to promote the widest possible participation in cricket. These include:

- an extensive network of cricket development officers nationwide, whose brief is to promote cricket to all ages, sexes, colours and creeds;
- a proposed Racial Equality Campaign for cricket in conjunction with the English Sports Council and the Commission for Racial Equality; and

a co-ordinated national audit of recreational cricket, via the 38 county boards, in order to gain a clearer picture of the level of Asian and black involvement in cricket.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Portcullis House

Mrs. Roe: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, if any legal actions are in progress against the Corporate Officer of the House arising out of the construction of Portcullis House; and if he will make a statement. [43883]

Mr. Kirkwood: A legal action is currently in progress, involving a claim for damages by Harmon CFEM Facades (UK) Ltd. (In Liquidation) against the Corporate Officer of the House of Commons. The plaintiff seeks damages arising from the procurement procedures adopted by the Corporate Officer in relation to the fenestration package in respect of the new parliamentary building (Portcullis House). The plaintiff tendered for the package but it was awarded elsewhere. The Corporate Officer is defending the proceedings.

The case is being heard in the High Court of Justice before an Official Referee His Honour Judge Lloyd QC.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Immigration and Nationality Policy

Angela Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement of Government policy on immigration and nationality. [44078]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We made it clear in our manifesto that Britain, like every country, must have firm control over immigration. However, we are also determined that applications should be dealt with speedily and fairly. All staff applying the Government's immigration and nationality policy will observe these central principles of being fair, fast and firm; and will carry out their duties without regard to the race, colour or religion of any person seeking to enter or remain in the United Kingdom, or applying for citizenship.

The main elements of our policy are to: welcome genuine visitors and students who wish to come to the United Kingdom; support family life by admitting the spouses and minor dependent children of those already settled in the United Kingdom; ensure that asylum decisions are both swift and fair and fully meet the United Kingdom's obligations towards refugees under international law; grant entry to those who qualify for periods of work in the United Kingdom; maintain a fair, fast and effective entry clearance operation at United Kingdom posts overseas; give effect to the "free movement" provisions of European Community law while retaining controls at frontiers, operated by a civilian Immigration Service; detect and remove those entering or remaining in the United Kingdom without authority and take firm action against those profiting from abuse of the immigration laws, including effective preventive measures; and to grant applications for citizenship to those meeting the specified criteria.

This statement is included in the Home Office Immigration and Nationality Directorate Annual Report 1997, which is published today. The Report covers a number of important developments which affect the work of the Directorate, such as the Casework Programme, the Treaty of Amsterdam and other major policy issues; and includes a factual account of events in each element of the immigration control. A copy is being placed in the Library.

Prisoners (Incentives and Earned Privileges Scheme)

Mrs. Fiona Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what new initiatives are planned to increase the effectiveness of the incentives and earned privileges scheme which encourages responsible behaviour by prisoners. [44090]

Ms Quin: The national framework for Incentives and Earned Privileges was introduced in 1995 and has been operating in all prisons since mid 1996. These schemes seek to reward good prisoner behaviour and performance and penalise bad prisoner behaviour and performance. In a few prisons, one of the "Key Earnable Privileges" has been television in-cell and the Government now intend to extend the availability of this as an earned and forfeitable privilege more generally across the Prison Service. This will build on the previous Government's introduction of the privilege in 1991, adding slowly to the approximately 2,500 sets already in place. Prisoners will pay for the privilege themselves. The weekly charge is likely to be about £1 against average weekly prisoner earnings of £7.50.

Prisoners' normal access to television is out of the cell in association with others. Television in cells was introduced in 1991, following a White Paper in response to Lord Justice Woolf's Report on the disturbances at Strangeways prison (Manchester). About 1,000 prisoners in four establishments initially had this privilege; under the previous Government the numbers had risen by 1997 to the current levels of about 2,500 (four per cent. of the prison population), mostly in five establishments of varying types. At present, it is largely a matter of chance whether a prisoner will find him or herself in a prison with the prospect of in-cell television.

Experience of in-cell television in recent years suggests considerable benefits. As an earned privilege it can be a powerful incentive to good behaviour and regime participation, and can help with order and control, reducing tension on the landings. Its loss is feared. It helps prisoners keep in touch with the outside world to which all but a few must eventually return. It has potential as a means of providing information and enhancing prison regimes.

The Government have taken into account the views on this subject expressed in a variety of contexts, including the Learmont Report on Prison Service security following the escape from Parkhurst in 1995, the Home Affairs Committee in March 1997, and in reports by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons and Boards of Visitors. The Learmont Report recommended the wider

introduction of in-cell television and pointed to its potential benefits as an information, as well as a recreational, medium. The Home Affairs Committee recommended it in March 1997

"given the potential of TV in-cell as a means of contributing to good order in a prison; so long as the availability of television in this way is clearly an earned privilege rather than a right".

Successive Chief Inspectors have urged the previous and this Government to make wider use of in-cell television and have reported on its existing successful use, most recently at Garth prison. Boards of Visitors of establishments with in-cell television frequently report favourably on its value. There is already extensive use of in-cell television in other European prison systems and in the United States and Canada.

In-cell television will be liable to be forfeited in a number of ways: when a prisoner is moved to the basic privilege level of the incentives and earned privileges schemes; when an adjudicating governor awards a disciplinary penalty of forfeiture of privileges; if local rules governing the use of in-cell television are broken; and if a judgment is made in a particular case that its availability appears to be damaging a prisoner's treatment or increasing the risk to the public on his or her release.

The Prison Service will be considering further the scope to use internal channels as an additional means of communicating information to prisoners and helping with education and regimes generally. In-cell television can help deliver educational courses, for example through Open University and other relevant programmes. Garth prison—one of the first prisons to have in-cell television—uses an internal information channel to help communication with prisoners and to show videos.

A procurement process for televisions—which will receive terrestrial channels only—is starting with a view to the extension of this privilege from later in 1998. The option of in-cell television will initially be targeted on prisoners on the enhanced privilege level or in other priority groups, such as those who are "drug free". Those on the standard privilege level will not be precluded but the extension of in-cell television will be gradual and monitored closely. This is partly to maximise its benefits as an earned privilege and partly because in-cell electricity is not available in about forty per cent. of accommodation and this is unlikely to change significantly for some time.

Extension of in-cell television will be broadly self-financing, with the costs of Prison Service-owned televisions and their replacement, warranties and wall brackets recovered from prisoners allowed the privilege. At present, licence fees are not payable in respect of prisoners because of Crown exemption. The Government propose to consider the practicability of a licensing arrangement for prisoners later on in the context of licensing arrangements more generally.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what provision has been made for meeting staff costs over the life of each of the Private Finance Initiative contracts undertaken by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the Prison Service; and if he will make a statement. [43428]

Mr. Straw: In respect of both *(a)* and *(b)*, staffing costs which are part of the operations of a Private Finance Initiative (PFI) contract are the responsibility of the service operator and are included in the contractual charge for each PFI service.

Feltham Young Offenders Institution

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the *(a)* current and *(b)* target ratio of staff to 15 to 16 year old inmates in the juvenile wing, of Feltham Young Offenders' Institution. [43362]

Ms Quin: The target ratio of staff to inmates on the five juvenile wings at Feltham is approximately 5 : 1. Current staffing levels on Swallow, Heron, Jay and Dunlin, and Eagle wings slightly exceeded this ratio as detailed in the table.

Staffing ratios for juveniles at Feltham YOI and RC

Unit/number of juveniles	*Current staffing*	*Target staffing*
Swallow 60–65 juveniles	2 senior officers 12 officers	2 senior officers 12 officers
Heron and Jay (combined) 60–68 juveniles	2 senior officers 17 officers	2 senior officers 12 officers
Dunlin and Eagle (combined) 60–68 juveniles	2 senior officers 17 officers	2 senior officers 16 officers

Security Services

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the Data Protection Registrar's proposal that the Security Services should register under the Data Protection Act 1984. [43458]

Mr. George Howarth: We have decided not to depart from the existing policy that the Security Service should not register any of the personal data they hold under the Data Protection Act 1984. I understand similar considerations also apply to the Secret Intelligence Service and GCHQ.

National Police Computer

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department over what period, and at what cost the West Midlands Probation Service and its partners are piloting the PHOENIX system to provide access to the national police computer. [43461]

Mr. Michael: The pilot project commenced live operation in August 1997 and will end in July 1998. The total cost of the pilot project will be approximately £33,350. The costs were shared by the Home Office unit responsible for Co-ordination of Computerisation in the Criminal Justice System (78 per cent.), the West Midlands Probation Service (19 per cent.) and the Police Information Technology Organisation (3 per cent.). The main cost items of the project were equipment, software and communications charges and staff costs associated with the management of the project and the day-to-day operation of the PHOENIX computer terminal.

A formal evaluation report will be produced following the end of the live running period in July. Emerging findings from the pilot are encouraging. Previously, requests to the police for this information often took one to two weeks, whereas probation officers now have access to information on previous convictions within one to two days.

Road Traffic Offences

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many police man hours were involved in enforcing the current speed limits in Lancashire in the years *(a)* 1994, *(b)* 1995, *(c)* 1996 and *(d)* 1997; and how many convictions resulted from this, [43477]

(2) how many police man hours were involved in enforcing the current drink driving laws in Lancashire in the years *(a)* 1994, *(b)* 1995, *(c)* 1996 and *(d)* 1997; and how many convictions for drink-related offences resulted from this. [43478]

Mr. Michael: Figures for officer hours dedicated to drink drive and speed enforcement in the years requested are not available. Officers are deployed on many different duties and commonly deal with a wide range of offences on a tour of duty.

Convictions for drink driving in the force area were:

1994: 2,645

1995: 2,828

1996: 3,211.

Convictions for speeding offences were:

1994: 2,223

1995: 2,945

1996: 4,629.

Figures for 1997 convictions are not yet available.

Re-offenders

Mr. Browne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many criminals convicted abroad and deported back to the United Kingdom in the years 1990 to 1997 have re-offended; [41735]

(2) how many criminals convicted of murder or homicide abroad and deported back to the United Kingdom in the years 1990 to 1997 have re-offended. [41736]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 19 May 1998]:* The information requested is not available centrally.

Correspondence

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Richmond Park concerning entry clearance officers in Columbo of 8 December 1997. [42889]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I wrote to the hon. Member on 22 May.

Small Businesses

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the regulations that have been amended or removed to help small businesses since 1 May 1997. [42785]

Mr. Straw: Regulations to reduce the burdens on business are not necessarily targeted on businesses of a particular size. My Department has made seven amending or repealing regulations (listed below) in the period 1 May 1997 to 15 May 1998 which are expected to reduce burdens on business, irrespective of size:

	Date
1997 Regulations	
1. The Gaming Act (Variation of Monetary Limits) Order 1997 (SI No. 1828)	August
2. The Gaming Act (Variation of Monetary Limits) (No. 2) Order 1997 (SI No. 2079)	September
3. The Amusement with Prizes (Variation of Monetary Limits) Order 1997 (SI No. 2080)	September
1998 Regulations	
4. The Deregulation (Licence Transfers) Order 1998 (SI No. 114)	January
5. The Video Recordings (Labelling) (Amendment) Regulations 1998 (SI No. 852)	March
6. The Gaming Clubs (Hours and Charges) (Amendment) Regulations 1998 (SI No. 961)	May
7. The Gaming Act (Variation of Monetary Limits) Order 1998 (SI No. 962)	May

Prison Site, Middleton Sands

Miss Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the evacuation plans are in the event of a nuclear emergency at either of the nuclear power stations at Heysham for the prisoners who would be housed in the proposed prison at Middleton Sands, Morecambe; and if he will make a statement. [43861]

Ms Quin: Contingency plans for evacuation have been agreed between the Prison Service and the Lancashire Ambulance Service, Lancashire Constabulary and Lancashire Fire Brigade. In his recommendations following the public inquiry, the planning inspector made it a condition that the Emergency, Safety and Evacuation Plan, agreed with the County Emergency Planning Unit, should be operational before the prison opens.

Miss Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what research has been carried out by his Department regarding the likely effect on the local tourism industry at Morecambe if the proposal to site a temporary prison there is implemented. [43660]

Ms Quin: No specific research has been undertaken into the effects of the proposed siting of a temporary prison in the Morecambe area.

The planning inspector concluded in his report of the recent public inquiry that the prison would have little if any harmful visual impact on the area. In considering the Prison Service's proposals, together with the views of other interested parties, the inspector thought it unlikely that the prison would materially harm the special attractions of the area or that it would likewise harm the tourist and holiday business in the Morecambe area as a whole.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many appeals are currently outstanding against a refusal of an asylum claim by persons who have been granted exceptional leave to remain in the United Kingdom. [42979]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: As at the end of April 1998, there were estimated to be some 23,815 asylum appeals outstanding with the Immigration Appeals Authority. Of these 21,425 were appeals to the Special Adjudicators and 2,390 to the Tribunal. I regret that it is not possible, from the available information, to differentiate those appellants who were granted exceptional leave.

Channel Islands

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what discussions he has held with the Governments of *(a)* Jersey and *(b)* Guernsey about incorporating the European Convention on Human Rights into the law; [42986]

(2) what was the purpose of the visit to Jersey made by the Under-Secretary of State, Lord Williams of Mostyn. [42978]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Lord Williams of Mostyn met the Lieutenant Governor, the Bailiff and other representatives from Jersey on Monday 18 May to discuss with the insular authorities the progress of the Human Rights Bill [*Lords*] and the action being taken in the Island in response to the Government's decision to incorporate the European Convention on Human Rights into United Kingdom law. He visited Guernsey for a similar discussion on 22 May.

Immigration

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the representations he has received on the case of Mr. Sukhvinder Singh Gill, Ref S474991; if he will meet hon. Members with an interest in the case to discuss those representations; and what action he proposes on the case. [43080]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The most recent representations about Mr. Gill's case were received from my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, South (Mr. Marshall) in September 1997. I am currently considering Mr. Gill's case and will inform his representatives of my decision in due course.

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what maintenance or income level is required in the assessment of entry clearance applications for settlement. [43199]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Each case is considered on its own facts. The maintenance and accommodation criteria set out within the Rules meet the need to ensure that, where people are admitted for settlement, they will have the basic means to support and accommodate themselves and there will be no need for them to seek state assistance.

Prison Officers

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans the Prison Service has to enable the recognition of the Prison Officers Association in private prisons. [42919]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 21 May 1998]:* The conditions of service, including membership of trades unions, of prisoner custody officers employed at a privately managed prison are a matter for negotiation between them and their employer, the contractor managing the prison, who is of course required to comply with all appropriate legislation.

Prisoners (Health Care)

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 20 January 1998, *Official Report*, column *518*, when he expects the joint working group on the future of prison health care to report. [43045]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 21 May 1998]:* The joint Prison Service/ Department of Health Working Group on the future organisation of prisoners' health care is expecting to report its findings to Ministers in July, and to publish its conclusions and recommendations in due course.

Deaths in Custody

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to complete his review of the disclosure regulations regarding deaths in custody. [43183]

Ms Quin: My right hon. Friend indicated in his statement to the House on 23 March 1998, *Official Report*, columns 21–37, in response to the Home Affairs Committee report into police disciplinary and complaints procedures, that he would consider the scope for greater openness in respect of investigation reports into deaths in police custody. This is expected to be completed later this year. A similar situation applies in the Prison Service.

Prisoners (Suicide and Self-harm)

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action was taken as a result of the review of suicide and self-harm in prison, conducted by Judge Tumim in 1990; and if he will make a statement. [43184]

Ms Quin: Judge Tumim's report on suicides and self-harm in prisons in England and Wales made wide-ranging recommendations with implications across prison regimes. The Prison Service's response was shaped through a newly created central unit which was set up to develop suicide awareness strategies. Following detailed examination of the recommendations in the report, a revised strategy on caring for the suicidal was introduced in 1994. A further review by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons is now underway and will help to refine strategies further.

Coroners

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in what circumstances a High Court judge can sit as a coroner; and on how many occasions this has happened in the last 10 years. [43182]

Mr. George Howarth: It is open to doubt whether a High Court judge has the jurisdiction to act as a coroner, and none has done so in recent years.

Prisoners

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if the advice contained in Section Two: Board report of Form HDC (4) in the draft guidance to governors on the eligibility of prisoners for early release on home detention curfew applies in the case of prisoners required to register under Part I of the Sex Offenders Act 1997; [42356]

(2) if prisoners required to register under Part I of the Sex Offenders Act 1997 will not be eligible to apply for early release on home detention curfew; [42353]

(3) pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Brigg and Goole (Mr. Cawsey) of 12 May 1998, *Official Report*, column *70*, if he will define the exceptional circumstances in which prisoners who are required to register under Part I of the Sex Offenders Act 1997 would be released on home detention curfew; [42372]

(4) if prisoners who are required to register under Part I of the Sex Offenders Act 1997 and who apply for early release under home detention curfew are to be evaluated by any criteria under the enhanced assessment procedure which are not used in the case of other categories of prisoner required to go through the enhanced assessment procedure before early release under the home detention curfew. [42354]

Ms Quin: Any prisoner serving a sentence of four years or more will not be eligible for home detention curfew. Clause 91 of the Crime and Disorder Bill [*Lords*] sets out the other categories of prisoner who will be ineligible for home detention curfew, including prisoners who are serving extended sentences for sex offences under clause 55 of the Bill. My right hon. Friend has also decided that prisoners serving between three months and four years who are required to register under Part I of the Sex Offenders Act 1997 should not be tagged on home detention curfew, save in exceptional circumstances.

Specific guidance on the assessment of prisoners required to register under Part I of the Sex Offenders Act 1997 is given in paragraph 3.2 of the draft guidance on the risk assessment for home detention curfew (placed in the Library on 12 May). This states that prisoners who are convicted of an offence to which Part I of the Sex Offenders Act 1997 applies should not be placed on home detention curfew, save where there are exceptional circumstances.

This reflects our overall objective of protecting the public. Each case will be considered on its merits and only where there are exceptional circumstances will release be approved. Factors which will be considered include the circumstances of the offence, the prisoner's risk to the public and the potential supervision arrangements.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners *(a)* are currently eligible for release on home detention curfew and *(b)* will be released following (i) a standard assessment and (ii) an enhanced assessment. [42355]

Ms Quin: The latest estimate indicates that, were the scheme in force, around 7,200 prisoners would currently be eligible for home detention curfew, subject to their passing a risk assessment and having a suitable address.

All eligible prisoners will have to be considered under the standard assessment before they can be granted home detention curfew. The number of prisoners referred for further consideration under the enhanced assessment will depend on the judgment of those conducting the risk assessments in the individual cases. It is estimated that around 4,000 prisoners might be on home detention curfew at any one time.

Police (Training)

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the training consultants commissioned by the Metropolitan Police during 1997 and 1998 to date. [42806]

Mr. Michael: The Commissioner tells me that training in the Metropolitan Police is delivered on three levels: centrally; area; and divisional. He tells me that, because of the devolved nature of the Metropolitan Police, the majority of training activities and consultants are arranged at a local level in one of its Divisions or Branches. This is to allow local training or consultation to be bought according to need. As a result, the information requested is not readily available centrally and can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

However, the Commissioner tells me that contracts for the value of £10,000 and above, and those contracts which may generate particular difficulties, are let in consultation with the Metropolitan Police's Department of Procurement and Commercial Services. He tells me that the formal contracts for training have been placed by the unit over the last year in regard to the following topics:

Public Order Strategic Command Course

Driving Techniques

Finance and Resource Manager Training

Policing Diversity

Specialist Operations Workshops

Resettlement—Outplacement Services.

The Commissioner also tells me that a number of companies have asked that confidentiality clauses be included in their contracts so that they cannot be identified. The reasons given were generally security or commercial grounds, I am told. As the Metropolitan Police have agreed to include such clauses in their contracts, the Commissioner is unable to provide me with the information requested. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary is currently undertaking a thematic inspection of training, which will include the Metropolitan Police, and I have asked that contractual arrangements for training be included in that inspection.

Probation Services

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department to what extent probation services provided through local authorities have *(a)* been expanded and *(b)* diminished between 1996–97 and 1997–98. [42400]

Ms Quin: Home Office cash limited current grant for the years in question, service by service, is shown in the table.

Total £ cash limit

	1996/97	*1997/98*
Avon	5,657,097	5,568,333
Bedfordshire	3,011,253	2,997,989
Berkshire	4,771,088	4,686,246
Cambridgeshire	3,443,008	3,393,925
Cheshire	5,147,843	5,110,514
Cleveland	4,204,430	4,364,095
Cornwall	2,233,736	2,208,707
Cumbria	3,448,005	3,385,424
Derbyshire	4,388,080	4,556,718
Devon	6,179,943	6,026,040
Dorset	3,697,043	3,593,716
Durham	3,640,662	3,601,976
Essex	7,480,624	7,413,790
Gloucestershire	3,248,583	3,202,508
Hampshire	7,793,274	7,803,939
Hereford and Worcester	3,660,065	3,594,965
Hertfordshire	4,761,433	4,734,267
Humberside	5,251,750	5,258,571
Kent	8,351,281	8,307,578
Lancashire	7,661,145	7,933,492
Leicestershire	4,614,336	4,577,699
Lincolnshire	3,249,156	3,238,827
Greater Manchester	20,456,930	20,422,394
Merseyside	12,860,645	12,585,564
Norfolk	3,508,673	3,516,190
Northamptonshire	2,894,369	2,860,597
Northumbria	10,205,589	10,105,172
Nottinghamshire	7,228,881	7,126,463
Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire	6,393,411	6,297,623
Shropshire	2,140,708	2,111,436
Somerset	3,308,250	3,201,367
Staffordshire	6,115,628	6,046,105
Suffolk	3,067,983	3,043,987
Surrey	4,791,070	4,679,942
East Sussex	3,561,157	3,547,240
West Sussex	2,766,603	2,751,465
Warwickshire	2,889,135	2,818,192
West Midlands	21,202,578	20,923,624
Wiltshire	2,825,447	2,812,210
North Yorkshire	2,860,695	2,963,504
South Yorkshire	10,182,621	9,971,749
West Yorkshire	16,136,171	15,984,817
Inner London	32,495,559	32,033,478
North East London	7,708,497	7,616,985
South East London	5,122,339	5,061,132
South West London	3,915,125	3,837,747
Middlesex	13,936,761	13,706,116
England	314,468,662	311,584,416
Dyfed	1,766,225	1,759,966
Gwent	2,843,130	3,017,029
North Wales	3,008,587	3,137,235
Powys	650,080	648,208
South Glamorgan	3,306,567	3,259,640
Mid Glamorgan	2,854,057	2,794,663
West Glamorgan	2,741,691	2,698,843
Wales	17,170,338	17,315,584
England and Wales	331,639,000	328,900,000

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reason the current and capital probation grant and credit approvals to local authorities were reduced between 1996–97 and 1997–98. [42401]

Ms Quin: Probation service budgets for 1997–98 were decided by the previous Government and announced to services before that financial year began. We adhered to those budgets after the General Election in line with our commitment to maintain public spending in 1997–98 and 1998–99 in accordance with the previous Government's spending plans.

MINISTER WITHOUT PORTFOLIO

Expenditure

29. **Mr. Green:** To ask the Minister without Portfolio how much public money will be spent on the Millennium Experience between the present time and the staging of the event. [42017]

Mr. Mandelson: There is no taxpayers' money allocated to the Millennium Experience project. The budget comprises a grant of £399m (net) from the Millennium Commission and forecast receipts of £359m from private sector sponsorship, visitor income and other commercial revenue. So far £93.6m of the grant from the Millennium Commission has been used.

31. **Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Minister without Portfolio if he will make a statement on the budget for the Millennium Experience at Greenwich. [42019]

Mr. Mandelson: As I previously informed the hon. Member, the budget for the Millennium Experience comprises a grant of £399m from the Millennium Commission and forecast receipts totalling £359m from the private sector sponsorship, visitor income and other commercial revenue. The project is on time and on budget.

Regional Exhibitions

30. **Mr. Bob Russell:** To ask the Minister without Portfolio what plans he has to enable exhibits in the Millennium Experience to be displayed elsewhere in the United Kingdom. [42018]

Mr. Mandelson: It is too early for final decisions to be made about the future of individual exhibits beyond the year 2000, but the Government, in confirming their determination to ensure a legacy from the Millennium Experience, hope that it might be possible for elements of the exhibits to be displayed elsewhere after 2000.

Serious Play Zone

32. **Ann Clwyd:** To ask the Minister without Portfolio if he will make a statement on the content of games to be included in the serious play zone. [42020]

Mr. Mandelson: The detailed content of the serious play zone is currently being developed by the New Millennium Experience Company and its designers, Land Design Studios Ltd., working closely with the zone sponsor, BSkyB. The zone will explore the world of sport and leisure in the 21st century.

International Debt

33. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Minister without Portfolio what representations he has received on linking

the Millennium Experience in the UK with the experience of debt reduction or cancellation in other countries of the world. [42021]

Mr. Mandelson: I have received a number of representations on this important issue, as have my colleagues in the Treasury, the Department for International Development and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. Representations have particularly related to the Jubilee 2000 campaign and the Bondfire project.

The Government are committed to the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative, which aims to reduce the debt burden of the world's most indebted countries to sustainable levels.

Visitors

34. **Mr. Brady:** To ask the Minister without Portfolio what estimate he has made of the number of people from Altrincham and Sale, West who will visit the Millennium Experience. [42023]

Mr. Mandelson: The New Millennium Experience Company estimates that 12 million visits will be made to the Millennium Experience. Between 8 and 10 million of those are likely to be from the UK, and I hope that many of those will come from Altrincham and Sale, West. I also hope that as many people as possible from the greater Manchester area and across the country participate in the associated Challenge and Millennium Festival programmes.

WALES

Small Businesses

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the regulations that have been removed or amended to help small businesses since 1 May 1997. [42780]

Mr. Hain: There is only a limited volume of Wales-only legislation, however, the following regulations have been removed since 1 May 1997 to the advantage of small and other businesses:

The Food Protection (Emergency Prohibitions) (Radioactivity in Sheep) (Wales) (Partial Revocation) Order 1998 withdrew, in relation to specified areas of land in North Wales, restrictions upon the movement and slaughter of sheep.

The restrictions on fishing activities as a result of the Sea Empress disaster were withdrawn in June 1997, by the Food Protection (Emergency Prohibitions) (Oil and Chemical Pollution of Fish and Plants) (Revocation) Order 1997.

National Health Service

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the cost of *(a)* preparing a corporate plan for the NHS in Wales and *(b)* managing the trust reconfiguration exercise. [42597]

Mr. Win Griffiths: *(a)* Preliminary estimates of first year costs in preparing a corporate plan for the NHS in Wales are of the order of £250,000 including accommodation, staff and running costs. Budgets for subsequent years will be agreed in the light of progress in year one. *(b)* The Department's staff and other costs including consultation exercises and external assessment of proposals are estimated to be £870,000 for managing the trust reconfiguration exercise.

Details of costs which will be borne by health authorities, trusts and other bodies are not held centrally.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many sites of special scientific interest there were in Wales on 31 March; and what was their total area in hectares. [42442]

Mr. Win Griffiths: At 31 March 1998 there were 942 SSSIs in Wales, with a total area of 217,807 hectares.

Community Hospitals

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much new funding is available in the current year to *(a)* build new community hospitals and *(b)* upgrade existing community hospitals; and if he will make a statement. [42432]

Mr. Win Griffiths: There is no new funding available specifically for community hospitals in 1998–99. However, almost £50 million has been made available for major capital investment in the NHS in Wales for projects ranging from the removal of asbestos at the University of Wales Dental Hospital, to the new Cancer Treatment Centre at Glan Clwyd NHS Trust. Another £47 million discretionary capital has also been made available to NHS Trusts and Health Authorities, to maintain existing facilities, including community based services.

In February this year, we were very pleased to announce a new community hospital for Chepstow, which will be built and serviced by a private company under the Private Finance Initiative (PFI). In addition, several other NHS Trusts are currently negotiating with private partners for the provision of capital services.

Occupational Health

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps are being taken to make occupational health services available to staff working in primary care within the National Health Service. [43599]

Mr. Win Griffiths: It is primarily for general practitioners (GPs) as independent contractors to look after their own health and that of their staff. However, the Welsh Office has been involved in discussions with the Welsh Council of the Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) and the Welsh General Medical Services Committee (WGMSC) about this issue. We are also aware that some health authorities in Wales are exploring ways of setting up a service on a local basis.

Asthma

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the net ingredient cost for preparations used in the treatment of asthma *(a)* in total, *(b)* per health authority and *(c)* per head of population per health authority, in each of the last five years. [43695]

Mr. Win Griffiths: Information on the net ingredient cost of prescription items dispensed specifically for asthma could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

However most prescription items dispensed for the treatment of asthma fall into one of three therapeutic classes (bronchodilators, corticosteroids and cromoglycate & related therapy) and figures for these are given in the following table. It should be noted, however, that some items dispensed in these classes were not for the treatment of asthma. Prior to the setting up of the five new Health Authorities in Wales on 1 April 1996 these data were collected on the basis of Family Health Service Authorities.

	Net ingredient cost (£000)				Net ingredient cost per person(£)[2]			
Family health services authority	*1992–93*[1]	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Clwyd	2,854.4	3,395.1	3,823.8	4,247.0	6.71	7.98	8.98	9.92
Dyfed	2,957.2	3,374.8	3,783.6	4,097.5	8.14	9.19	10.41	11.24
Gwent	3,150.5	3,692.8	4,096.4	4,447.6	6.84	8.01	8.87	9.64
Gwynedd	1,763.7	2,114.1	2,372.3	2,635.9	7.07	8.46	9.49	10.55
Mid Glamorgan	4,832.7	5,582.1	6,415.9	7,108.8	8.54	9.86	11.32	12.59
Powys	863.1	981.9	1,067.8	1,177.6	6.68	7.55	8.20	8.99
South Glamorgan	3,215.2	3,659.7	4,006.5	4,336.6	7.45	8.42	9.16	9.87
West Glamorgan	3,132.6	3,671.1	3,984.5	4,291.8	8.17	9.50	10.29	11.1
Wales	22,770.1	26,471.6	29,550.7	32,342.8	7.57	8.76	9.78	10.69

Health Authority	*Net ingredient cost (£000) 1996–97*	*Net ingredient cost per person (£)*[2] *1996–97*
Bro Taf	8,724.7	11.66
Dyfed Powys	5,685.8	11.47
Gwent	6,369.1	10.83
Morgannwg	6,526.7	12.29
North Wales	7,388.4	10.8
Wales	34,694.8	11.38

[1] The figure for Wales includes net ingredient costs where the Family Health Service Authority was unidentified
[2] Persons on NHS prescribing and dispensing lists at 31 March

Further Education

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the budget for further education in each year since incorporation and what the budget will be for 1998–99; and what percentage change has occurred since incorporation. [42646]

Mr. Hain *[pursuant to his reply, 21 May 1998, c. 472]:* I regret the information that my hon. Friend was provided was incorrect. The correct answer is as follows:

The annual budgets made available to the Further Education Funding Council for Wales (FEFCW) on a cash basis for the period 1993–99 are set out in the table.

Financial year	*FEFCW Budget (£ million)*	*Percentage change*
1993–94	143.3	—
1994–95	160.0	11.7
1995–96	170.6	6.6
1996–97	175.9	3.1
1997–98	178.0	1.2
1998–99	178.5	0.3

NORTHERN IRELAND

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list in respect of each Northern Ireland Minister the *(a)* nights which they have spent in Northern Ireland since 1 May 1996, *(b)* arts events in Northern Ireland attended, *(c)* education and sports events in Northern Ireland attended, *(d)* voluntary sector events in Northern Ireland attended and *(e)* events relating to the tackling of unemployment in Northern Ireland attended. [29850]

Mr. Paul Murphy *[holding answer 19 February 1998]:* Information for the Northern Ireland Ministers is as follows:

	(a)	*(b)*	*(c)*	*(d)*	*(e)*
1 May 1996–30 April 1997					
Sir Patrick Mayhew	172	4	13	7	3
Sir John Wheeler	47	10	4	0	0
Michael Ancram	88	6	25	4	0
Malcolm Moss	69	0	0	5	0
Baroness Denton	109	8	16	4	32
1 May 1997–18 February 1998					
Dr. Marjorie Mowlam	69	1	4	6	1
Paul Murphy	119	1	1	0	0
Adam Ingram	67	0	3	0	19
Tony Worthington	97	11	42	21	15
Lord Dubs	85	9	6	4	10

Consultation Papers

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list the consultation papers published since 1 May 1997 giving the date of publication, closing date for submissions and the number of respondents. [42254]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The information requested has been placed in the Library.

Employee Travel

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will estimate the cost of employee travel on office business, broken down into *(a)* fuel allowances, *(b)* unproductive time during travel, *(c)* other costs related to car transport and *(d)* costs related to public transport, for (i) 1994–95, (ii) 1995–96, (iii) 1996–97 and (iv) 1997–98. [32438]

Mr. Paul Murphy *[holding answer 3 March 1998]:* The information for the Northern Ireland Office and the Northern Ireland Departments is as follows:[1]

£000

Year	Fuel allowances	Other costs[2]	Public transport[2]
1994–95[3,4]	9,215	152	2,830
1995–96[4]	8,786	217	4,206
1996–97[4]	10,299	266	4,366
1997–98	9,644	264	2,372

[1] The information on the cost of unproductive time during travel is not available

[2] The Northern Ireland Office and the Department of Agriculture could not split cost between Other Costs and Public Transport and a total figure is included in figure work at Public Transport

[3] The Department of Finance and Personnel could provide information for 1994–95 in all categories only at disproportionate cost

[4] Prior to 1997–98 the Prisons accounting system could not split travel and subsistence payments

Civil Servants

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will estimate the number and percentage of civil servants in her Department, at each grade including and above higher executive officer who *(a)* attended university and *(b)* attended either Oxford or Cambridge University. [33068]

Mr. Paul Murphy *[holding answer 9 March 1998]:* The information for the Northern Ireland Office and the Northern Ireland Departments is as follows:

Grade	Attended university	Percentage of grade
Senior Civil Service	122	83
Grade 6	56	90
Grade 7	221	60
Deputy Principal (SEO)	254	44
Staff Officer (HEO)	249	28
Professional and Technical Grades	1,113	72

Notes:

1. The figures for attendance at university have been completed on the basis that staff with a degree level qualification have attended university.

2. Information on attendance at Oxford or Cambridge University is not readily available.

3. Figures are not included for the Department of the Environment and the Northern Ireland Office (London) who could provide the information only at disproportionate cost.

Reproductive Health Care

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what estimates he has made of the costs of extending reproductive health care and abortion services in Northern Ireland; and which aspects will receive priority. [42685]

Mr. Worthington: No estimate of costs for extending reproductive health care and abortion services in Northern Ireland has been made. The provision of infertility services is a matter for the Health and Social Services Boards which are at present engaged in reviews of the infertility services provided to their local populations. Abortions are illegal in Northern Ireland except where necessary to save the life of the mother or where continuation of the pregnancy would involve risk of serious injury to her physical or mental health.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will ensure that the people of Northern Ireland have the same access to reproductive health care and abortion services as is available in England and Wales. [42567]

Mr. Worthington: As in England and Wales, where the provision of infertility services is a matter for the health authorities, the provision of infertility services in Northern Ireland is a matter for the Health and Social Services Boards, which are at present engaged in reviews of the services provided to their local populations. Abortion is illegal in Northern Ireland except where necessary to save the life of the mother or where continuation of the pregnancy would involve risk of serious injury to her physical or mental health. It would therefore not be lawful to grant access to abortion services on the same grounds as in England and Wales, where the law is different.

Petroleum Products

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment she has made of the effect of the illegal importation of petroleum products into Northern Ireland on *(a)* ancillary industries, *(b)* rural employment and *(c)* the rural economy; and if she will make a statement. [42890]

Mr. Ingram: Illegal importation of petroleum products into Northern Ireland is a matter for HM Customs and Excise and the Treasury. Treasury Ministers are aware of the Petrol Retailers Association's concerns about the economic effects and Customs are actively deploying resources to counter the threats posed to the revenue and to the Northern Ireland business community.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland for what reasons she declined to meet the officers of the Petrol Retailers Association to discuss the illegal importation of petroleum products into Northern Ireland; and if she will make a statement. [42881]

Mr. Ingram: The petrol Retailers Association wrote to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State expressing their concerns about illegal importation of petroleum products into Northern Ireland and requesting a meeting. Illegal importation of products across UK national boundaries is a matter for HM Customs and Excise and the Treasury. A response from the Financial Secretary to the Treasury has issued been to the Association.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what additional measures are being taken by the Royal Ulster Constabulary to intercept commercial vehicles transporting motor fuel products into Northern Ireland; and if she will make a statement. [43448]

Mr. Ingram: The RUC has been liaising with a multi-national oil company and HM Customs and Excise. As a result a strategic, co-ordinated and intelligence led plan is being developed to address this problem effectively.

A series of additional tactics and operational measures are now being actively considered.

Small Businesses

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list the regulations that have been removed or amended to help small businesses since 1 May 1997. [42779]

Mr. Ingram: During the period 1 May 1997 to 30 April 1998 small businesses in Northern Ireland benefited from the repeal or amendment of the following regulations.

Health and Safety (Miscellaneous Fees Amendment) Regulations (NI) 1997

Motor Vehicle Testing (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 1998

Goods Vehicles Testing (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 1998

Motor Vehicles (Construction and Use) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 1998

Planning (Control of Advertisements) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 1998.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Fines (Lincolnshire)

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what was the total amount in fines levied *(a)* by courts in Lincolnshire, *(b)* on residents of Lincolnshire and *(c)* on residents of South Holland and the Deepings in the most recent available year. [43933]

Mr. Hoon: *(a)* The total fines imposed by Lincolnshire magistrates' courts in 1997 was £4.4m. *(b)* This Department does not hold any information on the amount of fines imposed by magistrates' courts on residents of Lincolnshire and this information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. *(c)* This Department does not hold any information on the amount of fines imposed by magistrates' courts on residents of South Holland and The Deepings and this information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Public Trust Office

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the staff/client ratio at the Public Trust Office in each year since 1990. [43957]

Mr. Hoon: It is only from the 1993–94 financial year that caseload figures in the Public Trust Office have been monitored on the same basis. Although figures prior to 1993–94 exist, they have not been formulated in the same manner as those available from that date. On this basis I am able to provide the staff/client ratio from 1993–94.

1993–94: 457 clients per member of staff;

1994–95: 497;

1995–96: 517;

1996–97: 532; and

1997–98: 547.

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what guidelines are followed by the Public Trust Office to keep next of kin informed about its involvement in each case. [43953]

Mr. Hoon: Both the Court of Protection and the Public Trust Office treat each case on its merits, and endeavour, using the information available, to try and do what the client (the mentally incapable person) would wish. If this involves close liaison and involvement with the next of kin, this is done.

However, the Mental Health area is not required to keep next of kin involved in each case on the grounds of confidentiality. If the individual was not suffering from a mental illness which meant that they were unable to manage their own financial affairs, they would not necessarily wish their next of kin to be informed of the current position regarding their finances. In some cases people would not, under any circumstances, wish next of kin involved in any way whatever. Each case must be judged on its individual merits.

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many visitors are employed at the Public Trust Office; and how many visits each made per client in each year since 1990. [43956]

Mr. Hoon: The Public Trust Office assumed responsibility for the Lord Chancellor's General Visitors with effect from April 1996—prior to that the Visitors were employees of the Lord Chancellor's Department. There are currently six General Visitors who are appointed on a self-employed basis. Statistics showing the number of visits completed are available only from 1992–93 and are as follows:

	Visits completed
1992–93	1,500
1993–94	1,300
1994–95	850
1995–96	790
1996–97	1,680
1997–98	1,500

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many staff were employed by the Public Trust Office in each year since 1990. [43958]

Mr. Hoon: The figures provided are based on permanent staff in post plus casuals. The figures supplied show full time equivalents and exclude those staff "off strength" e.g. those staff on maternity or career breaks, or on unpaid leave.

	Number
1989–90	591.5
1990–91	590
1991–92	580
1992–93	592
1993–94	572
1994–95	528
1995–96	550
1996–97	558.5
1997–98	553

Mr. Faber: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to review the operation of the Public Trust Office. [43887]

Mr. Hoon: As the Public Trust Office became an executive agency in 1994, it will be subject to the usual Quinquennial agency review which must be completed in 1999. As is normal with such reviews, this will include a review of all the Public Trust Office's functions.

Court of Protection

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what checks are made by the Court of Protection before approving a loan. [43955]

Mr. Hoon: The exercise by the Court of Protection of its discretion in approving a loan is a judicial matter and its exercise varies according to the circumstances of each particular case.

In approving a loan, the Court has regard to the requirements of the relevant Sections of the Mental Health Act 1983, the Enduring Powers of Attorney Act 1985, the Court of Protection Rules 1994, the Court of Protection (Enduring Powers of Attorney) Rules 1994 and relevant case precedent as necessary in the particular circumstances of the case.

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what changes have occurred in the relationship between the Court of Protection and the Public Trust Office since the latter became an executive agency in 1994. [43954]

Mr. Hoon: There has been little change in the relationship between the Court of Protection and the Public Trust Office since 1990, except that the Court of Protection Rules 1994 and the review of the Public Trust Office's Framework Document in 1997 defined the functions and roles of each more clearly.

Personal Injury Cases

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what research he has commissioned or undertaken into the effect of his proposals for the *(a)* wider introduction of conditional fee arrangements and *(b)* allocation of legal aid in personal injury cases from the consumer's perspective. [42586]

Mr. Hoon: Organisations representing consumers have been consulted during the development of these proposals and have responded to the consultation paper. All the responses are being analysed and we intend to publish our response to the consultation in due course.

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what evaluation he has made of the pre-action protocols piloted by nine firms of solicitors and six insurers since October 1997; and if he will publish his conclusions, indicating the evidence underlying them. [42585]

Mr. Hoon: The pilot of the pre-action protocol for personal injury cases will continue until the end of August. The working group responsible for drafting the protocol, whose membership includes insurers and solicitors, and which is running the pilot, has agreed that officials of the Lord Chancellor's Department should evaluate the data produced by the pilot at its conclusion. Any decision on the publication of the results would be a matter for the working group.

Legal Aid

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what evaluation he has made of the Law Society's research undertaken by Sheffield University, and the Law Society's response to his Department's research undertaken by KPMG into conditional fees; and if he will publish his conclusions and the evidence underlying them. [42584]

Mr. Hoon: The Law Society's research into conditional fees and their response to the consultation paper *Access to Justice with Conditional Fees* are being analysed at the moment, together with all the other responses to the consultation paper. We intend to publish our response to the public consultation as soon as the analysis is complete and we have considered the results.

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many firms of solicitors in England and Wales undertook legal aid work in each of the last five years for which figures are available; what was the average income from legal aid, excluding VAT and disbursements, of those firms in each of those years; and how many of these firms were not included in his answer to the hon. Member for West Lancashire (Mr. Pickthall) on 28 April 1998, *Official Report*, column 65. [42598]

Mr. Hoon: The information requested is not available in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. All solicitors' firms undertaking legal aid work are required to hold a Legal Aid Board account number to which payments are made. However, the payment records do not provide an accurate figure for the number of firms doing legal aid work, since a single firm may have more than one office, and therefore account number.

Information on the range of payments for various categories of legal aid made by the Legal Aid Board to solicitors offices are published in its annual report each year. In the 1996–97 annual report, Table General 5 relates to payments made, within each range, to the number of solicitors' offices by each legal aid area. The payments are inclusive of VAT and disbursements as these are not recorded separately.

However, it should be noted that the tables published prior to 1996–97 will not be comparable with those published in preceding annual reports as the tables were revised to make them more relevant to current developments in legal aid (paragraph 4.5 to Section 4 of the 1996–97 report refers). As of 1996–97, the area is the legal aid area in which the solicitor's office is situated.

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many barristers in England and Wales undertook legal aid work in each of the last five years for which figures are available; what was the average income from legal aid, excluding VAT, of those barristers in each of those years; and how many of those barristers were not included in his parliamentary answer to the hon. Member for West Lancashire (Mr. Pickthall) on 28 April 1998, *Official Report*, column 65. [42599]

Mr. Hoon: The information is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Payments made to counsel for legal aid work are recorded by the

Legal Aid Board by range of payments and category of work only. This means that the statistics contained in the Board's Annual Report do not accurately reflect the number of barristers undertaking legal aid work, as each barrister may appear in a number of categories and ranges of payment.

Information on the range of payments for various types of legal aid made by the Legal Aid Board to counsel are published in its annual report each year. In the 1996–97 annual report, Table General 9 relates to payments made to counsel (Table General 7 in preceding annual reports). The payments are inclusive of VAT and disbursements as these are not recorded separately. However, it should be noted that the tables published prior to 1996–97 will not be comparable with those published in preceding annual reports as the tables were revised to make them more relevant to current developments in legal aid (paragraph 4.5 to Section 4 of the 1996–97 report refers).

Defamation Act

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the dates when those parts of the Defamation Act 1996 not yet in force are to come into force; and when the attendant rules of court will become effective. [42456]

Mr. Hoon: The Government intend to bring the remaining provisions of the Defamation Act 1996 (including those which apply to Scotland) into force as soon as reasonably practicable. All those provisions will require secondary legislation to make them fully effective. We will make the necessary amendments to the Rules of Court and other Orders at the same time.

Public Bodies

Jackie Ballard: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) what is the average attendance fee of *(a)* male and *(b)* female members of boards of non-departmental public bodies responsible to his Department; [42845]

(2) what is the average salary of *(a)* male and *(b)* female members of boards of non-departmental public bodies responsible to his Department. [42844]

Mr. Hoon: The majority of board members of non-departmental pubic bodies give their time and services voluntarily and receive no payment other than normal travel and subsistence expenses. Where members do receive remuneration, this can vary between an annual salary, an honorarium or an attendance fee (which itself can be a daily rate or a half-daily rate, or calculated on a per meeting or per case basis). Individuals' remuneration therefore is not directly comparable. Full details of all payments to board members of non-departmental bodies, by gender, are given in the Cabinet Office publication 'Public Bodies'. Copies of 'Public Bodies 1997' are available in the Libraries of the House.

Public Appointments

Jackie Ballard: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when his Department's action plan for increasing the number of women holding public appointments will be published; and if he will place a copy in the Library. [42846]

Mr. Hoon: My Department's action plan will be published shortly. Copies will be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Public Inquiries

Maria Eagle: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what provisions and at what cost were made out of public funds in respect of costs of legal representation for the families and relatives of victims at the public inquiries into the following tragedies *(a)* Piper Alpha, *(b)* Hillsborough, *(c)* King's Cross, *(d)* the Marchioness, *(e)* the Clapham rail crash, *(f)* the MV Derbyshire, (first inquiry) and *(g)* Stephen Lawrence's murder; and in each case how the costs were (i) agreed, (ii) verified and (iii) disbursed. [42974]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I have been asked to reply.

I regret that the information requested is not obtainable except at disproportionate cost.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Fur Farming

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to implement the Council of Europe's recommendations regarding fur farming. [43706]

Mr. Morley: The revision of the recommendations regarding fur farming currently being undertaken in the Council of Europe will provide the sound scientific justification for any new welfare rules. We will consider legislating on the basis of the Council of Europe's work if it makes sense to do so once we have established the timetable for phasing out fur farming in Great Britain.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what advice ADAS is currently giving fur factory farms with regard to investments in and improvements to their premises. [43707]

Mr. Morley: ADAS was privatised on 1 April 1997. Any services provided to fur farmers by ADAS are a matter for the parties concerned, and costs are met by the fur farms.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his timetable for banning fur factory farming; and what factors govern this timetable. [43708]

Mr. Morley: The Government's firm intention is to ban fur farming as soon as practicable. Such a ban must be implemented in accordance with national and international law and I am currently considering how our intention can best be implemented. An announcement will be made once I have decided how to proceed and there will be public consultation on any proposals for legislation to ban fur farming.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many mink and fox fur factory farms there are by county. [43705]

Mr. Morley: As at 28 May 1998, there were the following mink farms in England:

County	*Number of licensed mink farms*
Cornwall	1
Dorset	1
Hampshire	1
Isle of Wight	1
Lancashire	6
Northumberland	1
South Yorkshire	1
Staffordshire	1
West Yorkshire	2
Total	15

There is no requirement to register fox fur farms. However, I am not aware of any in England.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received from fur breeders opposing the Government's policy on fur breeding. [43710]

Mr. Morley: A public consultation letter seeking comments on how I proposed to prohibit the keeping of mink and other species for fur was issued on 5 August 1997. Since then, the Ministry has received 7 representations from fur breeding interests, including the British Fur Trade Association, the Fur Breeders Association of the UK and the International Fur Trade Federation, all opposing the Government's policy on fur farming.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what guidance has been given to owners of fur factory farms with regard to the Government's policy on fur breeding. [43704]

Mr. Morley: All the current mink farm licensees have been informed in writing that it is the Government's intention to ban the keeping of mink for fur in this country and that I am considering how this intention may best be implemented.

Animal Welfare

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on his policy on the proposed EU update to Directive 88/166/EEC regarding the welfare of hens. [43886]

Mr. Morley: We are pleased that the Commission has now submitted to the Council of Ministers its proposals to set improved welfare standards for laying hens in cages and to introduce standards for alternative systems. The proposals will require thorough technical discussion, which we have already set going under our Presidency. Our aim is to secure a measure which significantly raises minimum welfare standards for laying hens throughout the European Union and leads to a phase-out of the battery cage.

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the current welfare requirements for free range hens. [43728]

Mr. Morley: The welfare of laying hens in free range systems is covered by a Welfare Code made under the Agriculture (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1968. We would like in addition to see firm statutory requirements adopted at the EU level on the welfare of hens in alternative systems: we will be working to secure such requirements in the EU negotiation which is now under way on the Commission's recent proposals in this area.

Marine Research Laboratory

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about the future of the Marine Research Laboratory in Burnham-on-Crouch. [43209]

Mr. Morley: The laboratory at Burnham-on-Crouch is part of the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (CEFAS), an Executive Agency of the Department. As part of its obligation to provide an efficient and effective scientific service, CEFAS is reviewing its long-term requirements for sites and specialist research facilities. The objective of the review is to ensure that CEFAS has appropriate facilities to support first class science, whilst recognising the need for the Agency to recover its full costs and offer affordable services. It is essential to develop flexible facilities, so that CEFAS can respond quickly to changing work opportunities.

The current work programme at Burnham fully occupies the site, and staff numbers have been increasing. There is no expectation that this situation will change significantly in the near future. The estate review will aim to establish the long-term costs and benefits of maintaining all CEFAS sites, including that at Burnham. It will assess the need for future investment in facilities, taking account of the views of the MAFF customers who commission work at CEFAS on their likely requirements, and on the prospects of acquiring new non-MAFF business.

Common Fisheries Policy

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement concerning his meeting with National Federation of Fisheries Organisations and the Scottish Fishermen's Federation on 30 April; and what issues raised at that meeting will be taken forward to the next meeting of fisheries ministers. [43872]

Mr. Morley: At my meeting with the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations and Scottish Fishermen's Federation on 30 April we discussed their joint paper on the future of the Common Fisheries Policy after 2002.

I warmly welcomed the joint strategy as a good basis for discussion. Over the coming months the UK industry will discuss the paper with their counterparts in other Member States and there will be further discussions among ourselves in this country.

Reform of the CFP is a continuous process, and the June Fisheries Council will be looking at reform of the marketing regime as well as proposals for changes to the rules on enforcement. The Commission will also be making a report on preparation for the 2002 review.

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what amendment to the Treaty of Rome established the without time limit derogation of national allocation of quota from the equal access principle; [43819]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 6 May 1998, *Official Report*, column *421*, if the common resource principle is part of Council Regulation EEC 3760/92. [43816]

Mr. Morley: The principle of equal access to fishing grounds is not set down in the EC Treaty but in Council Regulation (EEC) No. 2141/70. Council Regulation (EEC) No. 3760/92 heavily qualifies the principle so far as the practical operation of the Common Fisheries Policy is concerned.

Food Safety

Mr. Cox: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list his Department's bodies that have responsibility for food safety and hygiene; and if he will make a statement. [43629]

Mr. Rooker: The bodies reporting to the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, or jointly to the Minister and other Secretaries of State, which are concerned wholly or partially with food safety and hygiene, or which provide relevant services, are as follows:

Executive Agencies

- Meat Hygiene Service
- Pesticides Safety Directorate
- Veterinary Medicines Directorate
- Central Science Laboratory
- Farming and Rural Conservation Agency

Advisory bodies

- Advisory Committee on Microbiological Safety of Food
- Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes
- Advisory Committee on Pesticides
- Consumer Panel
- Epidemiology of Foodborne Infections Group
- Food Advisory Committee
- Microbiological Food Surveillance Group
- Microbiological Safety of Food Funders Group
- Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee
- Veterinary Products Committee
- Working Party on Chemical Contaminants in Food
- Working Party on Chemical Migration from Materials and Articles in Contact with Food
- Working Party on Dietary Surveys
- Working Party on Food Additives
- Working Party on Pesticide Residues in Food
- Working Party on Radionuclides in Food
- Working Party on Veterinary Residues in Food

Other

- BSE Regulatory Forum
- Meat Hygiene Appeals Tribunal.

Antibiotic Growth Promoters

Dr. Ladyman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimates his Department has made of the increased cost to the consumer if antibiotic growth promoters were banned in the production of poultry, pigs and beef. [43793]

Mr. Rooker: No such estimates have been made. However, figures produced by the European Federation of Feed Additive Manufacturers indicate that withdrawal of antibiotic growth promoters could result in increased production costs of up to 10 per cent., with a cost to EU farmers and consumers of almost ecu 2,500 million per year.

Dr. Ladyman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what studies his Department has made of the experience of countries which have banned the use of antibiotic growth promoters in animal husbandry. [43792]

Mr. Rooker: The use of antibiotic growth promoters is controlled under EC Directive 70/524/EEC. Information in support of bans in certain Member states has been submitted to the European Commission's Scientific Committee on Animal Nutrition (SCAN). This information has either already been considered by the UK's independent scientific Veterinary Products Committee, which advises Agriculture and Health Ministers, or is to be reviewed by the Committee shortly.

Dr. Ladyman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimates he has made of the increased levels of *(a)* nitrates and *(b)* phosphates which will be excreted if antibiotic growth promoters are banned in the production of pigs, poultry and cattle. [43791]

Mr. Rooker: Figures from the European Federation of Animal Feed Additive Manufacturers and the National Office of Animal Health indicate that withdrawal of antibiotic growth promoters in France, Germany and the UK would result in the excretion of an additional 78,000 tonnes of nitrogen and 15,000 tones of phosphorus each year.

Green-top Milk

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many people have suffered food poisoning in each of the last 10 years where the source of infection has been green top milk. [43187]

Mr. Rooker: The majority of food poisoning cases are sporadic and the vehicle of infection is not known. Cases may also occur as part of outbreaks and for some of these the vehicle of infection may be established. The latest information on the number of people infected in general outbreaks of infectious intestinal disease in England and Wales associated with all unpasteurised milk will be made available in a detailed table to be placed in the House of Commons Library shortly. However, information is not available specifically on sporadic cases associated with green top or unpasteurised cows' drinking milk.

SCOTLAND

Buildings Refurbishment

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his estimate of the cost of buildings refurbishment carried out by his Department in *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97, *(c)* 1997–98 to date and *(d)* 1997–98 full year; and if he will make a statement. [26644]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 5 February 1998]:* The information set out below relates to buildings owned by The Scottish Office and its associated Departments and Agencies, with the exception of the Scottish Prison Service, for which figures could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

The total cost of buildings refurbishment for the years requested are:

	£
1995–96	8,629,204
1996–97	13,708,322
1997–98 full year	7,276,063

The refurbishment work has been carried out on a range of buildings, offices and specialist facilities and has been necessary either to preserve the fabric of the buildings or to bring systems up to a modern standard. The greater part of the expenditure relates to the refurbishment of court buildings.

Public Appointments

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people appointed to *(a)* the Scottish Office and *(b)* quangos were (i) females, (ii) males, (iii) from ethnic minorities and (iv) registered disabled in (1) 1995–96, (2) 1996–97, (3) January to April 1997 and (4) since 1 May 1997. [41811]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 13 May 1998]:* The number of permanent staff appointed to the Scottish Office and Quangos, together with details of sex, ethnicity and disability are shown in the table.

	Female	*Male*	*Ethnic Minority*	*Disabled*
The Scottish Office and its Executive Agencies (excl SPS)				
Staff appointed in:				
1995–96	88	148	1	3
1996–97	126	175	3	1
1 January 1997 to 30 April 1997	54	83	0	0
1 May 1997 to 30 April 1998	137	203	0	1
The Scottish Prison Service				
Staff appointed in:				
1995–96	212	486	2	0
1996–97	153	370	2	0
1 January 1997 to 30 April 1997	55	133	0	0
1 May 1997 to 30 April 1998	137	322	4	1
Quangos				
Staff appointed in:				
1995–96	280	418	2	1
1996–97	460	533	4	1
1 January 1997 to 30 April 1997	51	129	3	0
1 May 1997 to 30 April 1998	497	442	5	3

Jackie Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when his Department's action plan for increasing the number of women holding public appointments will be published; and if he will place a copy in the Library. [42874]

Mr. McLeish: The Scottish Office action plan will be published shortly. Copies will be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Police Complaints

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many formal complaints have been made in each of the last five years against *(a)* Scottish chief constables and *(b)* deputy and assistant chief constables; how they were dealt with; and what the outcome was of each complaint. [42431]

Mr. McLeish: This information is not held centrally. Complaints made against chief constables, deputy and assistant chief constables are dealt with by the relevant police authorities.

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how his Department ensures that police boards have an appropriate mechanism for dealing with formal complaints against the chief constable or deputy or assistant chief constables; [42428]

(2) what system each police board has in place to deal with formal complaints against the chief constable or deputy or assistant chief constables. [42427]

Mr. McLeish: It is for each police board to decide what system to put in place to discharge its statutory duty to keep itself informed as to the manner in which the

Chief Constable handles complaints by members of the public. If it is reasonably believed that a disciplinary offence may have been committed by a senior officer, the police authority must institute procedures set out in the Police (Conduct) (Senior Officers) (Scotland) Regulations 1996. The Secretary of State has no locus to ensure that the police board's mechanism is appropriate.

Green Belt

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on his policy regarding the conservation of the Green Belt and of the countryside around cities and towns. [42546]

Mr. Macdonald: The Government are committed to ensuring the long term protection of Scotland's green belts and countryside, whilst looking to planning authorities to ensure through their development plans that their policies remain relevant to local circumstances and to reflect those policies in their planning decisions.

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list planning approvals allowing development in the Green Belt in Scotland since 1 January 1995, indicating the council concerned, the nature, date, location and extent of each development, the developer and whether approval was given by the council or by his Department. [42429]

Mr. Macdonald: Information on decisions taken by councils allowing development in the Green Belt is not held centrally. From 1 January 1995 to 31 December 1997 my right hon. Friend has granted approval for the applications listed in the table. The majority of these decisions were appeal decisions delegated to The Scottish Office Inquiry Reporters Unit.

Authority	*Applicant*	*Development*	*Location*	*Ground area*	*Approved*
North Lanarkshire	—	Letting bedroom block	Dalziel Park, Motherwell	—	15.12.97
North Lanarkshire	Peter D. Stirling Ltd	Infilling and recycling/reuse of construction waste	Drumcavel Quarry, Mount Ellen	—	06.08.97
South Lanarkshire	Mrs. M. Ingram	1 house	Muir Farm, Carmunnock, Glasgow	1.36ha	27.11.97
Renfrewshire	Linzi and William Gorman	Storage	Yardfoot Farm, Lochwinnoch	180m^2	19.11.97
South Ayrshire	Telecoms Tower and Compound	Mercury Personal Communications	Raith Hill, Prestwick	96m^2	21.07.97
East Dunbartonshire	Cora Foundation/St. Mary's Kenmure	Residential, teaching and leisure	St. Mary's Road, Bishopbriggs	366m^2	10.07.98
East Dunbartonshire	McCann, Lindsay Ltd.	Extension to hard standing, industry	Craigton Works, Craigton, Milngavie	—	06.05.97
East Dunbartonshire	Mr. J. Stark	1 House	Alton Farm, Antermony Road, Milton of Campsie	—	09.10.96
Falkirk	Goalday	Landfill	Avondale Farm, Polmont, Falkirk	80ha	15.11.96
Falkirk	Falkirk Football and Athletic Club	Football stadium	Westfield Road, Falkirk	30ha	03.06.96
Kyle and Carrick	—	House and garage	12 Monktonhill Road, Southwoods, Troon	—	10.02.97
Kyle and Carrick	Bett/Summerbridge	Retail	Heathfield/Whitletts, Ayr	—	24.04.96
Midlothian	—	Private housing (45) development	Dalkeith	—	22.03.95
Hamilton	George Wilson (Stonehouse) Ltd.	175 Houses	Strathaven Road/Carscallan Road, Hamilton	7.082ha	06.08.96
Strathkelvin	Mr. Kohli	House extension and garage	Lochview, Bardavie	—	16.04.96
Strathkelvin	Greater Glasgow Community and Mental Health Services	Offices to housing (change of use)	The White House, Lennox Castle, Lennoxtown	—	15.01.96
Strathkelvin	Mr. Kohli	Entrance vestibule and double garage	Lochview, Bardavie	—	31.01.95
Strathkelvin	Beazer Homes	Housing	Garnhart Estate	9ha	11.96
Aberdeen	Stewart Milne Homes Ltd.	Housing	Contlaw Road, Milltimber	15ha	06.03.96
Aberdeen	Mr. F. J. McLean	1 House (change of use from store)	West Lasts, Peterculter	—	10.05.95
Edinburgh	Gogar Curling Club	Extension to Curling Club	Gogar Station Road, Edinburgh	1ha	30.01.96

Authority	Applicant	Development	Location	Ground area	Approved
Grampian	J. Hutchison	2 Holiday chalets	Elrick Farm, Ridge of Muchalls, by Stonehaven	—	13.07.95
Grampian	C&R Fraser	Housing	Jellieshillock, Maryculter, Kincardine	—	25.01.95
Kincardine and Deeside	Trustees of late G. A. M. Saunders	Housing	Monduff, Newtonhill	—	15.05.95
East Kilbride	Lightbody Ltd.	Housing	Hamilton Road, Strathaven	3.4ha	01.96
East Kilbride	Whiteshawgate Ltd.	Housing	Hamilton Road, Strathaven	6.9ha	01.96
Renfrew	—	Housing	Kirktonfield Road, Neilston	—	16.03.95
Strathclyde	Wimpey Homes Holdings Ltd.	Housing	South of Wester Cleddons Road and West of Westerhill Farm	30ha	06.02.95

Source:
The Planning Exchange (details of applicant's name and ground area are not recorded in every instance)

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the councils which have sought approval since 1 January 1995 to remove protection from land previously designated as green belt and the date and the area of land involved in each case. [42446]

Mr. Macdonald: This information is not available in the form requested. However, the table indicates the housing provision in the green belt for which approval has been sought for release by the former regional councils since 1 January 1995.

Authority	Green belt	Housing allocation	Date of submission
Strathclyde Regional Council	Ayr, Prestwick, Troon	650	November 1995
Strathclyde Regional Council	Greater Glasgow	170	November 1995
Lothian Regional Council	Edinburgh	Up to 4,000	January 1995

Notes:
1. The Grampian Structure Plan, submitted for approval in February 1995, includes a green belt exceptions policy which allows for limited release of land for housing and business use. The extent of these releases remains to be defined and quantified through the relevant Local Plans.
2. The Edinburgh Green Belt is the subject of a review following modification of the Lothian Structure Plan by the Secretary of State.

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the parts of Scotland designated as Green Belt, indicating the areas covered. [42433]

Mr. Macdonald: There are six designated green belts in Scotland. The boundaries of individual green belts are defined in the relevant local authorities' local plans which can be viewed at the offices of the authority concerned. As at January 1998 the area covered by such designation is as follows:

Green belt	Area (hectares)
Aberdeen	23,039
Ayr, Prestwick and Troon	3,024
Clackmannan	981
Falkirk and Grangemouth	3,803
Glasgow and Clyde Valley	109,917
Edinburgh	15,869
Total	156,633

Source:
The Scottish Office Geographic Information Service—based on information in Local Plans.

Scottish National Sleep Laboratory

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will make a statement on his Department's funding for the Scottish National Sleep Laboratory for *(a)* 1998 and *(b)* each year since 1992; [42717]

(2) how many people are currently on waiting lists to be treated at the Scottish National Sleep Laboratory; [42718]

(3) what was the average length of time for which a patient had to wait for treatment at the Scottish National Sleep Centre in the last year for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [42719]

Mr. Galbraith: Until 31 March 1996 funding for the Scottish National Sleep Laboratory was provided centrally by the National Services Division of the Common Services Agency. Funding from 1992 until 1996 was as follows:

Financial year	£
1992–93	54,525
1993–94	295,916
1994–95	286,987
1995–96	519,338

Planning of sleep disorder services was devolved to Health Boards with effect from 1996–97 and funds were allocated to them on a weighted basis. Exceptionally in 1997–98, the Management Executive granted an additional allocation of £150,000 to the Laboratory. There are currently 416 people waiting for a new out-patient appointment, 188 waiting for a diagnostic study, and 220 waiting to start treatment.

The waiting time for a new out-patient appointment is on average 28 weeks, for diagnostic study 2.5 months and for the start of treatment 10 months.

Association of Chief Police Officers

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the funds and assistance provided in each year since 1994–95 to the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland by *(a)* the Scottish Office, *(b)* other Government departments and *(c)* each police authority or board. [42409]

Mr. McLeish: The assistance provided by The Scottish Office in respect of the staff salaries and administrative costs incurred by the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPOS) was £104,000 in 1994–95, £119,000 in 1995–96, £135,000 in 1996–97 and £141,000 in 1997–98. No other Government department provided funding.

Scottish Office funding for the ACPOS secretariat is included among the common police services for which the Secretary of State recovers 50 per cent. of his expenditure from police authorities. Details of the expenditure recovered from police authorities for the years in question are shown in the table.

£

Police authority	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*
Central	2,380	2,741	3,123	3,262
Dumfries and Galloway	1,406	1,573	1,787	1,985
Fife	2,856	3,289	3,737	4,009
Grampian	4,313	4,854	5,533	5,889
Lothian and Borders	9,238	10,546	11,981	12,816
Northern	2,395	2,758	3,133	3,518
Strathclyde	25,462	29,202	33,154	33,588
Tayside	3,951	4,537	5,183	5,433
	52,001	59,500	67,631	70,500

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the grades within the uniformed police or civilian police service which make up the membership of the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland. [42405]

Mr. McLeish: The membership of the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland comprises chief constables and assistant chief constables (including designated deputies).

Grampian Constabulary

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will place in the Library a copy of *(a)* the report by the Deputy Chief Constable of Lothian and Borders Police, on the Grampian Constabulary and *(b)* other reports concerning the management and administration of the Constabulary. [42404]

Mr. McLeish: Yes. Copies of the report by Graham Power on the handling of the Scott Simpson murder inquiry by Grampian Police have already been placed in the Libraries of both Houses. Arrangements are being made to place copies of the Accounts Commission for Scotland's Report on the Scottish Police Service Performance Manual, published on 22 April, in the Libraries. Copies of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary's inspection report on Grampian Police will be placed in the House Libraries when it is published.

Information

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if his Department operates a monitoring exercise of persistent inquirers for information. [42630]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 19 May 1998]:* It does not. The low incidence of such inquirers has not warranted the setting up of a monitoring system across my Department.

Voluntary Sports Clubs

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the cost in 1997–98 of discretionary rate relief for voluntary sports clubs in Scotland. [42912]

Mr. Macdonald: The cost of discretionary rate relief for voluntary sports clubs for 1997–98 is estimated at £5,398,120.

Scottish Parliament

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the responsibilities in respect of the *(a)* regulation of and *(b)* payment of subsidy to the railways to be transferred to the Scottish Parliament. [43132]

Mr. McLeish: Under the Government's devolution proposals all matters relating to the regulation of the railway are to be reserved to the UK Parliament. We propose, however, to give appropriate oversight of Scottish passenger rail services to the Scottish Executive including the responsibility for funding passenger rail services which start and end in Scotland.

High Rise Flats, Shettleston

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many blocks of high rise flats, containing what total number of housing units, there are in the Glasgow, Shettleston constituency. [43335]

Mr. Macdonald *[pursuant to his reply, 19 May 1998, c. 337–38]:* The information requested is not available centrally by constituency.

Housing

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make it his policy to collect statistics on the number of houses below tolerable standards in each constituency in Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [43333]

Mr. Macdonald: Information on the number of houses below the tolerable standard is available nationally (from the Scottish House Condition Survey) and at local authority level (from data collected by individual local authorities). Below tolerable standard housing is one of four national housing priority categories for investment for local authorities. There are no current plans to collect this information by constituency.

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make it his policy to collect statistics relating to high rise flats in each constituency in Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [43334]

Mr. Macdonald: Information on the number of council owned high rise flats is available at national and local authority level. There are no plans to collect this information by constituency.

Asthma

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the net ingredient cost for preparations used in the treatment of asthma *(a)* in total, *(b)* per health authority and *(c)* per head of population per health authority, in each of the last five years. [43694]

Mr. Galbraith: The information by health board and Scotland for financial years 1993–94 to 1997–98 is set out in the table. The costs shown are based on the value of ingredients dispensed by community pharmacists and dispensing doctors before the addition of dispensing fees or deduction of any discount or patient charges. The cost of drugs used in hospital treatment of asthma is not available centrally.

The costs shown relate to drugs used in the treatment of asthma contained in British National Formulary sections 3.1 (Bronchodilators), 3.2 (Corticosteriods) and 3.3 (Cromoglycate and related therapy). Some of the drugs may be used in the treatment of other conditions.

	Ingredient cost (£ million)					*Ingredient cost per patient on GP lists (£)*				
Health Board	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*
Argyll and Clyde	3.206	3.575	3.867	4.120	4.455	7.18	8.06	8.81	9.39	10.15
Ayrshire and Arran	3.470	3.972	4.373	4.665	5.096	8.86	10.12	11.17	11.91	13.06
Borders	0.880	0.949	0.999	1.036	1.142	8.21	8.80	9.25	9.56	10.56
Dumfries and Galloway	1.078	1.195	1.293	1.412	1.573	7.03	7.80	8.43	9.21	10.31
Fife	2.377	2.627	2.892	3.122	3.496	6.76	7.44	8.16	8.80	9.84
Forth Valley	2.004	2.275	2.490	2.697	2.968	6.90	7.83	8.54	9.27	10.21
Grampian	3.546	3.960	4.337	4.643	4.980	6.69	7.22	8.05	8.59	9.22
Greater Glasgow	7.198	8.099	8.841	9.251	9.796	7.12	8.13	8.92	9.33	9.96
Highland	1.248	1.401	1.557	1.752	1.890	5.88	6.58	7.28	8.15	8.76
Lanarkshire	4.448	5.074	5.706	6.050	6.590	7.62	8.68	9.78	10.32	11.29
Lothian	5.237	5.652	6.091	6.461	7.279	6.52	7.03	7.57	7.93	8.89
Orkney	0.109	0.130	0.144	0.149	0.156	5.45	6.47	7.17	7.38	7.81
Shetland	0.100	0.111	0.128	0.141	0.158	4.46	4.82	5.57	6.12	6.95
Tayside	3.435	3.936	4.388	4.741	4.979	8.36	9.58	10.73	11.57	12.17
Western Isles	0.142	0.172	0.201	0.215	0.229	4.76	5.77	6.76	7.27	7.88
Scotland	38.478	43.128	47.307	50.455	54.787	[1]7.17	[1]8.03	[1]8.84	[1]9.40	[1]10.22

[1] Based on cost of ingredients divided by the total numbers of patients on GP lists

Small Businesses

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the regulations that have been removed or amended to help small businesses since 1 May 1997. [42781]

Mr. Wilson: Since 1 May 1997, The Scottish Office has made the following amendments to regulations which are expected to help small businesses:

Invergarry-Kyle of Lochalsh Trunk Road (A87) Extension (Skye Bridge Crossing) Toll Order (Variation) Order 1997—(SI1997/2941 S.186)

The Town and Country Planning (Use Classes)(Scotland) Order 1997—(SI1997/3061)

The Corn Returns Regulations 1997—(SI1997/1873)

The Non-Domestic Rates (Levying)(Scotland) Regulations 1997—(SI1997/452—S.34).

TREASURY

Information

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if his Department operates a monitoring exercise of persistent inquirers for information. [42643]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 19 May 1998]:* HM Treasury Public Enquiry Unit (PEU) records the total number of calls answered by PEU staff. We do receive calls from persistent inquirers but we do not monitor these independently of the overall total.

Working Hours

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the minimum number of hours someone has to be working to count as employed under the ILO definition. [43972]

Mrs. Liddell: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. David Willetts, dated 1 June 1998:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your parliamentary question on the ILO definition of being employed.

Under the definitions of economic status agreed by the Thirteenth International Conference of Labour Statisticians (Geneva, 1982) anyone working at least one hour in the reference period (normally the week preceding the interview) is counted as being employed. This minimum does not apply to those who happened to be away from work in the reference period due to sickness, holiday etc.

The full ILO definition of employment is published on page 63 of the 1996 ILO Yearbook, a copy of which is available from the House of Commons Library.

The United Kingdom's and all other European Union countries' Labour Force Surveys use the ILO definitions although there may be some small differences in interpretation between countries.

Mortality Statistics

Mr. Cunliffe: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the mortality rates for *(a)* heart disease,

(b) lung cancer and *(c)* renal failure in (i) the National Health Service North-West Region and (ii) Wigan and Bolton health area. [43308]

Mrs. Liddell: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Lawrence Cunliffe, dated 1 June 1998:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your parliamentary question on the mortality rates for *(a)* lung cancer, *(b)* other forms of cancer and *(c)* kidney disease in (i) the National Health Service North-West Region and (ii) Wigan and Bolton health area.

The data requested are shown in the table.

Death rates[1] by cause in the North Western Regional Office and Wigan and Bolton Health Authority, 1996

	North Western RO	*Wigan and Bolton HA*
Lung cancer	71	64
Other forms of cancer	211	193
Kidney disease	9	11

[1] Deaths per hundred thousand population

The deaths data were identified as those certified with an underlying cause assigned to the following International Classification of Diseases Ninth Revision (ICD9) codes:

Cause	
Lung cancer	162
Other cancers	140–208 (malignant neoplasms) minus 162
Kidney disease	580–593 (renal failure and infections of the kidney)
	250.3 (diabetes with renal manifestations)
	403–404 (hypertensive renal disease)

Dividend Tax Credits

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 18 July 1997, *Official Report*, column *375*, if he will provide a breakdown of the number of *(a)* non-taxpayers aged over 65 years and *(b)* all non-taxpaying individuals reclaiming tax credits on dividends in (i) 1995–96 and () 1996–97, in the categories (1) under £20, (2) £21 to £50, (3) £51 to £100, (4) £101 to £200 and (5) over £200 reclaimed. [41637]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: The latest available estimates derived from the Survey of Personal Incomes cover dividends paid in 1995–96 and are given in the table.

Amount of dividends tax credit claimed (£)	*Number of non taxpayers aged 65 and over with claims (thousands)*	*Number of non taxpayers with claims (thousands)*
under 20	100	240
21–50	60	130
51–100	60	110
101–200	50	90
201 and over	30	60
Total	300	630

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 18 July 1997, *Official Report*, column *375*, concerning tax credits on dividends, if he will provide figures for 1996–97. [41635]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: I regret that the information requested for 1996–97 is not yet available.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 18 July 1997, *Official Report*, column *375*, what is the estimated saving to the Exchequer of abolishing the repayment of dividend tax credits in respect of *(a)* all non-taxpaying individuals and *(b)* non-taxpaying individuals aged over 65 years. [41638]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: It is estimated that abolishing payment of dividend tax credits in respect of all non taxpaying individuals will save the Exchequer about £50 million in a full year. About half of this relates to payments to non taxpaying individuals aged 65 and over. These estimates do not take into account any behavioural effects which might result from abolishing the payment of tax credits.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many individuals with no tax liability reclaimed a tax credit on dividends paid in *(a)* 1995–96 and *(b)* 1996–97; and what was the average amount re-claimed. [41636]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: The latest available information is derived from the 1995–96 Survey of Personal Incomes. It is estimated that some 630,000 non taxpayers made claims, averaging £75, for payment of the tax credit on dividends paid in 1995–96.

Euro-X Committee

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the terms of reference of the Euro-X Committee; and what matters have been reserved to ECOFIN. [43142]

Mrs. Liddell: The terms of reference of the Euro-X committee are set out in the Luxembourg European Council conclusions. The Luxembourg European Council conclusions state that decisions will in all cases be taken by the ECOFIN Council in accordance with the procedures set out in the Treaty.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what will be the agenda for the June meeting of the Euro-X Committee. [43141]

Mrs. Liddell: As agreed by all member states, the agenda for the June meeting of Euro-X will include practical arrangements for future meetings of Euro-X and a preliminary assessment of the macroeconomic situation in the euro area with a view to the introduction of the single currency in those countries.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what mechanisms will be created to co-ordinate the work of the Euro-X Committee and ECOFIN. [43143]

Mrs. Liddell: Euro-X is an informal body to be established in line with the conclusions of the Luxembourg European Council. The ECOFIN Council is a formal body of the EU, established under the Treaty. The Luxembourg European Council conclusions state that the Ministers of member states participating in the euro area may meet informally among themselves to discuss issues connected with their shared specific responsibilities for the single currency. The Luxembourg conclusions also

state that whenever matters of common interest are concerned they will be discussed by Ministers of all member states. Decisions will in all cases be taken by the ECOFIN Council in accordance with the procedures laid down in the Treaty.

Capital Receipts

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will announce the capital receipts initiative for the next three years. [43196]

Mr. Darling: The Chancellor announced in his 1997 Budget the amount of resources for the Capital Receipts Initiatives in 1997–98 and 1998–99.

The provision for the next three years will form part of the new spending plans which will be announced in the summer following the completion of the Comprehensive Spending Review.

Official Engagements

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list his official engagements during his recent visits to *(a)* Indonesia, *(b)* Korea and *(c)* Malaysia. [42398]

Mr. Gordon Brown: My visit to Asia began in Korea, where I met President Kim Dae-Jung, the Ministers of Finance and Foreign Affairs and the Governor of the Bank of Korea. I also met members of the business and financial community, and representatives from the trade unions.

I then travelled to Malaysia, where I met Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Anwar Ibrahim. As in Seoul, I also had discussions with members of the business and financial community in Kuala Lumpur.

The final leg of the visit was to Indonesia. I met President Soeharto and delivered a strong message on the need for political reform. I then met a number of the key figures involved in the economic reform effort: the Ministers for the Economy, Finance, and Trade and Industry, and the Governor of the Bank of Indonesia. I also delivered a speech at the Jakarta Stock Exchange on strengthening the architecture of the international financial system, and visited a World Bank rehabilitation project.

Korea

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his discussions with the Korean trade union movement. [42351]

Mr. Gordon Brown: On my recent trip to Korea I met President Kim Dae-Jung, the Ministers of Finance and Foreign Affairs and the Governor of the Bank of Korea. I met some members of the business and financial community. I also met the leaders of the two main Korean trade union bodies: Park In-Sang, President of the Federation of Korean Trade Unions and Lee Kap-Yong, President of the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions.

HIPC Initiative

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussion of the five points of the Mauritius Mandate occurred at *(a)* the Finance Ministers' meeting and *(b)* the G8 summit; and if he will make a statement. [43837]

Mrs. Liddell: Agreement was reached at both the Foreign and Finance Ministers meeting on 9 May and at the Birmingham Summit itself on issues raised in the Mauritius Mandate. Both meetings agreed to the speedy and determined implementation of debt relief to more countries under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative, and encouraged all poor countries to have begun the process of securing debt relief by the year 2000. The meetings also urged all countries that have not already done so to forgive aid-related bilateral debt or to take comparable action for reforming poor countries, and to use export credits to countries eligible for debt relief under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative only for productive expenditure. These agreements follow directly from proposals originally made by the Chancellor in the Mauritius Mandate.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions were held regarding the six-year qualification period for the HIPC initiative at (i) the Finance Ministers' meeting and (ii) the G8 summit. [43836]

Mrs. Liddell: To date, five of the six countries that have had decision points under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative, have been granted shortened second stages before their completion points, demonstrating the willingness of the international community to implement the initiative flexibly.

The G8 further demonstrated its support for the speedy and determined implementation of debt relief to the world's poorest countries under the HIPC initiative in the communiques issued after both the G8 Foreign and Finance Ministers meeting on 9 May and the Summit itself.

Following an initiative by the Chancellor at the Foreign and Finance Ministers meeting, the Summit also discussed the needs of post conflict countries. One possibility to be looked at is counting IMF post conflict assistance programmes towards a country's track record. This could bring the decision point forward by up to twelve months for certain countries.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received from the Governments of *(a)* Japan and *(b)* Germany with regard to debt relief. [43735]

Mrs. Liddell: *(a)* The Chancellor has not received any recent representations from the Japanese Government with regard to debt relief.

(b) The Chancellor has received recent representations from the German government, which make clear its support of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative and which illustrate its generosity in granting debt relief to date.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with the G8 Finance Ministers regarding the sale of IMF gold stocks to fund Third World debt relief. [43734]

Mrs. Liddell: At the present time the sale of IMF gold reserves is not necessary to finance debt relief under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative. The British Government recognise that gold sales will eventually be necessary, and will discuss the issue with other creditors when appropriate.

Asian Crisis

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what initiatives the G8 Summit discussed regarding the impact of the Asian financial crisis on the poor; and what proposals were made. [43733]

Mrs. Liddell: G8 leaders were very conscious of the serious impact of the Asian crisis on the poor and most vulnerable. They agreed that economic and financial reform needs to be matched with actions and policies by the countries concerned to help protect these groups from the worst effects of the crisis. G8 leaders welcomed the support for this by the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and bilateral donors and the increased emphasis on social expenditure in programmes agreed by the IMF. At the Summit there was also a full discussion of the challenges of poorer developing countries throughout the wider world and a number of steps were agreed to help them. The conclusions on this are contained in the G8 Communique in the Library of the House.

PRIME MINISTER

BSkyB

Mr. Maude: To ask the Prime Minister when Cabinet Office officials were consulted about the appointment of Mr. Timothy Allan to a position at BSkyB. [39892]

The Prime Minister: Before his contract was signed on 19 April.

Mr. Maude: To ask the Prime Minister when he was informed that his deputy press spokesman, Mr. Timothy Allan, was negotiating to become an employee of BSkyB. [39874]

The Prime Minister: I was aware that he was discussing employment with several companies for some weeks before his appointment with BSkyB was announced.

Mr. Maude: To ask the Prime Minister when he was informed that his deputy press spokesman, Mr. Timothy Allan, was to become an employee of BSkyB. [39875]

The Prime Minister: On 19 April.

Mr. Maude: To ask the Prime Minister if he provided a reference for Mr. Timothy Allan, his former deputy press spokesman, in connection with his securing a senior position at BSkyB. [39876]

The Prime Minister: No.

Sierra Leone

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the occasions on which he has met President Kabbah of Sierra Leone since 1 May 1997; and if he will publish the minutes of such meetings. [42093]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 14 May 1998]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 19 May 1998, *Official Report*, column *313*.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Prime Minister what United Kingdom public funds were made available to President Kabbah of Sierra Leone during his exile; and what reports he has received on what the money was used for. [42803]

The Prime Minister: The total financial value of United Kingdom assistance to President Kabbah and his government representatives while they were in Conakry, Guinea was £342,711. This comprised direct support from the Department for International Development and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office for: the basic services of President Kabbah's government in Conakry; President Kabbah and a Sierra Leone delegation to attend the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Edinburgh in October 1997; a workshop and seminar in the United Kingdom to help President Kabbah restore the legitimate Government of Sierra Leone; and communications equipment.

The expenditure has been monitored by the British High Commissioner to Freetown, who worked alongside President Kabbah's government in Conakry, and by periodic reports to the Department for International Development from the government of Sierra Leone.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Prime Minister by whom the decision was taken to release the recent letter from President Kabbah to the press; who was consulted; and when. [42708]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 20 May 1998]:* I took the decision in consultation with the Foreign Secretary on the day the letter was received. President Kabbah himself wrote in the letter that he had no objection to its contents being released to the media. When the letter was made public my Press Secretary made clear to journalists that there were interpretations in the letter which the British Government did not agree with—both in relation to interpretation of Security Council Resolutions and in relation to named individuals—but that we saw it as helpful in providing the perspective of the democratically elected and legitimate government of Sierra Leone on events which led to their restoration after the military coup.

Mr. Butterfill: To ask the Prime Minister how many intelligence reports on the activities of Sandline were submitted to No. 10 Downing Street; on what dates; and if he will extend the scope of Sir Thomas Legg's inquiry to include such reports. [43466]

The Prime Minister: All papers that were available to me will be made available to Sir Thomas Legg's investigation.

Consultation Papers

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 11 May 1998, *Official Report*, column *19*, what estimate he has made of the cost of holding centrally details of all the consultation papers issued by Departments since 1 May 1987. [42217]

The Prime Minister: I have made no estimate. Individual Ministers are responsible for the consultation papers they publish.

North Korea

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister what plans Her Majesty's Government have to provide contributions in terms of *(a)* food aid, *(b)* agricultural development and *(c)* the provision of light water reactors to North Korea. [42424]

The Prime Minister: The United Kingdom, in our Presidency role, led a European Union Technical Mission to North Korea from 8–17 May to assess the present humanitarian situation and consider future needs. The UK participated in the United Nations Development Programme Round Table on 28–29 May to discuss plans for agricultural rehabilitation. The Secretary of State for International Development will review UK policy in the light of these events.

We and our EU partners are committed to resolving the issue of nuclear proliferation on the Korean Peninsula. The EU is a full member of the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organisation (KEDO), which is providing North Korea with new Light Water Reactors and interim energy supplies in return for North Korea suspending (and eventually dismantling) its own nuclear reactor programme. The UK contributed $1 million to KEDO in 1995. The EU contributed 5 million ecu in 1996 and in 1997 agreed to contribute 15 million ecu a year for 5 years.

China

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister what plans he has to visit *(a)* the Suzhou Industrial Park and *(b)* Sichuan Province during his forthcoming visit to China. [42352]

The Prime Minister: Arrangements for my visit to China in October are at the planning stage. However, given the large number of competing demands on the programme, I unfortunately do not expect to visit either the Suzhou Industrial park or Sichuan Province on this occasion. However, my programme will ensure that I see as many aspects of Chinese society as possible.

Asia-Europe Meeting

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on ASEM II in London, listing his bilateral meetings with foreign leaders during the summit; and what responses have been received to the proposed trust fund from *(a)* foreign Governments and *(b)* international financial institutions. [42357]

The Prime Minister: The second Asia Europe meeting made a significant contribution towards reinforcing the bonds between Asia and both Britain and Europe as a whole.

There was a strong message on the financial crisis in Asia: how we can work together to restore confidence and stability. At a critical time, we were able to emphasise Europe's commitment to the region and secure agreement on the need to maintain open markets and free trade.

Action plans were agreed to encourage trade and promote investment. The third Asia-Europe Business Forum was also held during the Summit. This gave business leaders from all ASEM members the opportunity to report on the concerns of business directly to political leaders at the summit.

The ASEM process is breaking new ground in political dialogue between the two regions. At the London meeting, there was discussion of fundamental rights and issues ranging from international crime to developments in Cambodia, the Korean Peninsula, Kosovo and enlargement of the European Union.

The London Summit also launched major initiatives in areas of particular concern to all our peoples: the environment and the welfare and education of our children.

The UK's initiative to establish an ASEM Trust Fund was widely welcomed. The Fund, which will provide assistance in assessing the poverty impact of the Asian financial crisis and help with financial restructuring, will be managed by the World Bank. Discussions are at an advanced stage on the operating arrangements. Indications of financial support from EU ASEM participants exceed $30 (US) million (including £5 million from the UK) and further support is expected from both European and Asian participants.

During the Summit and immediately before, I had bilateral meetings with the Prime Ministers of China, Japan, Korea, Malaysia and Thailand.

Information

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Prime Minister if his Office operates a monitoring exercise of persistent inquirers for information. [42627]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 19 May 1998]:* Although requests for information under the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information are routinely monitored, it has not been found necessary to introduce specific procedures for persistent inquiries.

Whaling (Japan)

Mr. Baker: To ask the Prime Minister if he will raise Japan's continued whaling with Emperor Akihito during the latter's forthcoming visit. [42170]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 20 May 1998]:* Under the Japanese constitution, the Emperor has a strictly non-political role. However, we have made the Japanese Government aware on many occasions that the United Kingdom supports a permanent international ban on whaling, with the exception of some limited aboriginal subsistence whaling. The most recent occasion was at the International Whaling Commission meeting that took place between 27 and 29 May in Oman.

Former Service Personnel

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Prime Minister how many Government departments currently have responsibilities for the affairs of former service personnel. [43055]

The Prime Minister: Ex-Service personnel are accorded the same access to services provided by Government Departments as every other citizen. It will depend on the nature of the services required as to which Government Department will be involved. However, the majority of cases are matters relating to the Ministry of Defence, the Department of Social Security, of which the War Pensions Agency is a part, and the Department of Health.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Prime Minister if he will assess the advantages of having the affairs of former service personnel dealt with by a single Government department; what representations he has received on this matter; and if he will make a statement. [43056]

The Prime Minister: The Government have received a number of representations on this subject. My hon. Friend the Minister for the Armed Forces met the Secretary General of the Royal British Legion on 11 March, when they discussed how best to improve the handling of ex-Service affairs. The Ministry of Defence are looking closely at options for approaching the wider question of matters relating to the ex-Service community in the light of these discussions.

Party Funding

Dr. Tony Wright: To ask the Prime Minister if he will arrange for the minutes of the Political Honours Scrutiny Committee since 1979 to be made available to the Committee on Standards in Public Life for its inquiry into party funding. [43294]

The Prime Minister: No. The Committee's advice has been given in confidence to the Prime Minister of the day to assist him or her in making recommendations for political honours.

DEFENCE

British Beef

Mr. Linton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made with the European Commission in seeking to release stocks of British intervention beef for use by the armed forces. [44107]

Mr. Spellar: I am pleased to announce that, following discussions with my right hon. Friends the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Secretary of State for Defence—taken forward by my noble Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, and as a result of his Ministry's approach to the European Commission—the Commission has approved a Regulation allowing access to intervention stocks of British beef for use by the Armed Forces at competitive prices. Access to these stocks on terms agreed should allow our food supply contractor to substantially increase the amount of British beef consumed by our UK based Armed Forces.

Service Fatalities

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service personnel lost their lives in the past 12 months while in action, or as a consequence of wounds received during active service, outside Northern Ireland; and what was the country or coastal region of their deaths or wounds which consequently resulted in their deaths. [42897]

Dr. Reid *[holding answer 21 May 1998]:* This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Defence Analytical Services Agency (DASA). I have asked the Chief Executive to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Paul Altobell to Mr. Andrew Mackinlay, dated 1 June 1998:

I am replying to your questions to the Secretary of State for Defence about the number of service personnel who have lost their lives in action outside of Northern Ireland over the past 12 months, as this matter falls within my area of responsibility.

I am happy to report that our records show that, in the period 1 April 1997 to 19 May 1998, no service personnel died as a result of battle wounds or injuries as a direct result of action by or against an organised enemy.

I hope you find this information helpful.

WE177 Bombs

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what volumes of radioactive waste were generated in the research, manufacture, storage, maintenance and deployment of the WE177 nuclear bombs; what quantities of radioactive waste will be created in their decommissioning; what environmental measures are to be applied to their decommissioning; and where the residual radioactive waste and plutonium will be stored. [40778]

Dr. Reid: The WE177 free fall bomb programme started over 30 years go. Details of radioactive waste arising from the different phase of the programme were not recorded separately, and could be collated only at disproportionate cost.

Decommissioning of WE177 is being undertaken in accordance with all relevant environmental legislation and in line with the requirements of the appropriate regulatory bodies, principally the Environment Agency and the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate.

Any radioactive waste arising from this work will be disposed of via normal approved routes where these are available, and in accordance with certificates of authorisation issued by the Environment Agency; for example, suitable low level waste will be sent to BNFL Drigg. Other waste for which no disposal route is currently available will be stored safely and securely at AWE Aldermaston. Any plutonium will also be safely and securely held, though I must withhold details under Exemption 1 of the code of Practice on Access to Government Information relating to Defence, Security and International Relations.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence to which establishments WE177 bombs were taken for servicing; what the nature of such servicing entails; and how regularly this servicing was conducted. [40814]

Dr. Reid: Servicing was carried out by the Atomic Weapons Establishment as necessary to ensure the continued safety and reliability of WE177 whilst in service. I am withholding details as to the regularity and nature of servicing under Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information relating to Defence, Security, and Internal Relations.

RAF Menwith Hill

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 2 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *489*, what proportion of the total cost of the infra-red system at RAF Menwith Hill has been met by his Department. [42073]

Dr. Reid: As I told the hon. Gentleman in my reply of 2 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *489*, the Space Based Infra-Red System (SBIRS) is a programme funded by the United States Government. As such, we do not have details of the total programme costs and therefore I am unable to specify what proportion of these costs associated with the SBIRS programme at RAF Menwith Hill is being borne by my department.

Sierra Leone

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list all visitors to HMS Cornwall in the period during which President Kabbah was aboard and in the preceding and following weeks; and if he will give their job titles, their reasons for being there and the dates when they were aboard. [41957]

Mr. George Robertson *[holding answer 14 May 1998]:* President Kabbah visited HMS Cornwall in Freetown on 19 March for a lunch jointly hosted by the British High Commissioner and the Commanding Officer of HMS Cornwall to mark the successful completion of the ship's humanitarian mission prior to her sailing the following day. The following visited the ship while President Kabbah was on board:

Vice President Demby

Dr. James Jonah—(then Ambassador to the UN, now Minister of Finance)

Colonel Max Khobe—(ECOMOG Task Force Commander, Sierra Leone)

Mr. C. Margai—(senior political figure, now Minister of Internal Affairs)

Mr. A. Bangura—(Sierra Leone Radio)

Mr. Peter Penfold—(British High Commissioner)

Mr. Colin Glass—(Deputy High Commissioner).

In the evening, the Commanding officer and the British High Commissioner jointly hosted a reception, also to mark the completion of Cornwall's mission. The following attended:

Momodu Koroma—then Kabbah Task Force (now Minister for Presidential Affairs)

Dr. Soyei—Cottage Hospital

Tejan Kella—AFRICARE (organisation involved in humanitarian work)

Dr. Philip Almeida—Cottage Hospital

Mr. V. Collier—Head of Civil Service

Mr. Gael—Action Against Hunger (organisation involved in humanitarian work)

Mr. A. R. Wurie—Head of Protocol

Mr. P. Lamsona—CARE (Organisation involved in humanitarian work)

Dr. Julius Spencer—then Kabbah supporter (now Minister of Information)

Mr. H. Charels—CAUSE Canada (organisation involved in humanitarian work)

Martin Katta

Mr. Koroma—Council of Churches, Sierra Leone (organisation involved in humanitarian work)

Dr. Joe Lappia

Mr. A. Cox—Concern Universal (organisation involved in humanitarian work)

Kanga Sessay—Kabbah Task Force

Ms K. Richardson—Catholic Relief Society

Desmond Luke—then Presidential Adviser (now Attorney General)

Mr. J. Metzker—International Committee of Red Cross

Mrs. S. Gbujama—then Foreign Minister (now Minister for Social Welfare)

Mr. A. Eddo—International Committee of Red Cross

Mr. S. Berewa—then Attorney General

Jean Clement—Medecins sans Frontiéres

Martha Carey—Medecins sans Frontiéres

Rick Fitzpatrick—World Vision

Col. Musa—ECOMOG

Siko Pyker—OXFAM

Lt. Col. Shoboiki—ECOMOG Freetown Commander

Jost Vandenakker—OXFAM

Mr. E. Perez Porras—European Union Resident Representative to Sierra Leone

Clive Dawson—UK businessman

Tony Todd—Crown Agents Emergency Logistics Management Team Consultant

Mr. Hailey—Sierra Leone Police

Mr. Lathbry—Cable and Wireless

Mr. S. Lebby—British High Commission

Mr. Clarke—Cable and Wireless

Lt. Col. Ted Glover—Defence Attaché, Accra

Mr. H. Kamara

Mrs. Gloria Thomas—British Council

Dr. Frank Nyama—New England Clinic

Elizabeth Decker—Nurse

Mrs. D. Fraser

John BB Ganda—Head of Children's Clinic.

The following visited the ship on 19 March as Wardroom guests:

Mr. Juba Jubert—Sandline or associate

Mr. John Farr—Sandline or associate

Mr. Mike Ashworth—Sandline or associate

Mr. Rupert Bowen—Sandline or associate

8 others for whom full names were not given—Sandline or associate.

The following visited the ship in the week preceding 19 March as representatives of their organisations:

18 March

Francis Okello—United Nations

Martin Booth—United Nations

Representative of Cable and Wireless

17 March

Lt. Col. Ted Glover—UK MOD

Representative of Australian World Vision

Representative of Filipino World Vision

Representative of Cable and Wireless

13 March

Kristen Richardson—Catholic Relief Society

Mr. Lathby—Cable and Wireless

Mr. Clarke—Cable and Wireless

Mr. Hailey—Sierra Leone Police

12 March

Francis Okello—United Nations

Colonel Andrew Gale—United Nations

Mike Booth—United Nations

Dr. Jonah—Kabbah Task Force

Mike Downham—Medical Doctor

Clive Dawson—UK businessman

Peter Penfold—British High Commissioner

Mr. Albrecht—ICRC Driver

Mr. Mustaffa—CARE Driver.

A comprehensive list of job titles is not available. The ship sailed from Freetown on 20 March.

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will place a copy of the captain's log of HMS 'Cornwall' for the last 12 months in the Library; [42407]

(2) if he will place a copy of the ship's log of HMS 'Cornwall' for the last 12 months in the Library. [42418]

Mr. George Robertson: There is no such document as a Captain's log. HMS Cornwall's ships logs for the last year are either onboard the vessel, which is currently off Southern Africa, in the post to the UK, or in storage. The logs are not therefore readily available. However, as I told the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) in my reply of 18 May 1998, *Official Report*, column *257*, the logs for the period 1 January 1998 to 1 April 1998 are being collected and I will then consider their possible release. They cover the period that HMS Cornwall was off West Africa.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the Royal Navy vessels which have *(a)* carried out and *(b)* attempted to carry out shore operations in Sierra Leone since May 1997; if he will make a statement on the operations concerned; and what involvement there was of private companies. [42709]

Mr. George Robertson *[holding answer 20 May 1998]:* Since May 1997, with the exception of HMS Cornwall which, between 1 and 20 March 1998, provided humanitarian assistance to the people of Sierra Leone, supported our diplomatic efforts there and assisted in the return of the British High Commissioner, no Royal Navy vessels have carried out shore operations in Sierra Leone.

As far as involvement with private companies is concerned, the ECOMOG air operations centre, run by Sandline personnel, regularly briefed HMS Cornwall during her deployment to Sierra Leone on the security situation and the possible threat posed by rebels. This information was essential to ensure that HMS Cornwall's helicopter could safely carry out its humanitarian relief flights within the country. In addition, on 6 March, HMS Cornwall personnel spent two hours ashore repairing a Sandline helicopter, operating in support of ECOMOG, that had landed at a heli-port alongside the ship following a bird strike. While the helicopter was being repaired, the Sandline pilot and two others accompanying him were invited on-board. On 13 March, HMS Cornwall assisted Sandline personnel with some minor maintenance of the helicopter when it was at the same heli-port. On 19 March, the pilot and 11 others employed by, or connected with Sandline, were invited into the Wardroom for drinks.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence under what authorisation assistance was rendered to a Sandline helicopter by HMS Cornwall; what ship stores and spares were used during this operation; and under what head of charge these items were accounted for by the supply officer, HMS Cornwall. [42309]

Mr. George Robertson: The decision to assist with the repair of the helicopter operating in support of ECOMOG was, quite properly, taken locally by HMS Cornwall. No ship's stores or spares were used, apart from five litres of degreasant and 40 rivets. Both these items were routine consumables which were accounted for when they were issued to the ship's Flight by RNAS Culdrose prior to the Flight's embarkation in February 1998.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 18 May 1998, *Official Report*, column *258*, to the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), what payment was made for the assistance provided for Sandline International's helicopter by the crew of HMS Cornwall; if prior approval was sought and obtained from his Department by the Captain of HMS Cornwall; if Ministers were informed; and what other assistance was given by British military personnel to Sandline, and when. [43293]

Mr. George Robertson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb). No other assistance was provided to Sandline in addition to that detailed in my answer to the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) on 18 May 1998, *Official Report*, column *258*. This was properly a matter for the local commander; ministers were not informed of, nor were charges raised for, the assistance provided.

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those visitors to HMS Cornwall since 1 January 1996 who were employees of or connected with Sandline International indicating *(a)* the names of the visitors, *(b)* the dates of the visits, *(c)* the names of the persons met, *(d)* the purpose of the visits and *(e)* the location of the ship at the time of the visits. [41817]

Mr. George Robertson *[holding answer 14 May 1998]:* Information on visitors going back to January 1996 is not available. While HMS Cornwall was providing humanitarian assistance in Sierra Leone there were two occasions on which the ship was visited by identified Sandline personnel. On 6 March the pilot of the helicopter operated on behalf of ECOMOG, Mr. Juba Jubert, and two others accompanying him, identified as Mr. Farr and Mr. Ashworth, were invited on board while the helicopter was being repaired at the heliport alongside HMS Cornwall after a bird strike. On 19 March, twelve persons employed by, or connected with Sandline, were invited into the Wardroom for drinks. The group comprised Mr. Jubert, Mr. Farr, Mr. Ashworth, Mr. Bowen, and eight others for whom full names were not given.

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if HMS 'Monmouth' provided support to ECOMOG in discharging UNSCR 1132; and if he will make a statement. [42559]

Mr. George Robertson *[holding answer 18 May 1998]:* HMS Monmouth did not provide any support to ECOMOG in discharging UNSCR 1132.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what date notice was given to the crew of HMS Nottingham to report for duty to prepare to depart

for Sierra Leone; and on what date preparations were begun to load that vessel with humanitarian aid for that country. [42711]

Mr. George Robertson *[holding answer 20 May 1998]:* No such notice was given to the crew of HMS Nottingham; nor was Nottingham loaded with humanitarian aid for that country.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the role of HMS Monmouth in Sierra Leone since May 1997; what requests were received from that vessel with respect to acquiring additional (i) personnel and (ii) equipment for land operations; and if representatives from Sandline International were in contact with that ship. [42710]

Mr. George Robertson *[holding answer 20 May 1998]:* The instructions to HMS Monmouth (and later HMS Cornwall) were to deploy to the vicinity of Sierra Leone to be prepared to provide immediate humanitarian assistance to the people of Sierra Leone, to support our diplomatic efforts there, and to assist in the return of the British High Commissioner, should the democratically elected Government be restored.

No requests were made by HMS Monmouth to acquire additional personnel or equipment for land operations. As far as we can ascertain at no time, nor in any way, did representatives from Sandline International have any contact with the ship.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what date Sandline started running the ECOMOG Air Operations Centre. [43460]

Mr. George Robertson: This is not a matter for my Department.

Merlin and Astor Programmes

Mr. Rapson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his plans for the future procurement of *(a)* Merlin and *(b)* Astor from Lockheed Martin. [42914]

Mr. Spellar: I can confirm that, like many other equipment programmes, the procurement of the second batch of Merlin HM Mark 1 helicopters is under consideration as part of the Strategic Defence Review. A judgment must be taken on the optimum balance of Anti-Submarine Warfare assets, including helicopters, fixed wing aircraft, ships and submarines, in light of the perceived threat and against the backdrop of finite resources.

A package of SDR measures has been put before Cabinet, but no final decisions have yet been taken. Once they have, they will be published as quickly as possible.

Final proposals for ASTOR development and production were received at the end of February 1998 and are currently being evaluated. It is planned that a final decision will be taken around the end of this year.

Foreign Armed Forces (Training and Assistance)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the cost to Her Majesty's Government of providing training and assistance to the armed forces of *(a)* India, *(b)* Pakistan and *(c)* China in each of the last five years. [43095]

Dr. Reid: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) on 7 May 1998, *Official Report*, column *436*. I wrote to my hon. Friend the same day and a copy of my letter is in the Library.

Air Bases (Joint Use)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the air bases in the United Kingdom jointly used by the United Kingdom and the United States of America. [43630]

Mr. Spellar: There are various facilities where use is shared to some extent between UK and US personnel, but there are currently no air bases shared by flying units of our two nations on a permanent basis. I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Baker) on 7 April 1998, *Official Report*, column *219*, which details those sites made available to the United States Visiting Forces in the UK.

Defence Clothing and Textiles Agency

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the current capacity of the Defence Clothing and Textiles Agency to deliver the correct types of uniforms in the correct quantities for recruits to the armed forces. [43729]

Dr. Reid: This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Defence Clothing and Textiles Agency (DCTA). I have asked the Chief Executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Michael Roycroft to Mr. Andrew Robathan, dated 1 June 1998:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the current capacity of the Defence Clothing & Textiles Agency to provide uniforms for recruits to the armed forces, as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Defence Clothing & Textiles Agency.

Recruits are issued with items from our uniform and operational clothing ranges for which the current availability is 77.53% and 87.52% respectively against a funded target of 80%. The figures represent the proportion of demands which are met on first presentation and do not include other methods of supply such as local purchase. The actual availability is therefore higher. When items are in short supply or a future problem is forecast, efforts are made to ensure that our stocks are husbanded and that the requirements of the recruit establishments are met as a priority second only to support for operations.

I hope this answer is helpful and am willing to provide more precise information if you have specific concerns in regard to individual items.

Indonesia

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence at which United Kingdom educational institutions, including military colleges, Indonesian army officers are currently being taught, how many officers are at each institution and to what units each is attached. [41552]

Dr. Reid: There are eleven Indonesian army officers currently attending training courses at Ministry of Defence establishments in the UK. One is at the Joint

Services Command and Staff College at Bracknell, and a further ten are at the Royal Military College of Science at Shrivenham.

Details of Indonesian army officers attending non-military UK educational institutions are not a matter for my Department. However, based on the information available to us, we understand that there are a further 18 army officers being taught at non-military educational institutions in the UK. Information on the location of those establishments has been withheld under Exemption 4 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. These students are part of a programme of university training in international relations, defence management, international law and human rights, and the programme is being provided on a private and commercial basis.

We do not have records of which units Indonesian army officers have come from before attending courses in the UK.

Land Command

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library copies of *(a)* the documents sent by GOC 2 Division to GOC Land Command in support of retaining a Land Command Divisional Head Quarters in York rather than Edinburgh and *(b)* the papers submitted to the Executive Committee of the Army Board on the future divisional structure of Land Command. [42903]

Dr. Reid: I am withholding the documents requested under Exemption 2 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Service Personnel (Brave or Gallant Service Awards)

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service personnel have been *(a)* awarded and *(b)* formally recommended but not yet gazetted for the Military Cross over the past 12 months, for service outside Northern Ireland; and what was the country or coastal location in which their acts related to the award or recommendation. [42896]

Dr. Reid: In the past twelve months two Servicemen have been recommended and awarded the Military Cross. One was for service in Sierra Leone, published in the London Gazette on 5 December 1997, and the other for service in the Former Republic of Yugoslavia published in the London Gazette on 8 May 1998. At present there are no other recommendations outstanding for the award of the Military Cross.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* awards and *(b)* recommendations not yet gazetted for gallantry or bravery have been made in relation to service personnel serving in Northern Ireland over the past 12 months. [42894]

Dr. Reid *[holding answer 21 May 1998]:* Nominations for brave or gallant service by soldiers, sailors and airmen of the three Services are considered centrally to ensure continuity of standards and to protect the integrity of the awards. All recommendations received from HQ Northern Ireland reflecting service from 1 April 1997 to 30 September 1997 were approved and subsequently announced in the London Gazette on 8 May 1998. No recommendations for service from 1 October 1997 onwards have yet been submitted.

Territorial Army

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* officers and *(b)* soldiers are attached to the 5LI Shropshire and Herefordshire Light Infantry and the Royal Mercian and Lancastrian Yeomanry. [43119]

Dr. Reid: As at 1 May 1998, the current and established strengths of 5 Shropshire and Hereford Light Infantry and the Royal Mercian and Lancastrian Yeomanry, by officers and soldiers, are as follows:

	5 Shropshire & Hereford Light Infantry		*Royal Mercian & Lancastrian Yeomanry*	
	Current strength	*Established strength*	*Current strength*	*Established strength*
Officers	38	36	39	39
Soldiers	491	494	297	280

Note:
Figures include TA, Regular and Non Regular Permanent Staff (NRPS).

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received from those living in Shropshire on the future of 5LI Shropshire and Herefordshire Light Infantry and the Royal Mercian and Lancastrian Yeomanry. [43120]

Dr. Reid: My Department has received a number of representations from hon. Members with constituency interests in the Territorial Army in Shropshire on the future of 5 Shropshire and Herefordshire Light Infantry and the Royal Mercian and Lancastrian Yeomanry.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what criteria are being used in the Strategic Defence Review to decide which Territorial Army battalions will continue. [43628]

Dr. Reid: Our prime aim is to structure the Territorial Army in a way that will be relevant and useable in the operational circumstances we foresee. But we wish to take account of the valuable economic contribution made by Territorial Army units in their local community.

We will also want to build on existing strong social links of Territorial Army units with their communities, and the cadets; we will want to build on the enthusiasm that there is in many areas for volunteer service. We will also wish to take into account the availability of training facilities; and the need for close working between Territorial units and the Regular Armed Forces.

Within these constraints we aim to preserve as wide a presence as possible for the Territorial Army across the country. It may take some months after our first announcements to reach final decisions on what may be complex set of changes.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to visit the 5 Shropshire and Herefordshire Battalion and the Royal Mercian and Lancastrian Yeomanry at the Copthorne barracks in Shrewsbury. [43646]

Dr. Reid: Neither my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence nor I have any current plans to visit the 5th Shropshire and Herefordshire Battalion and the Royal Mercian and Lancastrian Yeomanry.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will assess the economic impact on Shrewsbury of the presence of the 5 Shropshire & Herefordshire Light Infantry and the Royal Mercian & Lancastrian Yeomanry. [43611]

Dr. Reid: No assessment has been made of the impact of any Territorial Army unit on its local economy, nor are there plans to make such an assessment.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the effect on the numbers of officers, soldiers and associated civilian staff of the amalgamation of the Queen's Own Mercian Yeomanry and the Duke of Lancaster's Own Yeomanry to form the Royal Mercian and Lancastrian Yeomanry. [43645]

Dr. Reid: The Queen's Own Mercian Yeomanry and the Duke of Lancaster's Own Yeomanry amalgamated on 1 April 1993 as part of the restructuring of the Territorial Army in that year. The establishment of the two units at the time of amalgamation, and the current establishment of the Royal Mercian and Lancastrian Yeomanry are shown in the table.

	Establishment		
	Queen's Own Mercian Yeomanry	*Duke of Lancaster's Own Yeomanry*	*Royal Mercian and Lancastrian Yeomanry*
Officers	36	36	39
Soldiers	398	398	280
Civilians	14	14	19
Total	448	448	328

Note:

Figures include TA, Regular and Non Regular Permanent Staff (NRPS)

Copthorne Barracks, Shrewsbury

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many civilian staff are employed at the Copthorne barracks in Shrewsbury. [43648]

Dr. Reid: 255 civilian staff are employed by the Ministry of Defence at Copthorne Barracks, Shrewsbury, including 18 part time staff. In addition, 34 civilian staff are employed by a contractor at Copthorne Barracks, including six part time staff.

Service Personnel Injuries

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service personnel were injured *(a)* in the United Kingdom and *(b)* abroad during (i) 1997, (ii) 1996 and (ii) 1995. [43481]

Dr. Reid: The numbers of Service personnel injured in the UK and abroad in the years 1995, 1996 and 1997 were as follows:

Year	*UK*	*Abroad*
1995	4,316	1,717
1996	4,322	1,389
1997	3,387	790

Notes:

1. The figures provided include injuries resulting in death.

2. The figures for the United Kingdom include injuries which occurred in UK waters and the North Atlantic.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service personnel who were injured *(a)* in the United Kingdom and *(b)* abroad during (i) 1997, (ii) 1996 and (iii) 1995 were forced through their injuries to leave the service. [43480]

Dr. Reid: The numbers of Service personnel medically discharged in the years 1995, 1996 and 1997 owing to injuries sustained in the UK and abroad were as follows:

Year	*UK*	*Abroad*
1995	450	88
1996	573	81
1997	484	77

Notes:

1. The figures provided represent the numbers of medical discharges resulting from injury irrespective of the year in which the injury was sustained. The total number of injuries occurring in 1995, 1996 and 1997 which resulted in medical discharge within the same year or a later year could be compiled only at disproportionate cost.

2. The figures for the United Kingdom include injuries which occurred in UK waters and the North Atlantic.

Fishery Protection Vessels

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Spanish naval personnel or Spanish fishery officers have been aboard British fishery protection vessels in each year between 1993 and 1997; which vessels were involved; and what were the dates and the duration of those visits. [43873]

Dr. Reid: There has been no formal exchange of naval personnel between the Spanish Navy and vessels of the RN Fishery Protection Squadron. No records are kept of Spanish naval personnel who may have visited ships during port visits. It is however known that at least three members of the Spanish Navy were on board HMS Guernsey at various times during her visit to Vigo in 1997.

My department does not hold records which would show the nationality of EU fisheries inspectors embarked on vessels of the RN Fisheries Protection Squadron.

The Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency operates its own fishery protection vessels for which the Secretary of State for Scotland is responsible. Since April 1997 these have had exclusive responsibility for fishery protection duties in Scottish waters.

Japanese Prisoners of War

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the number of widows of servicemen imprisoned by Japanese forces during World War 2 *(a)* in total and *(b)* by constituency. [43306]

Mr. George Robertson: No estimate has been made and no centrally collated figures exist.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the number of *(a)* servicemen and *(b)* civilians who were imprisoned or interned by Japanese forces during World War 2 (i) in total and (ii) by constituency. [43305]

Mr. George Robertson: 50,016 Service personnel from the Armed Forces of the United Kingdom were captured by Japanese forces during the Second World War. While matters concerning civilian citizens of the United Kingdom in such circumstances are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, I can advise that contemporary records show that some 20–21,000 civilians of British origin, British Indian or British subjects of European descent were interned by the Japanese during the Second World War.

The information on these Servicemen and civilians broken down by constituency is not held centrally and it could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Energy Use

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 19 May 1998, *Official Report*, column *322*, concerning departmental energy use, if he will list for each site the *(a)* name and *(b)* rank of the Energy Manager; and what method is used to assess the individual's effectiveness in the collection of relevant data. [43680]

Mr. Spellar: The Top Level Budget Holders in the Ministry of Defence are responsible, in conjunction with Energy Efficiency Focal points, for the setting and achievement of performance targets within their area. Assessments of an Energy Manager's effectiveness are based upon the practical savings achieved against recognised performance indicators, such as usage.

The names and ranks of the Energy Managers are being withheld under exemption 14 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Depleted Uranium

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those authorised to use depleted uranium in the United Kingdom. [43053]

Mr. Spellar: Depleted uranium has wide ranging use in both the civil and defence sectors, including shielding of radioactive sources, counterbalances for aeroplanes and oil rigs, and also in tank and naval ammunition.

The use and handling of depleted uranium are governed by a number of different regulations, none of which requires specific "authorisation" as such. However, disposal, as opposed to use, of depleted uranium is authorised only for licensed nuclear sites. The basic control of depleted uranium is provided by the Radioactive Substances Act 1993 (amended 1995), which is administered by the Environment Agency. Other regulations which may be applicable are the Ionising Radiation Regulations and associated Code of Practice 1985 and 1993, and the Radioactive Material (Road Transport) (Great Britain) Regulations 1996. The MOD itself also issues a number of internal manuals, regulations and instructions relating to the control of radioactive material within the Armed Forces and the MOD.

Small Businesses

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the regulations that have been removed or amended to help small businesses since 1 May 1997. [42783]

Mr. Spellar: The Ministry of Defence is not a Government Department which passes through Parliament regulatory legislation with which industry has to comply. The Department of Trade and Industry is the Government Department responsible for regulations concerning small businesses.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Occupational Pensions

Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many occupational pension funds *(a)* have opted out of the Pensions Act 1995 provisions for member-nominated trustees, *(b)* have no contributing employee and no pensioner-nominated trustees and *(c)* have pensioner-nominated trustees. [43961]

Mr. Denham: The Government want to promote healthy and well run occupational pension schemes and attach great importance to the role that member-nominated trustees have to play in achieving this.

We are taking stock of how the member-nominated trustee requirements are working in practice and, as part of our evaluation of the Pensions Act 1995, we will be looking very carefully at how we can further promote member-nominated trustees, including greater involvement for pensioner members.

The time limit for completion of member-nominated trustee exercises ended in May 1998 and research is currently underway to obtain information along the lines requested. It will be published as part of the 1998 Employers' Pension Provision Survey. The National Association of Pension Funds (NAPF) Annual Survey 1997 provides some early indications from data collected from 613 of their member organisations in the last quarter of 1997. This shows that 83 per cent. of schemes adopted employers' alternative arrangements. This is commonly referred to as opting-out although it does not necessarily mean that a scheme does not have member trustees. The NAPF data shows that the vast majority of schemes, including those who used employer proposed arrangements, do, in fact, have one-third or more member trustees, although these trustees have not been nominated and selected under sections 16 or 18 of the Pensions Act 1995.

Incapacity Benefits

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if she will make a statement on the timetable for execution and evaluation of pilot schemes to test less restrictive definitions of incapacity for benefit purposes; [43560]

(2) what budget the Government have set for 1998–99 for pilot schemes to test less restrictive definitions of incapacity for benefit purposes; [43562]

(3) what plans the Government have to consult with disability groups prior to undertaking pilot schemes to test less restrictive definitions of incapacity for benefit purposes. [43561]

Mr. Denham: Pilots testing more flexible definitions of incapacity to help disabled people into work are due to start in April 1999. No budget has been set for 1998–99.

The Government will continue to consult disabled people and their organisations on our plans to help disabled people who want to work.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans she has to extend the linking period between work entry and benefit claiming for severe disablement allowance and incapacity benefit. [43564]

Mr. Denham: We are taking action to remove obstacles to work from the benefits system as part of our strategy for helping people with disabilities or long-term sickness who want to work. As one of the first steps in this process we will introduce a new 52 week linking rule for people receiving Severe Disablement Allowance and longer-term incapacity benefits who move into work. We are planning to introduce the new rules, which will take some of the risks out of a return to work, with effect from October 1998.

Therapeutic Earnings

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will introduce greater flexibility in terms of *(a)* hours, *(b)* wages and *(c)* types of work considered therapeutic for the assessment of therapeutic earnings. [43566]

Mr. Denham: The Government announced in the Green Paper, "New Ambitions for Our Country: A New Contract for Welfare", changes to the benefits system to encourage disabled people who have the capacity to work to do so. Once we have seen the results of these initiatives we will then consider whether further changes are needed to the work claimants are permitted to undertake whilst retaining benefit.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will disregard therapeutic earnings up to the present therapeutic earnings limit for the purposes of income support and housing benefit calculations. [43565]

Mr. Keith Bradley: For people in receipt of the disability premium there is a disregard of £15 in Income Support and Housing Benefit. There are no plans to introduce a special therapeutic earnings disregard in these benefits.

Benefit Integrity Project

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps her Department has taken to ensure that DLA recipients subject to Benefit Integrity Project review who have appealed against adjudication do not have to return their Motability vehicle. [43298]

Mr. Denham: Motability is an independent charity, but we have worked with them to consider what might be done in cases where entitlement to the higher rate mobility component (HRMC) of Disability Living Allowance is ended under the Benefit Integrity Project.

The Governors of Motability have introduced, from 5 May 1998, a scheme whereby lease payments may be protected for Motability customers who have requested a review of the decision to end their HRMC entitlement. This protection will continue to the date that this further review is completed and the claimant is notified of the outcome. If that decision is favourable to the customer the lease reverts to its previous status; if the decision is still adverse, payment protection ends and the Motability car will have to be surrendered. The new procedures are explained in Motability literature sent to each customer whose HRMC entitlement is ended.

The costs of payment protection will be met from within Motability scheme funds.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when her Department will undertake a review of Benefit Integrity Project cases where benefit was stopped or reduced prior to the introduction of pre-adjudication check. [43297]

Mr. Denham: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for North Tayside (Mr. Swinney) on 5 May 1998, *Official Report*, columns *376–77*.

Lone Parents

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to her answer of 18 May 1998, *Official Report*, column *285*, if she will list the variables which are considered in the management data routinely collected on the New Deal for Lone Parents; if she will make a statement on the reasons why housing status is not included; and what plans she has to include such information in the future. [43593]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Management data show the numbers of lone parents who have reached the various key stages in the New Deal for Lone Parents process.

The information collected records:

- the number of initial invitation letters issued;
- the number of initial interviews with Personal Advisers booked;
- the number of initial interviews which have taken place;
- the number of lone parents who agree to participate in the programme following an initial interview;
- the total number of interviews conducted (including initial interviews);
- the number of referrals to Employment Service programmes or other training;
- the number of jobs obtained following participation;
- the number of lone parents who have increased their hours of work following participation.

These points mark the key milestones in the New Deal for Lone Parents process, and the information is collected and collated on a monthly basis.

The following additional information is also collected for each positive work outcome (each case where either a job has been obtained or hours of work have been increased):

for the first work outcome for each participant, a record is kept of whether the hours of work are (a) under 16 hours per week; (b) 16 to 29 hours per week; or (c) 30 hours or more per week;

whether the outcome has led to a move off Income Support;

whether the lone parent has a child under 5 years and 3 months;

for those whose youngest child is over 5 years and 3 months, whether the lone parent put themselves forward before receiving an invitation letter;

in cases where the lone parent has obtained a job not identified by their Personal Adviser, whether they have received other assistance under the New Deal for Lone Parents (such as referral to training, in-work benefit calculations, help with interview skills, preparation of a CV etc); and

whether those moving into work were given help with making an application for Family Credit.

Other information may be collected on an ad hoc basis, for example, by interrogation, on a case-by-case basis, of DSS/local authority computer systems and clerical records.

The management data collected are designed to show the extent of participation in and process through the New Deal for Lone Parents programme. In this context it is not appropriate to collect information on other characteristics, such as housing status, of the lone parents who participate.

Full independent evaluation of the New Deal for Lone Parents is being carried out by a research consortium led by Social and Community Planning Research on behalf of the Department. The evaluation will consider housing status and mortgage payments in its assessment. The final evaluation report will be published in autumn 1999.

Pensions

Mr. Dawson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will estimate the cost of establishing a common minimum pension for men and women at 60 years including a breakdown of both costs and savings. [41981]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 18 May 1998]:* The information is set out in the table.

The cost of paying a basic State pension of £64.70 to every GB resident aged 60

	£ billion
Gross Retirement Pension cost	40
National Insurance (contributory) benefit offsets	−31.5
Means-tested benefit offsets	−1.5
Net cost	7

Notes:
1. Costs and savings are in 1998/99 prices and are rounded to the nearest £0.5 billion. (−) denotes a saving.
2. National Insurance benefit costs and savings have been provided by the Government Actuary's Department.
3. Behavioural changes have not been allowed for, other than moves between National Insurance benefits.

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans she has, when reviewing the level of the basic state pension, to take account of the rises in the levels of fuel tax and council tax in 1998–99; and if she will make a statement. [42662]

Mr. Denham: We are committed to retain the basic State pension as the foundation of pension provision in retirement, and to increase it at least in line with prices.

The Retail Prices Index used to uprate the basic pension takes into account increases in the price of a wide range of goods and services, including fuel and council tax.

Pensioners with low incomes are entitled to help with their Council Tax through Council Tax Benefit.

Correspondence

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when she will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Walsall, North of 23 March 1998 concerning a constituent, (Reference 5/3644/28). [43307]

Mr. Field: A reply was sent to my hon. Friend on 22 May 1998.

Sick and Disabled People

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans she has to pilot worker retention schemes *(a)* as part of and *(b)* in addition to the New Deal for Sick and Disabled People. [43563]

Mr. Denham: Using some of the £195 million set aside from the Windfall tax we will provide funding to run a number of innovative schemes to test ways of helping disabled people who want to work. These schemes may include worker retention schemes. We expect to announce the first contracts to be awarded towards the end of June.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Public Bodies

Jackie Ballard: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what is the average attendance fee of *(a)* male and *(b)* female members of boards of non-departmental public bodies responsible to her Department; [42818]

(2) what is the average salary of *(a)* male and *(b)* female members of boards of non-departmental public bodies responsible to her Department. [42817]

Mrs. Beckett: The majority of board members of non-departmental public bodies responsible to my Department give their time and service voluntarily, and do not receive payment other than normal travel and subsistence expenses. Where members do receive remuneration, this can vary between an annual salary, an honorarium, or an attendance fee—which can be a daily or half-daily rate, or calculated on a per meeting or per case basis. Individuals' remuneration therefore is not directly comparable. Full details of all payments to board members of non-departmental public bodies—by gender, are given in the Cabinet Office publication 'Public Bodies'. Copies of 'Public Bodies' 1997 are available in the Libraries of the House.

Public Appointments

Jackie Ballard: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when her Department's action plan for increasing the number of women holding public appointments will be published; and if she will place a copy in the Library. [42819]

Mrs. Beckett: My Department's action plan for increasing the number of women holding public appointments will be published shortly. Copies will be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Coal Industry

Mr. Boswell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when she will announce her conclusions on the recent review of the coal industry contracts and the consumption of coal in power stations. [43063]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 21 May 1998]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) on 2 February 1998, *Official Report*, columns *479–80*.

Power Stations

Mr. Boswell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many applications for construction and operation of gas-fired power stations are currently awaiting decision; at what stage; from which applicants; for how much capacity; and if she will make a statement. [43061]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 21 May 1998]:* The following is the information requested:

Station	*Applicant*	*Size(MW)*
Cottam (dual firing)	PowerGen plc	1,000
Spalding	InterGen (UK) Ltd	800
Baglan Bay	Baglan CoGeneration Ltd	1,200
Partington	AES Partington Ltd	380
Shotton	Eastern Generation Ltd	215
Barking	Barking Power Ltd	154
Rugeley B (dual firing)	Eastern Generation Ltd	1,000
Drakelow C (dual firing)	Eastern Generation Ltd	1,000
Teeside	Teeside Power Ltd	45
York	British Sugar plc	80
Castleford	Yorkshire CoGen Ltd	56

Our general approach to those awaiting decision is set out in the reply given by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade to my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. King) of 22 December 1997, *Official Report*, columns *519–20*.

It should be noted that the previous Government gave the go-ahead for some 23,000 MW of new gas-fired capacity, mostly combined cycle gas turbine stations but some combined heat and power (CHP). We inherited 21 applications for new gas-fired projects, totalling some 10,500 MW. Since coming into office we have given approval to 9 projects, 7 of which were industrial CHP totalling some 600 MW with another having an element of CHP.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will list in normal order of consideration the various consents to be given before construction and operation of a gas-fired power station may be initiated. [43062]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 21 May 1998]:* The construction, extension, or operation of a gas-fired power station with a capacity of more than 50 megawatts requires the President of the Board of Trade's consent under section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989. The President's approval is also required under section 14 of the Energy Act 1976 to use gas as the fuel for power stations over 10 megawatts. In addition, the President's consent under section 37 of the Electricity Act 1989 may also be required if the proposed station is to be connected to the transmission system via an overhead electric line. Other consents and approvals also need to be obtained from other statutory bodies, for example an Integrated Pollution Control licence under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 has to be sought from the Environment Agency. It is for the applicant to determine when and in which order to seek the necessary approvals.

Petroleum Industry

Mr. Boswell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the actual and percentage reduction in the number of retail petroleum outlets in the last 12 months for which figures are available; and what assessment he has made of the adequacy of competition in the sector. [43100]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 21 May 1998]:* The Director General of Fair Trading has considered the evidence on this as part of his report on 'Competition in the Supply of Petrol in the UK'. I have asked the Director General to respond to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what studies she has commissioned into the pricing behaviour of petrol retailers on motorways relative to general purpose roads; and if she will make a statement. [43088]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 21 May 1998]:* None—since the Director General of Fair Trading is responsible for keeping the operation of markets under review. The Office of Fair Trading report 'Competition in the supply of petrol in the UK', published on 18 May, does not address the particular issue of the pricing behaviour of petrol retailers on motorways.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade by what means she will monitor the retail petroleum industry for potential abuse of dominant market position. [43071]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 21 May 1998]:* The Director General of Fair Trading is responsible for keeping the operation of markets under review. He has set out proposals for further monitoring of the petrol retailing market in Annex 3.1 of his report on 'Competition in the Supply of Petrol in the UK' published on 18 May. Copies have been placed in the libraries of the House.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will ensure that those types of vertical agreements in the retail petroleum industry which the

OFT has determined are not covered by the undertakings given by the oil companies in 1966 are subject to equivalent measures to ensure competition. [43097]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 21 May 1998]:* I understand that the Director General of Fair Trading will shortly commence a review of the undertakings given by the oil companies in 1966; he will advise me whether modifications are necessary. The undertakings were last modified in January 1994. In addition, any complaints about vertical agreements not covered by the undertakings should be put to the Director General for his consideration.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action she proposes to take in response to the recent OFT report on the retail petrol industry. [43070]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 21 May 1998]:* The Director General of Fair Trading has responsibility for keeping under review the operation of the retail petrol market, and powers to act where necessary to promote competition. I am studying his conclusions. The hon. Member should address any comments on the report to the Director General of Fair Trading.

Mr. Kidney: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to her answer of 11 February 1998, *Official Report*, column *218*, when she expects to receive the report of the Director General of Fair Trading regarding the wholesale and retail petrol market. [42114]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: I received a copy of the Director General's report on the wholesale and retail petrol market in the UK on 18 May.

EU Postal Directive

Mr. Boswell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when she expects the United Kingdom to adopt the EU Postal Directive; and if it will be fully applied in the United Kingdom. [43799]

Mr. Ian McCartney: By early February 1999 and the Directive will be fully applied.

Post Office

Mr. Boswell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will set out the calculation underlying the most recent Post Office external financing limit. [43804]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The Post Office external financing limits for 1997–98 and for the current financial year remain as set by the previous Government in line with our commitment to maintain public expenditure at the levels they had set.

Parcelforce

Mr. Boswell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement on the current *(a)* financial situation of and *(b)* plans for the future of Parcelforce. [43806]

Mr. Ian McCartney: Parcelforce recorded a loss of £21m in 1996–97; the Post Office accounts for 1997–98, which will include details of the Parcelforce financial performance last year, are expected to be published next month. The second stage of our review of how best to grant the Post Office greater commercial freedom within the public sector is looking at a range of issues, including the future status of Parcelforce. We hope to announce our conclusions on this second stage of the review in the Autumn.

Meanwhile, the development of new twin hubs at Coventry Airport for use by Parcelforce for express and international traffic, for which planning permission has recently been received, will represent a major step forward in the modernisation of the business, and should help to secure its longer-term future.

Royal Mail

Mr. Boswell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations she has received concerning the investigation of local complaints about the security of Royal Mail. [43059]

Mr. Ian McCartney *[holding answer 21 May 1998]:* One representation has been received.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations she has received concerning the premature collection of mail from post boxes before the advertised time of last posting. [43060]

Mr. Ian McCartney *[holding answer 21 May 1998]:* A small number of representations from around the country have been received in the last year about collection of mail from post boxes before the advertised collection time.

Utility Regulation

Mr. Caplin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will establish a unified regulator for the electricity and gas industry with particular responsibility for monitoring cross-subsidy between the two markets. [43108]

Mrs. Beckett: In the Green Paper on utility regulation 'A Fair Deal for Consumers', which I published on 25 March, there is a proposal that the electricity and gas regulators should be replaced as soon as possible with a single energy regulator, and OFFER and OFGAS should be merged to create a single regulatory office. The duties of the new energy regulator will need to acknowledge the convergence of the gas and electricity markets. It will also be necessary to ensure that the creation of a joint energy regulator is underpinned by the proper integration of the supporting regulatory regimes.

The Green Paper also proposes that, as an interim measure, steps should be taken to ensure collaboration on the regulatory issues raised by integrated energy markets, and strategic planning set in hand for the creation of the single regulatory office.

Procedures are now in hand to appoint a Director General of Gas Supply as from November 1998. It is expected that the successful candidate will also be appointed as Director General of Electricity Supply, at or soon after appointment as DGGS. Subject to Parliamentary approval of legislation, it is also expected that he or she would later be appointed as Energy Regulator for Great Britain.

Energy Industry Reviews

Mr. Paterson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) when each of the current reviews relating to the energy industry will be completed; [42596]

(2) how many reviews of the energy industry the Government are conducting. [42600]

Mrs. Beckett: A Green Paper on Utility Regulation, including regulation of gas and electricity, was published in March, and the consultation period extended until the end of May. My hon. Friend, the Minister for Science, Energy and Industry, is currently considering future policy and programme options for renewables, and expects to make a further announcement later this year. My Department will be publishing an Energy Paper setting out our policy on clean coal technology in the Summer. The review of energy sources for power generation is expected to reach conclusions by the end of June. The review of electricity trading arrangements, which is being co-ordinated by OFFER, will report in July.

Home Workers

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is her policy towards the regulation of home worker schemes which require non-returnable registration fees; and if she will make a statement. [42686]

Mr. Ian McCartney *[holding answer 19 May 1998]:* People should never send money in advance for work at home. I have this week launched a publicity campaign to warn against the risks of falling victim to homeworking scams. Responsibility for investigating complaints about the promotion of such schemes lies with the Advertising Standards Authority. The British Codes of Advertising and Sales Promotion contain specific requirements for homeworking schemes and breaches of the codes in this respect are taken very seriously.

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

Mr. Paul Clark: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment her Department has made of the impact on small businesses of a fast rail link from the Channel Tunnel to the north via Ebbsfleet, Stratford and St. Pancras. [43093]

Mrs. Roche: My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister is aware of the economic regeneration aspects of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link (CTRL). Negotiations on the future of the CTRL continue.

Cambodia

Ann Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many export licences to British firms for arms have been *(a)* granted, *(b)* refused, and *(c)* revoked for export to Cambodia since May 1997 broken down by category of licence; and what human rights considerations were taken into account when considering the licences. [40811]

Mrs. Roche: The Export Control Organisation's computer databases have been interrogated, and the following results were obtained:

Between 2 May 1997 and 3 April 1998, three Standard Individual Export Licences were issued covering the export to consignees or endusers in Cambodia of goods subject to export control by being listed in Part III of Schedule 1 to the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994, the so-called Military List. The entry in the relevant legislation under which the export of goods is controlled is known as their rating. Two of these licences covered goods with a rating of ML4; the other covered goods with a rating of ML13. In addition to those shown above, one Standard Individual Export Licence was issued for an export to Cambodia under the End-Use Control.

In the same period, no Open Individual Export Licences covering such exports were issued; no Standard or Open Individual Export Licences covering such exports were revoked and no applications for Standard or Open Individual Export Licences covering such exports were refused.

This does not include any Media OIELs that may have been issued during this period. Media OIELs authorise the export to all destinations of protective clothing, mainly for the protection of aid agency workers and journalists, when working in areas of conflict.

This information should be considered in light of my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) on 30 October 1997, *Official Report,* columns *870–71.*

During the period, goods on the Military List may have been exported to Cambodia under certain Open General Licences, though it cannot be assumed that any such exports actually took place. Copies of all Open General Licences that were valid at any time during the period are in the Library of the House.

All applications for licences to export goods on the Military List are considered on a case-by-case basis against the criteria announced by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary on 28 July 1997, *Official Report,* columns *26–29.* The Government take into account respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in the recipient country, and will not issue an export licence if there is a clearly identifiable risk that the proposed export might be used for internal repression.

Astra

Mr. Cohen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the total public cost of *(a)* Treasury solicitors and *(b)* others in connection with the disqualification proceedings against Mr. Gerald James and the directors of Astra Holdings. [41875]

Mrs. Beckett: The final figures have yet to be determined, but Treasury Solicitors' costs are likely to be about £280,000. The costs (£122,000) of two directors have already been paid after proceedings against them were discontinued in May 1996. Following the request by the judge that I personally consider the handling of the case, and my subsequent decision to abandon the proceedings against the remaining four directors (three of whom are legally aided) my Department will meet their costs, to be taxed on the standard basis, unless previously agreed. It is too early accurately to predict what those costs might amount to.

Nuclear Material

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what guidelines her Department has in place to restrict the supply of weapons-usable nuclear material to foreign countries; [43065]

(2) what steps her Department takes to prevent the use for military purposes abroad of weapons-usable nuclear material of United Kingdom origin. [43066]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 21 May 1998]:* Transfers of nuclear materials from the UK to other countries are subject to strict controls. The requirements in the case of separated plutonium and uranium enriched in the isotopes 235 or 233 to more than 20% (highly-enriched uranium or HEU) are particularly stringent.

The UK's export controls on nuclear and nuclear-related goods are derived from international nuclear non-proliferation commitments and membership of international nuclear export control regimes, in particular the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) whose members have agreed common guidelines for the transfer of nuclear and nuclear-related goods and technology. The NSG guidelines are reproduced as International Atomic Energy Agency document INFCIRC 254 Parts I and II as amended. In addition, the UK was among a group of nine countries which recently adopted a set of Guidelines for the Management of Plutonium published as INFCIRC 549 which adds a further requirement in the case of transfers of plutonium.

These commitments are given effect in the relevant legislation, which in this case is Council Regulation (EC) No. 3381/94 on the export of dual use goods and the related Council Decision 94/942/CSFP as amended. Separated plutonium and HEU require an export licence—even in the case of transfers to other EU Member States.

Before such a licence could be issued certain conditions would have to be fulfilled which include assurances from the recipient Government as set out in the NSG guidelines in relation to peaceful use, physical protection and retransfer of the materials. Transfers to non-nuclear weapon States (NNWS) are only authorised once the receiving State has brought into force an agreement with the IAEA requiring the application of safeguards on all source and special fissionable materials in its current and future peaceful activities. In the case of separated plutonium and HEU, the UK's consent would be required for any retransfer.

Moreover, pursuant to our adoption of the Guidelines for the Management of Plutonium and in addition to the foregoing, before any shipment of separated plutonium exceeding 50 grams to one recipient country in any period of 12 months is undertaken, we require the recipient to provide a certificate containing details including the end-use and timetable for utilisation. The correctness of the information in the certificate has to be confirmed by the Government of the recipient country. This builds on the existing requirement within the EU for a similar certificate to be completed in the case of transfers of plutonium and HEU.

In addition to these governmental assurances an end-use undertaking would also be required from the consignee explicitly excluding uses that might result in any weapon of mass destruction and an assurance that the goods would not be used in any unsafeguarded nuclear fuel cycle activity.

As noted, the controls that we have in place on transfers include requirements for the application of IAEA safeguards. The purpose of these safeguards is to ensure that nuclear materials are not diverted to nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices.

Dounreay

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will place in the Library a copy of the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate's report on Dounreay's fuel cycle area, referred to in the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate's Site Inspector's Quarterly report for UKAEA-Dounreay for 1 January to 31 March. [43067]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 21 May 1998]:* The NII report covers areas that will form the subject of the major audit into the Management of Safety at the Dounreay plant which was announced by HSE on Friday 15 May. The report of that audit will be published later this summer.

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when a statement will be made regarding the UKAEA application for funding for the repair of Dounreay plant D1206; and what criteria will govern her decision. [43069]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 21 May 1998]:* My officials are in discussion with UKAEA about their proposals for the repair of the Dounreay plant D1206 and, when they have been concluded, they will make a recommendation to me regarding plans for the future of the D1206 plant. Depending on the outcome of these discussions, I may wish to consult more widely before making a decision.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what directions and instructions have been issued in the last month to the UKAEA by the Safety Inspectorate. [42376]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 18 May 1998]:* I have been advised by the UKAEA that the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate (NII), during the past month, have issued one direction which requires the UKAEA to shut down all processing activities in the Dounreay Fuel Cycle Area facility other than those operations and activities which are necessary to maintain the safe condition of the facility. In addition, and following on from the formal direction, the NII have issued the two following oral instructions. Firstly, no excavation permits may be issued until further notice and all excavation permits currently in force must be suspended until further notice. The only exception is the work to repair the damaged cable. Secondly, evidence must be preserved for the NII investigation into the power failure.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which facilities at Dounreay are not currently functioning; and what recent reports she has received on the safety and condition of the plant. [42120]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 18 May 1998]:* No reprocessing facilities are currently functioning in the Fuel Cycle Area at Dounreay apart from those required for safety purposes. Otherwise, normal Decommissioning and

Waste Management Operations are continuing at the site. Work at Dounreay continues to be subject to strict independent regulation by the Health and Safety Executive's Nuclear Installations Inspectorate (NII) and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency. My officials hold quarterly meetings with the NII at which policy matters are discussed. Specific safety issues are a matter between the NII and UKAEA, but my Department does have sight of the NII Site Inspector's quarterly report on Dounreay. I expect my Department to receive full reports from both UKAEA and NII after they have concluded their investigations into the recent incident at the site.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what investment the UKAEA is planning at its Dounreay facilities in the next three years; and what revisions to these plans have been made in the last six months. [42122]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 18 May 1998]:* The UKAEA's expenditure plans at Dounreay are described in the 1996–97 UKAEA Annual Review, which is available in the Library of the House. Such plans are reviewed at least annually by my officials. It is normal practice to withhold precise details of expected project costs to protect UKAEA's ability to subject the work to competition. The only significant revision in the last six months was the decision to retrieve waste from the Shaft which was reported to Parliament on 31 March 1998. We are currently waiting for UKAEA to complete their proposal for investment in a replacement dissolver in the Prototype Fast Reactor fuel reprocessing plant. This expenditure by UKAEA is aimed at discharging their main function which is removal of their existing nuclear liabilities safely, with due regard for the environment and at minimum cost to the taxpayer.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if the recycling capacity at Dounreay is currently operational. [42121]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 18 May 1998]:* The reprocessing capacity at Dounreay is not currently operational. UKAEA suspended all reprocessing operations on Friday 8 May, pending a full safety review following an incident on the previous day.

Indonesia

Mrs. Ann Cryer: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the outstanding level of ECGD exposure for the supply of Hawk Fighter jets to Indonesia. [43621]

Mrs. Roche: ECGD's exposure, which covers interest as well as the principal value of the guaranteed loans, currently amounts to £531 million.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement on the impact of recent disturbances in Indonesia on British exports to that country. [42918]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 21 May 1998]:* The economic and political crisis being experienced by Indonesia has inevitably affected UK exports to Indonesia. Exports fell by 50.3 per cent. in the first quarter of this year.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Flight: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many full-time equivalent positions within her Department are currently occupied by people working on *(a)* millennium and *(b)* single currency compliance requirements. [41928]

Mrs. Beckett: The numbers of people within my Department working on the following are:

(a) Millennium—About 7.6 full-time equivalent staff are dealing with Millennium issues relating to information systems and to estates and facilities management in the Department. A further 2.5 staff are involved in assisting UK businesses to deal with the problem of the Millennium date change in co-ordination with Action 2000 which DTI set up earlier this year. The numbers may vary according to the needs of the programmes.

(b) Single currency—Some 1.5 full-time equivalent staff are directly involved in helping UK firms prepare for Economic and Monetary Union. These officials are working closely with Treasury's Euro Preparations Unit, which has the primary role in raising awareness of UK firms to the implications of EMU and helping them to prepare. A number of DTI staff have been seconded to the Treasury to work in that unit.

Duty Free

Mr. Gale: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what surveys have been carried out by *(a)* the Government of the United Kingdom and *(b)* the European Union to establish the effect upon jobs of the proposed abolition of the duty-free trade; and if she will make a statement. [42342]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 19 May 1998]:* The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions has undertaken a study into the effects on the transport sector of the abolition of intra-EU duty and tax free sales in 1999. The European Union has not undertaken a survey to establish the effect upon jobs of the proposed abolition of duty and tax free sales within the EU. The Government's position remains that they would not oppose a study should there be a consensus amongst Member States in favour of such a study. However, when these matters were discussed at 19 May EFOFIN Council, there was no consensus amongst Member States to call for a Community-wide study of the impact of abolition.

Solar Energy

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much her Department spent on research into solar energy in *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 1997–98; and what plans she has for future expenditure on this. [43126]

Mr. Battle: My Department, under its New and Renewable Energy Programme, spent £2.0 million (net of any associated receipts) in 1996–97, and £1.6 million (net of any associated receipts) in 1997–98 on RD&D into solar energy. Within the overall solar budget the proportion allocated to photovoltaics is increasing as part of DTI's funding of the Energy Design Advice Scheme (EDAS). EDAS is being funded by the Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR) while they consider the shape of a future energy advice scheme. Future expenditure plans are the subject of the renewable policy review, the outcome of which will be announced later this year.

In addition, the Engineering and Physical Science Research Council (EPSRC) has been spending £1 million a year over the past three years on basic and applied research, and the Office of Science and Technology (OST) has committed £1 million to the £2.5 million Foresight Challenge Solar programme which aims to put photovoltaic arrays into 100 schools and colleges across the country by 2000.

More Group Plc

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what contacts the Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs has had with executives or personnel of More Group plc, or its subsidiaries, in connection with the bid by J. C. Decaux. [43213]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: None.

Mergers

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many mergers she has referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission against the advice of the Director-General of Fair Trading since May 1997; what representations she has received on this issue from United Kingdom financial institutions or businesses; and if she will make it her policy to state in full her reasons for all decisions taken against Office of Fair Trading advice. [43201]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: Between 1 May 1997 and 21 May 1998 my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade disagreed with the Director-General of Fair Trading's ("DGFT's") advice on whether or not to refer a merger to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission ("MMC") on just three cases out of 189. These were National Express Group ("NEG")/Central Trains, NEG/ScotRail and PacifiCorp/The Energy Group.

In each case, the President or the DGFT received representations from competitors, customers or other third parties both for and against reference to the MMC.

On each occasion, the Department's announcement referred explicitly to the President's disagreement with the DGFT's advice. It is our intention to continue this practice. The President has made it clear that it is her policy to make references primarily on competition grounds. Where other public interest considerations lead to an MMC reference against the advice of the DGFT, this will be made clear in the announcement, as was done when PacifiCorp/The Energy Group was referred.

Funerals

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement about her Department's plans to ensure adequate protection of consumers purchasing their funerals in advance. [42053]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: I refer the hon Member to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Hove (Mr. Caplin) on 22 January 1998, *Official Report*, column *655*. The Department is actively discussing this with interested parties.

Post Office Users National Council

Mr. Kidney: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will accept nominations for membership of the Post Office Users National Council from rural community councils. [43329]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: An advertisement for appointments to a number of consumer councils, including the Post office Users National Council, will appear in the press in the next couple of weeks. At the same time we seek nominations for appointment from a range of bodies, and will be happy to consider any names put forward by rural community councils for appointment to the Post Office Users National Council as part of this process.

Anyone wishing to apply to be considered for appointment to the Post Office Users National Council should write to:

Consumer Affairs & Competition Policy Directorate 2b
Department of Trade & Industry
Room 4.T.11
1 Victoria Street
London SW1H OET.

Corporation Tax

Mr. Livsey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when she will announce the outcome of the review into corporation tax exemption under Section 508 of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988. [42869]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 21 May 1998]:* I hope to issue revised guidance notes for applicants by July.

Ice Cream

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action she will take during the Presidency of the EU to support the European Commission in resisting attempts to delay implementation of decisions designed to ensure fair competition in ice cream markets; and if she will make a statement. [43101]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 21 May 1998]:* The European Commission is the competent investigative authority on EC competition law cases. It is therefore the appropriate body to respond to attempts to challenge its decisions or delay their implementation. However, I can assure my hon. Friend that we support the full and fair application of EC competition rules.

London Art Market

Miss McIntosh: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations she has made to Britain's EU partners concerning the preservation of the London art market. [42005]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The Government continue to press the case for the preservation of the London art market. So far as artists' resale rights are concerned, the Government have argued repeatedly that the European Commission's proposal is ill-considered and would damage the international competitiveness of Community art markets, in particular the London art market, and would lead to a net loss of earnings and jobs in the Community. We are actively seeking the support of other Member States to defeat the proposal.

Vehicle Licensing

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what the cost is per licence of providing a vehicle licensing service by the Post Office; and if she will provide a breakdown of the costs; [41045]

(2) what the cost is, per licence, of providing a vehicle licensing service using the postal service. [41047]

Mr. Ian McCartney: This information is commercially confidential.

Export Licences

Mr. Paterson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many export licence applications are currently pending. [42579]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 18 May 1998]:* Licences to export arms and other goods subject to control for strategic reasons are issued by the President of the Board of Trade and the Export Control Organisation of the Department of Trade and Industry is the licensing authority. All relevant individual licence applications are circulated by the DTI to other Government departments with an interest as determined by them in line with their policy responsibilities. These include the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Ministry of Defence and the Department for International Development.

ECO management data on the processing of licence applications are compiled on the basis of four-week periods. At the end of the last four week period for which statistics have been compiled—ie 4 April 1998 to 1 May 1998—a total of 1,752 applications were awaiting a decision: these applications comprised applications for new standard or open individual export licences to export strategic goods and applications for the renewal or amendment of existing individual licences. This compares with 2,184 outstanding applications on 17 October 1997. ECO is also the licensing authority for goods whose export is only controlled because of UN trade sanctions but data on the number of applications awaiting a decision are not compiled as most decisions are subject to UN authorisation, which can take some time.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how old is the longest outstanding application for an export licence. [42580]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 18 May 1998]:* Licences to export arms and other goods subject to control for strategic reasons are issued by the President of the Board of Trade, and the Export Control Organisation of the Department of Trade and Industry is the licensing authority. All relevant individual licence applications are circulated by the DTI to other Government Departments with an interest, as determined by them in line with their policy responsibilities. These include the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Ministry of Defence, and the Department for International Development.

Of applications for individual licences pending a decision at 21 May 1998, the oldest application for a Standard Individual Export Licence was received in August 1996; processing of this application cannot be completed until the applicant fulfils a request from the Export Control Organisation to supply an end-user undertaking. The oldest application for an Open Individual Export Licence pending a decision on this date was received in February 1996. My Department has now received the necessary advice from advisers in other Government departments, and after final checks the licence will be issued.

Consultation Papers

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will list the consultation papers published since 1 May 1997 giving the date of publication, closing date for submissions and the number of respondents. [42251]

Mrs. Beckett: A list of significant consultation papers has been placed in the Library.

Arms Sales

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how frequently she receives reports on arms sales to African markets. [42378]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 18 May 1998]:* Reports on arms sales to any market are not routinely received by any Minister in the Department of Trade & Industry. The Defence Export Sales Organisation of the Ministry of Defence is primarily responsible for assisting the British defence industry to promote its goods and services overseas.

Information

Mr. Sanders: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if her Department operates a monitoring exercise of persistent inquirers for information. [42632]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 19 May 1998]:* My Department provides a great deal of information to business, the scientific community, and the general public in pursuit of its objectives. No central exercise to monitor persistent inquirers for information is undertaken.

Competitiveness White Paper

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if an environmental appraisal will be produced as part of the Competitiveness White Paper, using "Policy Guidance on Policy Appraisal and the Environment". [42667]

Mrs. Beckett: The forthcoming Competitiveness White Paper will set out the Government's vision for sustainable wealth creation, based on a high-skill, high-investment, innovative, modern economy. It will contain a range of policies and initiatives for companies themselves to improve their performance, and for Government and others to create the right framework and conditions to foster such an improvement. It will be for each public and private sector body involved to address the environmental implications of their activities, including where necessary, through specific environmental appraisal.

Caravans

Mr. Woolas: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans she has for further protection of consumers regarding the buying and selling of static caravans. [42913]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: The Director General of Fair Trading has recently agreed a revised code of practice for holiday caravans with the two main site owners' organisations which give clear rights to those buying and selling holiday caravans. Buyers of holiday caravans also benefit in the same way as other consumers from general consumer protection legislation, such as the Sale of Goods Act 1979 and the Unfair Terms in Consumer Contracts Regulations 1994. The responsibility for legislation covering residential caravans lies with the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions.

HEALTH

Cosmetic Surgery

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will legislate to restrict the use of the term cosmetic surgeon to doctors with specialist qualifications and membership of the British Association of Plastic Surgeons or the British Association of Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons. [34164]

Mr. Boateng: Legislation would not be practicable because cosmetic surgery is not a defined specialty and not all cosmetic surgery practitioners are plastic surgeons.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the number of *(a)* men and *(b)* women who have undergone cosmetic surgery in each year since 1990. [34163]

Mr. Boateng: It is not possible to estimate the number of people who have undergone cosmetic surgery because it is not a defined medical specialty. Available information relates to the number of consultant episodes of treatment in which an operation or procedure was recorded "for purposes other than for remedying health states".

In 1994/95 there were 3,676 such episodes in the National Health Service in England.

Organophosphates

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what *(a)* guidance and *(b)* information his Department provides to general practitioners in farming areas on the symptoms and health risks associated with organophosphates; and if he will place a copy of this information in the Library. [41379]

Ms Jowell: The advice given by the Department has been widely distributed on a national basis and has not been confined to farming areas.

The Chief Medical Officer wrote to all doctors in England in 1991 and again with the Chief Executive of the Veterinary Medicines Directorate in June 1993 to alert doctors to the possibility of adverse effects from exposure to pesticides and certain veterinary medicines and to remind them of the reporting schemes for human adverse reactions to veterinary products operated by the Employment Medical Advisory Service and the Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food's Veterinary Medicines Directive. The Chief Medical Officers in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland also wrote to doctors in those countries.

An article in the October 1995 edition of Chief Medical Officer's Update, sent to all doctors in England, dealt with both the acute and chronic effects of organophosphates and the methods of reporting adverse reactions to them.

A further article, in the April 1996 edition of Update (England only) informed all doctors of the publication, in the same month, of the new edition of the book "Pesticide Poisoning: Notes for the Guidance of Medical Practitioners". This book was sent by all United Kingdom Health Departments to general practices, accident and emergency departments and consultants in communicable disease control (and equivalents) with a covering letter.

Copies of this book were also sent to the Presidents of the Royal Colleges under cover of an explanatory letter which encouraged them to draw the book to the attention of their Fellows/Members through their continuing medical education programmes.

Copies of the book "Pesticide Poisoning: Notes for the Guidance of Medical Practitioners" are available in the Library.

We will look closely at the Report of the "Working Party on Management of Patients Chronically Exposed to Organophosphate Sheep Dips" set up by the Royal College of Physicians and the Royal College of Psychiatrists to be published later this year to identify issues for action including whether further guidance to medical practitioners is necessary.

Asthma

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each local authority area, the number of emergency admissions of patients suffering from asthma and breathing-related illnesses for each year since 1992. [41948]

Mr. Boateng: The available information has been placed in the Library. It gives estimated episodes of treatment, by health authority, in National Health Service hospitals in England for the years 1992–93 to 1995–96 (the most recent for which data are available), for emergency admissions with a primary diagnosis of asthma and other chronic lower respiratory diseases. These figures represent the number of episodes of care under individual consultants.

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the potential savings to the NHS for treating asthma and other breathing-related illnesses from a reduction in air pollution levels of *(a)* five per cent., *(b)* 10 per cent., *(c)* 15 per cent., *(d)* 20 per cent. and *(e)* over 20 per cent. [41947]

Ms Jowell: None. The January 1998 report by the Department's Committee on the Medical Effects of Air Pollutants, "Quantification of the Effects of Air Pollution on Health in the UK", copies of which are in the Library, illustrated that air pollution has a substantial effect on people's health. It included estimates of the numbers of people affected by different air pollutants. The Committee concluded that deaths and hospital admissions and readmissions were likely to be brought forward as a result of exposure to air pollution. That is why we are committed to reduce air pollution both in this country and in Europe.

However, there is no guarantee that reducing air pollution by particular amounts would lead to a corresponding reduction in the health effects nor in treatment costs associated with such illnesses. For instance, not all air pollutants affect people with asthma. Also, because some pollutants have no threshold of effects—that is, effects can be detected even when concentrations of particular pollutants are low—there will clearly be an effect at any level for some people.

Dentists

Mr. Prior: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS dentists practise in Norfolk; and what is the average number of people registered with each dental practitioner *(a)* in Norfolk and *(b)* nationally. [42770]

Mr. Milburn: Information on the number of dentists and patients registered with them is available by health authority. The table gives details for England, and for East Norfolk Health Authority and North West Anglia Health Authority which cover Norfolk.

General dental service: number of dentists[1] and average number of registered patients per dentist at 31 March 1998

	Number of dentists	*Average number of registered patients per dentist*
England	16,830	1,477
East Norfolk HA	215	1,572
North West Anglia HA	111	1,635

[1] Principals, assistants and vocational trainees (not salaried, hospital and community dentists)

Mental Health

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to ensure that nurses staffing the NHS direct telephone advice line are trained in advising people on mental health issues and dealing with people who may have mental health problems. [42876]

Mr. Boateng: We recognise the importance of ensuring that the NHS Direct service can appropriately meet the needs of people with mental health problems. We will ensure that this is addressed by NHS Direct sites in their plans for staff training.

Family Planning

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance has been issued to health authorities about providing a choice of sources for family planning services; and when it was last issued. [42887]

Ms Jowell: Departmental guidance on National Health Service family planning services was issued in January 1992. The circular HSG(92)6 "Guidelines for reviewing family planning services : Guidance for Regions", copies of which are in the Library, states that specialist family planning clinic services should complement those provided by general practitioners. The guidance asks health authorities to consider the best way to integrate the two to ensure the most comprehensive range of effective family planning services is provided to their local populations.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list, by health authority, the number of objections which he has received since 1 January about reductions in family planning services. [42888]

Ms Jowell: Since 1 January 1998, proposals from Northamptonshire Health Authority, which include changes to local family planning service provision, have been referred to Ministers for a final decision.

Fit for Business Campaign

Mr. Caplin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans his Department has to support the national Fit For Business campaign. [43058]

Ms Jowell: We welcome initiatives in the private sector in promoting health in the workplace. Our new health strategy, "Our Healthier Nation", identifies healthy workplaces as one of the key settings to help deliver our aims to improve the health of the population as a whole. We also support the "Health at Work" and "Workplace Health" initiatives, through the Health Education Authority, which provides information, advice and research on health promotion in the workplace.

Drugs Budget

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the gross cost of drugs to the NHS in actual and percentage terms for the last year for which information is available; and what is the estimated expenditure in the current year. [43031]

Mr. Milburn: In 1996/97 total expenditure on drugs was £4.7 billion accounting for 14 per cent. of total National Health Service expenditure.

Final outturn figures for 1997/98 and forecasts for the current year are not yet available.

Child Developmental Checks

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many health authorities currently carry out 18 months old developmental checks on children; and how many do not; [42975]

(2) what guidance has been issued by his Department to health authorities regarding developmental checks on young children. [42976]

Mr. Boateng: Developmental checks on children, including at the age of 18–24 months, form part of the core child health surveillance programme recommended in guidance issued by the Department in 1992—which updated the content and focus of this activity in line with developments in medical knowledge. The programme is led by general practitioners, who are trained and accredited in the practice of child health surveillance, with the assistance of health visitors and other members of the primary health care team. The majority (some 94 per cent.) of general practitioners participate in this service. We do not know of any health authority area where the service is not available.

GP Lists

Mr. Andy King: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the circumstances under which a patient may be removed from a general

practitioner's list and on the healthcare arrangements which are available to patients who are not registered with a general practitioner. [43160]

Mr. Milburn: General practitioners' terms of service provide that a doctor has the right, subject to certain necessary safeguards to ensure ongoing necessary treatment is not disrupted, to remove patients from their list without giving a reason unless they are seeking immediate removal due to an act or threat of violence in which case a complaint has to be made to the police.

General practitioners' terms of service also require that, unless they have been specifically relieved from such responsibilities, they provide healthcare to any person to whom they may be requested to give treatment which is immediately required owing to an accident or other emergency at any place in their practice area.

Cardiomyopathy

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the number of teenagers who might be at risk from cardiomyopathy leading to sudden death. [43130]

Mr. Boateng: While cardiomyopathy is one of the leading causes of sudden death in teenagers, it is not known how many people are affected by cardiomyopathy nor, of those who are, how many might be at risk. The Department is working with clinicians and voluntary organisations on the diagnosis, management and treatment of this condition.

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the cost of establishing a national screening programme for cardiomyopathy for all children starting secondary school to identify those suffering from Wolff-Parkinson-White Syndrome. [43129]

Mr. Boateng: The National Screening Committee (NSC), which offers health Ministers advice about the case for individual screening programmes, has not yet considered the case for screening children for cardiomyopathy. The NSC has commissioned a study of the emerging evidence which will inform its consideration later in the year. Any decision on the introduction of a national programme will be made in the light of that consideration.

Epilepsy

Mr. Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received and what response he has made on the issue of sudden unexpected death in epilepsy. [43330]

Mr. Boateng: Since November 1997, 37 private office cases have been received on the subject of sudden unexpected death from epilepsy (SUDEP) and one Parliamentary Question has been asked in the same period. Virtually all the private office correspondence has been from families who have lost a relative through SUDEP.

The Department has awarded £45,000 in total for the years 1997–2000 to the organisation Epilepsy Bereaved? through a Section 64 grant, to help them raise awareness of SUDEP.

I shall be meeting representatives from the charity Epilepsy Bereaved? and the Joint Epilepsy Council on 2 June.

Bacteria Spraying

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment his Department has made of the effects of spraying bacillus golbigii, E.coli and serratia marcescens on *(a)* humans, *(b)* men, *(c)* women and *(d)* pregnant women; [43290]

(2) if he will conduct a study of the health records of people resident in South Devon and South Dorset between 1966 and 1971 who were sprayed with bacillus golbigii, E.coli and serratia marcescens in Ministry of Defence germ warfare tests. [43289]

Ms Jowell: Information received from the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency states that the bacteriological material released during tests in the 1960s and 70s was composed of organisms which either occur naturally in the environment, or which were killed before release. The bacteria used do not present health problems.

Following concerns raised by local residents, Dorset Health Authority has commenced a survey into birth defects in the East Lulworth area. Preliminary investigations have not revealed any unexplained cluster of birth defects or ill health.

Disabled People

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will issue further guidance on the weight which purchasers are required to give to the views of disabled people and their families when evaluating options for providing social care for people with learning disability who have been in long-stay residential hospital provision; and if he will make a statement. [43299]

Mr. Boateng: We have no plans to do so. Current guidance already makes clear that we would expect the views and wishes of disabled people and their families to be taken into account when planning and arranging services. We are currently looking at the closure plans for the old long stay learning disability hospitals so that we can be sure that the proposals are based on sound individualised planning, proper consultation has taken place and all options have been fully considered.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department has taken to promote independent mobility for disabled people. [43355]

Mr. Boateng: Between 1996 and 2000 the Department is making an additional £50 million available to National Health Service wheelchair services to enable them to provide electrically powered indoor/outdoor wheelchairs for those severely disabled people who can benefit from them, and to introduce a voucher scheme to give wheelchair users more choice.

Chiropody Services

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what response he has made to the recommendations of Age Concern's report, On Your Feet: Older People and NHS Chiropody Services. [43161]

Mr. Boateng: I wrote on 8 May 1998 to Evelyn McEwan, Director of Age Concern England. The report provides valuable information about National Health Service chiropody services and the perceptions of its users and providers.

Officials in the NHS Executive are looking at ways in which chiropody services might be further developed and will be consulting Age Concern during this process.

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 19 May 1998, *Official Report*, column *353*, on hospital waiting lists, what information is held centrally; and for what reasons the information requested was available for 1996–97 and 1997–98. [43357]

Mr. Milburn: Waiting list/time information held centrally is based on the well established series of quarterly returns from health authorities and trusts. The information provided last year in respect of 1996–97 and 1997–98 had already been collected centrally as special exercises by the previous administration.

Children Act

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to review the guidance issued by his Department in respect of the Children Act 1989. [43296]

Mr. Boateng: There are no plans for a fundamental review of the guidance issued by the Department in respect of the Children Act 1989. Where legal changes or new policy requirements have arisen, appropriate guidance by way of a local authority circular has been issued.

Cancer and Kidney Disease

Mr. Cunliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the incidence is per 1,000 population of *(a)* lung cancer, *(b)* other forms of cancer and *(c)* kidney disease in (i) the National Health Service North-West Region and (ii) Wigan and Bolton health area. [43309]

Mr. Boateng: Figures which show the incidence of these diseases is not collated centrally. My hon. Friend may wish to contact the cancer registries at Liverpool and Manchester Universities which collect some information about the incidence of certain cancers.

Whooping Cough Vaccine

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what are the circumstances in which his Department advises that the pertussis vaccine should not be administered to a baby; [43205]

(2) what guidelines are issued to health practitioners on the use of the pertussis vaccine on babies; and what are the recognised side-effects of the vaccine. [43203]

Ms Jowell: Details of the recommendations for pertussis vaccine, the contraindications to vaccination and the adverse reactions associated with the pertussis vaccine are set out in the United Kingdom Health Departments' memorandum 'Immunisation against Infectious Disease'. This publication is issued to doctors, practice nurses, health visitors and pharmacists involved in immunisation. Copies are available in the Library.

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases have been recorded since 1987 of brain damage or blood poisoning which *(a)* have been attributed to the pertussis vaccine and *(b)* are claimed to be attributable to the pertussis vaccine but are yet to be determined. [43204]

Ms Jowell: There has been one suspected adverse drug reaction (ADR) report of mental handicap made via the United Kingdom spontaneous reporting scheme since 1987 associated with the multiconstituent diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis (DTP) vaccine. There have been no such reports of blood poisoning since 1987. Doctors are asked to report suspected adverse drug reactions via this scheme and therefore it is not possible to attribute causality definitely. When ADRs are reported with multiconstituent vaccines such as DTP it is not generally possible to know which, if any, component of the vaccine was responsible.

Industrial Tribunals

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) which trusts in the South Thames Region have, as respondents, made applications in the past year to have industrial tribunal hearings held in camera; and what legal costs have to date been incurred in respect of each application; [42494]

(2) how many applications in respect of unfair dismissal or constructive dismissal are outstanding in relation to *(a)* health authorities and *(b)* health trusts in the North Thames Region and South Thames Region; and to which authorities and trusts they relate; [42492]

(3) which trusts in the North Thames Region have, as respondents, made applications in the past year to have industrial tribunal hearings held in camera; and what legal costs have been incurred in respect of each application. [42493]

Mr. Milburn: The information requested is not held centrally. My hon. Friend may wish to contact individual trusts for details.

Tobacco Sponsorship

Mr. Maude: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the proposed ban on tobacco sponsorship will be introduced. [43745]

Ms Jowell: On 13 May the European Parliament voted through unamended the common position on the tobacco advertising Directive agreed by European Union Health Ministers last December. We hope that it can now be adopted during the United Kingdom Presidency. Following this, member states would have three years to implement the basic provisions of the Directive; a further 2 years are available beyond that for sponsored events; sponsored events organised on a global basis could be exempted for up to three further years, subject to diminishing advertising visibility and sponsorship expenditure. All forms of tobacco advertising and sponsorship covered by the Directive must cease by 1 October 2006. The timescale for implementation of the Directive in UK law will be set out in the tobacco control White Paper to be published later this year.

Small Businesses

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the regulations that have been amended or removed to help small businesses since 1 May 1997. [42786]

Ms Jowell: While none of the regulations laid by the Department have specifically targeted small businesses, all which impact on business generally take account of the needs of small businesses. For example, Statutory Instrument 1998/574, The Medicines for Human Use and Medical Devices (Fees and Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 1998, reduced fees for all businesses involved in the manufacture and sale of medicines for human use. It also extended a small business concession to a greater number of companies.

Haemophiliacs

Mr. St. Aubyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to respond to the proposal for a special payment scheme for haemophiliacs infected with hepatitis through NHS tests treatment. [43465]

Mr. Boateng: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend, the Member for Amber Valley (Judy Mallaber) on 11 May 1998, *Official Report*, column *39*.

Abortion

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will require general practitioners to make information publicly available as to whether they are prepared to refer women for abortion. [43602]

Ms Jowell: Referrals under the Abortion Act are part of the general medical services provided by general practitioners. Guidance issued by the British Medical Association states that practitioners with a conscientious objection to abortion who fail to refer on to another practitioner quickly could be alleged to be in breach of their terms of service. In these circumstances public statements about the GP's personal views on abortion are neither necessary nor appropriate.

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will replace the current assurances for private hospitals providing abortion with guidelines that will apply to both NHS and private services. [43603]

Ms Jowell: My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State has a power under Section 1(3) of the Abortion Act to approve non-National Health Service premises for termination of pregnancy. The assurances were introduced to combat abuses of the Act and to ensure that approved places provide an appropriate standard of care. The approval and monitoring processes have ensured that these abuses have been eradicated. Key extracts from the current assurances were issued to the NHS in 1995 for information.

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the inquiry into health inequalities will include an investigation of inequalities in abortion services. [43597]

Ms Jowell: It is for the Independent Inquiry into Inequalities in Health to determine its own work programme in discharging its terms of reference. Copies of the terms of reference have been placed in the Library.

Emergency Contraception

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make emergency contraception available through *(a)* pharmacy prescription and *(b)* pharmacies without prescription. [43454]

Ms Jowell: The emergency contraceptive pill is classified as a prescription only medicine under United Kingdom and European Community legislation which takes into account the safety of the product, the risk to health if utilised without medical supervision and the likelihood of incorrect use.

There are currently no proposals to make emergency contraception available through pharmacies without a doctor's prescription. Any such proposal would be carefully assessed by the Medicines Control Agency, taking into account the advice of the Committee on Safety of Medicines, and there would be statutory public consultation before a decision was reached.

There is presently no legal provision for pharmacists to prescribe medicines.

Smoking

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of teenage *(a)* boys and *(b)* girls in England was smoking tobacco (i) in 1988 and (ii) at the most recent date for which figures are available. [44019]

Ms Jowell: The table shows the percentages of boys and girls aged 11–15 who smoked regularly in 1988 and 1996.

Year	*Boys*	*Girls*
1988	7	9
1996	11	15

Notes:

1. Regular smoking is defined as smoking at least one cigarette a week
2. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole figure

Source:

Smoking Among Secondary School Children Surveys, 1996, conducted by the Office for National Statistics on behalf of the Department of Health

West Kent Health Authority

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the mechanism used to determine funding for the West Kent Health Authority for *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97, *(c)* 1997–98 and *(d)* 1998–99; and what factors underlay (i) the requirement for additional funding in (1) 1995–96, (2) 1996–97 and (3) 1997–98 and (ii) the overspend in the current year. [41922]

Mr. Milburn *[holding answer 18 May 1998]:* From 1996–97 a national weighted capitation formula has been used to determine each health authority's target fair share of available resources. Annual decisions are taken on how quickly health authorities are moved closer to their weighted capitation target. Prior to 1996–97 the regional health authority managed the allocation process using a similar formula.

Other than moneys held centrally, such as funding for the new deal to help reduce junior doctors hours, additional funds have been provided in 1997–98 to ease the pressures on the health and social care system during the winter and in 1998–99 to reduce National Health Service waiting lists to below the record levels we inherited, by next April.

Figures will be available on the health authority's financial position in 1998–99 at the end of July.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

New Deal (Young People)

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what proportion of young people aged 18 to 24 years who have attended their first New Deal interviews have not then met a subsequent appointment as part of the New Deal. [43881]

Mr. Andrew Smith: This information is not held centrally in the form requested. This will be assessed as part of the evaluation strategy.

National Insurance

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to his answer of 7 April 1998, *Official Report*, column *228*, on National Insurance, when the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment will write to the hon. Member for Havant. [43989]

Dr. Howells: We are still awaiting assessments by the Further and Higher Education Funding Councils of the impact on the further and higher education sectors respectively of changes to employers' National Insurance contributions from April 1999. Meanwhile, the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals have estimated that the annual cost to the higher education sector across the UK is likely to be some £10 million. In the case of further education, we estimate that the effect of the changes is likely to be a small saving of around £5 million per annum. I will write to the hon. Member as soon as we have received and considered the Funding Councils' advice.

European Voluntary Service

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if the European Voluntary Service will be eligible for the voluntary option of the New Deal. [43968]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The European Voluntary Service programme has not yet been formally agreed by the European Council and European Parliament. If and when the programme is fully operational, the opportunities offered will be eligible for the Voluntary Sector option of the New Deal for young unemployed people if they satisfy the design and quality criteria of that option. Organisations offering opportunities abroad on that option must also ensure that participants comply with benefit and immigration regulations.

Access Courses

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if sub-degree level higher education access courses will be covered by the New Deal as part of the education and training option. [43971]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Full-Time Education and Training option of the New Deal for 18–24 year olds is primarily aimed at enabling young people who do not hold qualifications at NVQ Level 2 (or equivalent) to gain those qualifications. Support for higher level studies can also be given, where this will clearly enhance the young person's employability. In the case of an Access to Higher Education course, support can be given under the New Deal where the course forms part of a coherent action plan leading towards sustained employment.

Tuition Fees

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate he has made of the cost and the number of staff to be involved in administering means tests for tuition fees for students from the EU. [43974]

Dr. Howells: The cost of administering the means test will be approximately £400,000 for the academic year 1998/99 and there will be some 25 staff providing this central service.

Disability Discrimination Act

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when his Department expects to make an announcement on the timetable for the implementation of part 3 of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. [43594]

Mr. Alan Howarth: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor) on 18 May 1998, *Official Report*, column *282*.

New Deal (Disabled People)

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will provide disability awareness/equality training to employers as part of the New Deal for Sick and Disabled People. [43559]

Mr. Alan Howarth: The Employment Service, through its Placing Assessment and Counselling Teams and Disability Employment Advisers, already provides significant support to employers. The Personal Adviser Service, the key part of the New Deal for Disabled People, will also provide employers with advice on employing disabled people. This will complement the role of the many voluntary organisations who also work with employers to increase their disability awareness.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will provide specialist advisers to the *(a)* post acute brain injured and *(b)* recovering mentally ill as part of the New Deal for Sick and Disabled People. [43570]

Mr. Alan Howarth: We will expect those providing the Personal Adviser Service as part of the New Deal for Disabled People to ensure advisers are equipped with the necessary knowledge and expertise to support people with a wide range of specialist needs, including the post-acute brain injured and people recovering from mental illness.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) how much money the Employment Service plans to invest in supported employment programmes for sick and disabled people in 1998–99; [43556]

(2) what funding has been given to supported employment programmes for sick and disabled people since 1995–96 by the Employment Service. [43555]

Mr. Alan Howarth: The information requested is given in the following table.

Supported employment programme

Year	*£ million*
1995–96 outturn	154.2
1996–97 outturn	154.3
1997–98 outturn	155.6
1998–99 plans	155.1

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will provide disability awareness/equality training to personnel in the Careers Service as part of the New Deal for Sick and Disabled People. [43558]

Mr. Alan Howarth: Careers advisers are required as part of their initial training to undergo disability awareness and equal opportunities training. Training as appropriate will be provided for New Deal for Disabled People Personal Adviser Service staff.

Special Educational Needs

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the Government's policy on integrating pupils with *(a)* severe learning difficulties, *(b)* moderate learning difficulties and *(c)* emotional behavioural difficulties into mainstream schools. [43798]

Ms Estelle Morris: We are preparing an action programme to take forward our policies on special educational needs (SEN), taking careful account of the responses to the Green Paper—Excellence for all children; meeting special educational needs. Progress on inclusion will be at the heart of those policies. We want to see an increased proportion of children with SEN included in mainstream schools where parents are happy with this, and where schools are properly prepared. But we will also promote a strong special school sector, to provide support for mainstream schools, and to offer high quality specialist provision for those children who need it.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what arrangements he is making to transfer grant-maintained schools back to the control of LEAs; when he expects this process will be completed; and if he will make a statement. [43808]

Mr. Byers: We are not proposing to transfer grant-maintained schools back to the control of LEAs. The School Standards and Framework Bill currently before Parliament provides for a new framework for the organisation of schools, which will accommodate all existing schools, including grant-maintained schools. It will strike a better balance between the discretion of schools to manage their own affairs and the role of LEAs in supporting and challenging schools in raising standards. The Government propose to introduce the new framework in September 1999.

Dental Students

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment he has made of the impact of his Department's proposals for higher education on the numbers of dental students; and what research his Department has evaluated on this matter. [43019]

Dr. Howells: The progress of applications to enter higher education in October 1998 is being closely monitored. Although applications for Clinical Dentistry are currently down on last year (from 11,939 to 10,381 as at 16 May according to figures from the Universities and Colleges Admission Service) we do not expect universities to have difficulty meeting the UK dental target of 805 places per year.

Small Businesses

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the regulations that have been amended or removed to help small businesses since 1 May 1997. [42784]

Mr. Andrew Smith: None of the Statutory Instruments made by the Department for Education and Employment revoking or amending regulations between 1 May 1997 and 22 May 1998 had a direct impact on small businesses. The Department is continually mindful of reflecting in policy the importance of job generation in small businesses, for example in the design of the New Deal and its self-employment option.

Supported Employment Placements

Ms Keeble: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) if he will estimate the cost of increasing the capitation grant for supported employment placements by the rate of inflation between 1 April 1998 and 1 April 1999; [42993]

(2) what was the cost of the capitation grant for supported employment placements in 1998–99. [42989]

Mr. Alan Howarth: The capitation grant for 1998–99 is £4,680. The cost of supported placements in 1998–99 can be calculated on a retrospective basis only once the financial year has ended and supported employment providers have sent the Department their audited accounts. Providers have been given a deadline of December 1999 for this.

Uprating the capitation grant in line with the GDP deflator of 2.9 per cent. would result in a level of £4,815.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what was the budget of the Staffordshire TEC in *(a)* 1997–98 and *(b)* 1998–99; [43114]

(2) what has been the level of public funding for each TEC in the West Midlands since they were established. [43115]

Dr. Howells: The information requested is shown in the following table.

West Midlands TEC funding (DfEE and DTI) 1995–96 to 1998–99

	1995–96	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*
Birmingham	27,187,475	31,481,373	29,419,491	29,141,010
Central England	8,891,325	8,350,991	9,630,290	620,756
Coventry and Warwickshire	21,444,349	21,400,763	22,001,108	20,076,484
Dudley	7,566,289	8,311,713	9,355,398	8,462,913
Herefordshire and Worcestershire	11,566,289	11,647,220	13,012,475	15,394,526
Sandwell	10,739,570	10,938,147	10,455,393	9,439,113
Shropshire	11,517,320	12,058,394	12,069,144	11,515,966
Staffordshire	26,071,937	27,430,212	24,861,306	24,369,613
Walsall	6,370,719	6,840,242	7,702,685	7,028,588
Wolverhampton	8,084,884	8,955,628	8,119,765	7,735,364

Notes:
Information prior to 1995–96 is not readily available and has, therefore, not been provided.
The contract with Central England TEC ceased at the end of 1997–98. The funding shown for this TEC for 1998–99 represents carry-over liabilities from the 1997–98 contract.
The area covered by Central England has been taken over by Birmingham (Solihull) and Herefordshire and Worcestershire (Redditch and Bromsgrove and Wyre Forest).
The 1998–99 funding for Birmingham and Solihull includes funding in respect of these areas.

Local Management of Schools

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) when he expects to publish the document on local management of schools: framework for guidance of local education authorities; [43033]

(2) when he expects to implement further delegation of responsibilities from local education authorities to schools. [43034]

Mr. Byers: The Government's consultation paper on the future development of local management of schools was published on 29 May. The intention is that the new arrangements should take effect from the beginning of the financial year 1999–2000. Copies of the paper have been placed in the Library.

Chefs (Work Permits)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the number of applications he has received for work permits for chefs for each year since 1990 indicating the number of permits granted; what plans he has to review his Department's policy on the admission of chefs; and how many work permits for chefs are currently under consideration by his Department. [43083]

Mr. Alan Howarth: The information about work permit applications for chefs requested is as follows:

Year	*Number of applications received*	*Number approved*
1990	2,160	767
1991	2,091	538
1992	1,408	455
1993	1,058	349
1994	844	238
1995	530	198
1996	589	259
1997	513	220

These figures include a small number of chefs training or gaining work experience. The totals for 1990–94 reflect the large number of applications made for a limited number of available permits under the former Dependent Territories Quota Scheme which was phased out over the period.

There are currently 114 work permit applications for chefs under consideration.

The Department consults, informally and formally, employers and interested bodies about the criteria for work permits but there are no firm plans at present to review the criteria for chefs.

Asperger Syndrome

Mr. Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many children are diagnosed as suffering from Asperger Syndrome in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* West Sussex. [43284]

Mr. Boateng: I have been asked to reply.

Data are not collected centrally on the number of cases of Asperger Syndrome. Research in Scandinavia has suggested a prevalence rate of 36 per 10,000 population. The National Autistic Society estimate there are 47,400 children with Asperger Syndrome in the United Kingdom.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Sierra Leone

Mr. Howard: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the procedures which officials must follow when asking for an inquiry by Customs and Excise officials. [41727]

Mr. Robin Cook *[holding answer 12 May 1998]:* In the normal way FCO officials refer allegations which they believe might require investigation to Customs and Excise officers.

Further action is for Customs and Excise to determine given that in such matters they are acting as an independent prosecuting authority of the Crown.

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which of his departmental officials are specifically responsible for policy relating to arms sales to Sierra Leone. [41596]

Mr. Robin Cook *[holding answer 12 May 1998]:* Within the FCO, arms sales are dealt with by the geographical department concerned in consultation with the Non-Proliferation Department.

Mr. Howard: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what meetings were held between Government representatives and President Kabbah of Sierra Leone while the President was in exile; who was present at such meetings; where and when they were held; what was their purpose; and what was discussed at them. [41800]

Mr. Robin Cook *[holding answer 13 May 1998]:* Officials from the High Commission had numerous meetings with President Kabbah in Conakry. Officials also met him when he visited the UK in October 1997.

The Minister of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd), met President Kabbah on 20 October when he addressed the seminar 'Restoring Sierra Leone to Democracy'; on 25 October, with the Minister of State at the Department for International Development; and on 31 March 1998 when he visited Sierra Leone as a member of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group mission.

My right hon. Friend, the Prime Minister, met him informally during the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Edinburgh in October 1997. I met the Foreign Minister of Sierra Leone in the margins of the UN General Assembly meeting in September 1997.

It is not normal practice to release the records of discussions with foreign Governments, but all relevant documents will be available to Sir Thomas Legg for his investigation.

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many reporting telegrams his Department received from Freetown and Conakry since 1 May 1997; and how many of these were copied to the private office of a Minister. [42096]

Mr. Robin Cook *[holding answer 14 May 1998]:* From 1 May 1997 to 18 May 1998 the FCO received 141 telegrams from Freetown, 102 of which were copied to my office and that of my hon. Friend the Minister of State.

During the period when Freetown was evacuated, the High Commission operated out of a hotel room in Conakry and communicated with the FCO by fax. No record has been kept of the total number of faxes received during this period. However 48 of these faxes were retransmitted as FCO telegrams, 43 of which were copied to Ministerial offices as above.

Mr. Howard: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish the reports submitted by the Committee of the UN Security Council established by paragraph 10 of UNSCR 1132. [41967]

Mr. Robin Cook *[holding answer 14 May 1998]:* The Sierra Leone Sanctions Committee has yet to make a periodic report.

Mr. Howard: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs by whose authority repairs were effected by Royal Naval personnel to a helicopter exclusively used by a Sandline International crew; and if this constituted a breach of the UN arms embargo. [41969]

Mr. Robin Cook *[holding answer 14 May 1998]:* I refer the right hon. and learned Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence to the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), on 18 May 1998, *Official Report*, column *258*. We do not believe that the repair of this helicopter constituted a breach of UNSCR 1132.

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on what date Ministers and officials in his Department first consulted ministers and officials in the Ministry of Defence concerning the use of UK military assets to help restore the Government of Sierra Leone. [41830]

Mr. Robin Cook *[holding answer 14 May 1998]:* UK military assets were not used to overthrow the junta in Sierra Leone, which fled from Freetown on 13 February. The instructions to HMS Monmouth, and later to HMS Cornwall, were to deploy to the vicinity of Sierra Leone to be prepared to provide immediate humanitarian assistance to the people of Sierra Leone, to support our diplomatic efforts there, and to assist in the return of the British High Commissioner, should the democratically elected Government be restored. The FCO and the MOD liaised closely throughout this period about the activities of HMS Monmouth and HMS Cornwall.

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if any official of his Department was in contact with officials of the Customs and Excise on 28 or 29 April in connection with the investigation into Sandline International. [42313]

Mr. Robin Cook *[holding answer 18 May 1998]:* The FCO fully cooperated with the Customs and Excise investigation throughout April and early May.

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the Minister of State, the hon. Member for Manchester, Central, discussed the activities of Sandline International with Mr. John Flynn at their meeting on 19 March. [42284]

Mr. Robin Cook *[holding answer 18 May 1998]:* No.

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the occasions on which his Department's Overseas Visitors Unit arranged calls by President Kabbah of Sierra Leone on Sandline International during his visits to the United Kingdom since 1 May 1997. [43206]

Mr. Robin Cook: The Overseas Visitors section has not arranged any calls by President Kabbah on Sandline International.

Mr. Howard: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he took after he was informed on 6 February that military intervention was planned in Sierra Leone. [42625]

Mr. Robin Cook: I took note of the reports of the military action by forces of the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) against the junta in Sierra Leone. In the following weeks, the following actions were taken by the FCO:

- the Permanent Representative to the UN was instructed to seek an explanation from members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Committee of five Foreign Ministers during a briefing for Security Council members held on 6 February and at the subsequent meeting on 6 March;
- we drafted the EU Presidential Statement on Sierra Leone issued on 20 February.
- on 20 February, we instructed our Missions in ECOWAS capitals to carry out a joint demarche with EU Troika partners urging *inter alia* that ECOMOG open up humanitarian supply lines, and assist in the rescue and evacuation of EU nations held hostage in Sierra Leone;
- the FCO liaised closely with MOD about instructions to HMS Monmouth on 10 February to proceed to the waters off Freetown to stand by to provide humanitarian assistance. HMS Monmouth was replaced by HMS Cornwall which entered Freetown on 1 March;
- we contributed to the drawing up of the statement issued by the president of the Security Council on 26 February;
- we contributed to the drawing up and adoption of UNSCR 1156 on 16 March 1998 which welcomed President Kabbah's return to Freetown and lifted the prohibition on the supply of petrol and petroleum products to Sierra Leone;
- we contributed to the drawing up and adoption of UNSCR 1162 on 17 April, which authorised the deployment of up to 10 United Nations military liaison and security advisory personnel to work under the Secretary General's Special Envoy. HMG is contributing one officer to the deployment;
- we donated £2 million to the UN Trust Fund established in February to support the demobilisation and disarmament process, and instructed our diplomatic missions in the EU and elsewhere to urge their host governments to contribute towards the Trust Fund and to provide humanitarian relief for Sierra Leone.

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if his Department received telegrams from the British High Commissioner for Sierra Leone warning that Sandline might breach the arms embargo; [42602]

(2) if his Department communicated the terms of the Sierra Leone (United Nations Sanctions) Order 1997 to the British High Commissioner for Sierra Leone. [42603]

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the occasions on which Mr. Peter Penfold visited the offices of Sandline International since 1 May 1997. [43207]

Mr. Robin Cook *[holding answer 20 May 1998]:* I refer the right hon. and hon. Member to my statement in the House during the debate on 18 May 1998, *Official Report*, columns 604–11, in which I announced the investigation by Sir Thomas Legg KCB QC into allegations about Government involvement with the supply of arms to Sierra Leone by UK citizens and firms, and said that the Terms of Reference would be placed in the Library of the House. I intend to publish the report of the investigation.

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish the written brief received by the Minister of State, the hon. Member for Manchester Central, before *(a)* the visit to CHOGM of President Kabbah, *(b)* his speech to the seminar in London on restoring Sierra Leone to democracy in October 1997, *(c)* the decision to invite HM Customs and Excise to conduct an investigation into Lord Avebury's allegations on 10 March, *(d)* the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group meeting in London on 2 and 3 March, *(e)* the decision to send HMS Cornwall to Sierra Leone, *(f)* the debate on Sierra Leone in the House on 12 March, *(g)* his visit to Sierra Leone in March, and *(h)* his evidence to the Foreign Affairs Committee on 5 May; and if he will list the oral briefings received in connection with those occasions, stating who was present when oral briefings or office meetings took place about Sierra Leone. [42099]

Mr. Robin Cook *[holding answer 14 May 1998]:* I refer the hon. Member to my statement in the House during the debate on 18 May 1998, *Official Report*, columns 604–11, in which I announced the investigation by Sir Thomas Legg KCB QC into allegations about Government involvement with the supply of arms to Sierra Leone by UK citizens and firms, and said that the Terms of Reference would be placed in the Library of the House. I intend to publish the report of the investigation.

European Structural Funds

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the nature and scope of his responsibilities in relation to the review of European structural funds in respect of Wales, indicating the timetable for action by his Department. [42471]

Mr. Doug Henderson: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister for Small Firms, Trade and Industry on 21 May 1998, *Official Report*, column *543*.

Turkey

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Turkey on the shooting of the Human Rights Association Leader Akin Birdal. [42439]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 18 May 1998]:* As EU Presidency, the UK issued a declaration on behalf of the European Union on 13 May expressing shock and dismay at the shooting of Mr. Akin Birdal, condemning this cowardly attack on the Chairman of the Human Rights Association, and strongly supporting statements of the Turkish authorities that every effort would be made to bring to justice those responsible.

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary made clear the importance we attach to the proper protection of human rights during his visit to Ankara on 19 May. He took the opportunity to visit Mr. Birdal in hospital to emphasise our support for the work of the Human Rights Association.

Indonesia

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his most recent discussions with Jose Ramos Horta; and what representations he has made recently to the Government of Indonesia regarding human rights, with particular reference to ethnic Chinese residents of Indonesia. [42345]

Mr. Fatchett: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary had a wide-ranging discussion with Mr. Ramos-Horta on 31 March. We have made various representations about human rights, in both a Presidency and national capacity, to the Indonesian authorities in Jakarta. My right hon. Friend raised human rights in East Timor in his meeting with Vice President Habibie and Foreign Minister Alatas in the margins of ASEM 2.

Human Rights

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received regarding the first annual human rights report from *(a)* foreign Governments and *(b)* British non-Governmental organisations. [42396]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The report has been widely welcomed. Mary Robinson, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, has written that she believes,

"it is a marvellous initiative by the Government",

Amnesty International stated publicly that they were "delighted at the publication of the first such report".

It quoted David Bull, a Director as saying,

"This is a good day for human rights".

The response of NGOs has been generally positive.

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has received no formal representations about the report.

Arms Sales

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the new European Code of Conduct on arms sales will ensure that signatories will open their arms sales to parliamentary scrutiny. [43170]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: No. Different Member States have different practices in this respect. It would not have been realistic to propose a Code which sought to dictate Member States' internal licensing procedures.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what consultation will take place under the European Code of Conduct on arms sales before one member state accepts an arms contract that has been turned down on ethical grounds by another. [43174]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The Code of Conduct specified that before any Member State grants an export licence which has been denied in accordance with the Code by another Member State or States for an essentially identical transaction within the past three years, it will first consult the Member State or States issuing the denial(s).

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made about proposed changes to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. [43128]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted by UNGA in 1989 and has achieved near universal ratification. The UK ratified in 1991. States Parties recognise and undertake to uphold the full range of human rights—and, political, economic, social and cultural—in respect of children.

We have no plans to propose changes to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, nor have we received representations to do so. We are, however, participating actively in UN Working Group discussions on draft Optional Protocols to the convention on the involvement of children in armed conflict, and on the sale of children, child prostitution, and child pornography. We support efforts to bring these discussions to a successful conclusion.

Gibraltar

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he has taken in the last four weeks to secure EU recognition for Gibraltar I.D. cards. [43106]

Mr. Doug Henderson: My answer to the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) of 13 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *402*, recorded that we were pursuing our complaint against Spain's non-recognition of Gibraltar's ID cards through the relevant Commission procedures. That remain the position.

Clive Allison

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the French Government over the disappearance of British citizen Clive Allison in Lyon on 25 April and subsequent events. [43359]

Mr. Fatchett: Following Mr. Allison's disappearance our Consulate in Lyon contacted the French Police who confirmed that they had already circulated his details as a missing person. On 29 April they issued a "search notice" to all police forces and hospital emergency units. A body was found in the Saone on 4 May and identified the next day as Mr. Allison.

The police investigation into Mr. Allison's death is continuing.

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will seek reports upon the steps taken by *(a)* the British Consulate in Lyon and *(b)* the French authorities following the reported disappearance of British citizen Clive Allison in Lyons on 25 April; and if he will make a statement. [43358]

Mr. Fatchett: Our Consul in Lyon has provided a full report of action taken by consular staff and French police when informed of the disappearance of Mr. Allison.

We are satisfied that the French authorities and our consular staff did all they properly could to help Mr. Allison's friends and relatives. Our consular staff cannot investigate the disappearance of a British citizen; that is a job for the police. In this case there was no reason to suspect foul play was involved and the police acted according to normal practice when dealing with missing persons.

Following the discovery of Mr. Allison's body the police opened an investigation, which is continuing.

Tibet

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the resolution by the European Parliament calling for a United Nations commission of inquiry into Tibet. [43164]

Mr. Fatchett: During our Presidency of the European Union the issue of Tibet has featured prominently in the EU's human rights dialogue with China. A delegation of EU Ambassadors to Beijing visited Tibet in May in order to make an assessment of the situation there. Our EU partners are considering their report.

Small Businesses

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the regulations that have been removed or amended to help small businesses since 1 May 1997. [42775]

Mr. Fatchett: Since 1 May 1997 the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has not amended or removed any regulations to help small businesses.

Israel

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress is being made on the implementation of the interim agreement on trade and trade-related matters between the EU and Israel in respect of verifying the accuracy of the labelling of goods as Made in Israel; and if the agreement will prohibit the labelling of goods produced in part or wholly in *(a)* illegal Israeli settlements, *(b)* East Jerusalem, *(c)* the Golan Heights, *(d)* the West Bank and *(e)* the Gaza Strip as Made in Israel. [43351]

Mr. Doug Henderson: On 13 May, the European Commission adopted a Communication to the Council on the implementation of the Interim Agreement on trade and trade-related matters between the European Community and Israel. This Communication is now being studied at a technical level by Member States and the Commission.

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress is being made on the implementation of the interim agreement on trade and trade-related matters between the EU and Israel in respect of monitoring human rights abuses in the occupied territories and the Israeli Government response to those abuses. [43352]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The EU continues to monitor closely the human rights situation in Israel. The EU attaches great importance to this subject, which is reflected in the terms of the EC/Israel Interim Agreement. EU Heads of Mission regularly report to the Council on the human rights situation in Israel and the Occupied Territories. A summary of the last report was released on 15 May. Member States, including the UK, also raise human rights in their bilateral contacts with Israel. The EU/Israel Association Agreement awaits ratification by all Member States. The EU/Israel Association Council set up under that agreement should also provide a welcome new forum for discussion of human rights.

Iraq

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the latest inspection of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq since the last agreement was reached; and what estimate has been made of the amount of such weapons left. [43337]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We are satisfied that Iraq has adhered to the commitments it gave to the UN Secretary-General on 23 February, and at present is allowing weapons inspections to proceed in line with its obligations under relevant Security Council Resolutions.

The latest report by the Executive Chairman of the UN Special Commission, issued in April, reported little progress in verification of all 3 areas of WMD (Biological weapons, Chemical weapons and Ballistic missiles), as a result of 4 months of crisis. As a result of the latest report from the Director General of the International Atomic Energy Authority (IAEA), the United Nations Security Council has agreed that the IAEA dedicate its resources to the implementation of Ongoing Monitoring and Verification of the nuclear capabilities of Iraq, subject to satisfactory Iraqi responses to outstanding IAEA questions and concerns prior to the issue of the next IAEA report (October 1998).

Copies of these reports will be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Dependent Territories

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information is available from British Consular offices in North America to potential investors in British Dependent Territories in the Caribbean. [43423]

Mr. Fatchett: Our Consulates-General in North America assist with any inquiries about investment in the Caribbean Overseas Territories either by obtaining relevant information from the Governments of the Overseas Territories themselves, or by putting potentional investors in direct contact with them.

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans *(a)* he and *(b)* other Ministers have to visit the Turks and Caicos Islands. [43427]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Neither my right hon. Friend, the Foreign Secretary, nor other FCO Ministers have any immediate plans to visit the Turks and Caicos Islands.

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress made in his review of the future status of Britain's Dependent Territories. [43446]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary published a response on 13 May 1998 to the FAC's Interim Report on the Dependent Territories. A copy of this is available in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what consultations he has had with the Governments of *(a)* the British Virgin Islands *(b)* the Cayman Islands and *(c)* the Turks and Caicos Islands on his proposals for their future status and citizenship. [43447]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: My right hon. Friend, the Foreign Secretary, discussed the proposals on the future status and citizenship with the Chief Ministers and equivalents of

all the Caribbean Overseas Territories' and Bermuda in February. We have consulted the Overseas Territories's governments on this matter at regular intervals since the announcement of the FCO Review last August. My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Baroness Symons, wrote to the Chief Ministers updating them on progress with the Review last month.

Defence Exports

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart) on defence exports of 18 May 1998, *Official Report*, column 265, if he will make a statement on the means by which the monitoring and assessment policy was applied to each item authorised for sale to Indonesia since 1 May 1997. [43450]

Mr. Fatchett: My hon. Friend the Minister of State's answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Slough referred to the process of assessing at the licensing stage the risk that proposed exports might be used for internal repression. We have made such an assessment in the case of all licence applications for the export of controlled goods to Indonesia circulated to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office by the Department of Trade and Industry in line with our policy responsibilities. No formal procedures exist for routinely monitoring the use that is made of British defence equipment, once exported. But we are ready when necessary to investigate any specific allegations of misuse.

Nuclear Tests (South Asia)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when Her Majesty's Government first learned that India was about to test nuclear weapons this year. [43451]

Mr. Fatchett: We first learned of the Indian nuclear tests from the Indian Government's statements to the press on 11 May and on 13 May, announcing that the tests had been conducted.

Departmental Inquiries

Mr. Howard: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those inquiries which were launched by his officials without his prior knowledge since 1 May 1997. [41724]

Mr. Robin Cook *[holding answer 12 May 1998]:* No formal investigations have been launched since 2 May 1997 by officials of the FCO without my knowledge. In the case of the alleged breach of the arms embargo on Sierra Leone, officials acted perfectly properly in referring allegations to Customs and Excise.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 2 June 1998

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Wheel Clamping

Ms Rosie Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the outcome of discussions with the Home Department on the regulation of the wheel clamping industry. [43193]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Government intend to include a statement on this subject in their forthcoming Transport White Paper.

Road Maintenance

Ms Rosie Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the current backlog in road maintenance on *(a)* trunk roads and *(b)* other adopted roads. [43188]

Ms Glenda Jackson: In December last year, my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister announced an increase of 50% in the Highways Agency's provision of capital maintenance on trunk roads and motorways to £300m for 1998–99. It is estimated that this will overcome underfunding in recent years and hold the trunk road network in a steady state condition. There is currently no central government estimate of maintenance backlog for local authority roads. Road maintenance for the future is an issue which we are considering in the Comprehensive Spending Review.

Water Abstraction

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on Government policy in relation to proposals from the Water Companies Association to increase abstraction to meet demand in areas of water shortage. [43548]

Angela Eagle: Proposals for new or increased abstractions of water to serve the needs created by development must be discussed with the Environment Agency which regulates abstractions through its licensing system. A review of that licensing system was announced at the water Summit last May and we shall shortly be publishing a consultation paper on a range of proposals for change. Water companies have duties to maintain and develop efficient and economical water supply systems to meet the needs of their areas, and to promote the efficient use of water by their customers. They are currently preparing water resource plans to maintain a balance between demand and supply over the next 25 years.

Air Bags

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to the letter of 10 November 1997 from the Minister for Transport in London to the hon. Member for Linlithgow (J/P50/10405/97), what is her Department's latest assessment of the development of air-bags for aircraft. [44064]

Ms Glenda Jackson: There have been no further developments to those outlined in my letter of 10 November 1997.

No Man's Heath Bypass

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects to announce a decision on the A41 No Man's Heath bypass; and if he will make a statement. [43382]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Inspector's report on the public inquiry into the proposed A41 No Man's Heath and Macefen bypass was received on 3 December 1997. My right hon. Friend will announce his decision in the light of the Inspector's recommendations as soon as possible.

Single-person Households

Mr. Tom King: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the proportion of households formed in each region between 1991 and 1996 which were single-person households. [43858]

Mr. Raynsford: There are no suitable survey sources for the information requested. However, my Department makes annual estimates of the total number of households by applying household information derived from recent censuses and the Labour Force Survey to the annual mid-year population estimates produced by the Office for National Statistics.

Using these figures for 1991 and 1996, the net change in the number of one person households as a percentage of the net change in total households is as set out.

Government office region	*Net increase in the number of one person households (thousands)*	*Net increase in the total number of households (thousands)*	*Percentage of total net increase that is one person households*
North East	34	34	102
North West	71	87	82
Merseyside	15	10	149
Yorkshire and the Humber	64	84	76
East Midlands	59	95	62
West Midlands	69	90	77
Eastern	85	135	63
London	112	158	71
South East	122	194	63
South West	73	110	66
England	702	996	71

In some areas the net growth in one person households exceeds the net growth in total households. This can be explained by, for example, one person households being

formed when one member of a couple dies. This increases the number of one person households by one but the overall number of households remains unchanged.

A49

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he plans to review proposals for improvements to the A49 between Ludlow and Shrewsbury. [43383]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency, Mr. Lawrie Haynes, to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Paul Marsden, dated 2 June 1998:

The Minister of Transport in London has asked me to reply to your recent question about plans to review proposals for improvements to the A49 between Ludlow and Shrewsbury.

The Highways Agency regularly reviews the operation of its trunk roads and last year commissioned its agent, at that time, Shropshire County Council, to carry out a number of safety and traffic calming studies on the A49. From 1 April, we appointed a new agent, WSP Graham, who will be reviewing the outcome of those studies with a view to acting on their recommendations at the earliest opportunity. The Agency's Area Manager, whose responsibilities include this length of A49, recently met with representatives of a newly formed Safety Campaign Group to listen to their concerns. We shall be carefully considering the points which they raised as part of the review process.

In addition, you will be aware that a review of the trunk road programme is currently being carried out, the results of which are due to be announced shortly.

National House-building Council

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received about the operations of the NHBC. [43868]

Mr. Raynsford: In the last year I have received representations concerning some 35 cases involving the NHBC Buildmark warranty scheme, some of which also involved NHBC in its capacity as an approved building control inspector. From these representations and other sources I am aware of the dissatisfaction with the way the Buildmark scheme sometimes operates. That is why, on three occasions in the past year, I have met the Chief Executive and other senior staff of the NHBC to hear progress with their Buildmark review. I am awaiting a further update from them on action to improve the operation of the scheme. As regards building control, I have welcomed the setting up by the Construction Industry Council, the Local Government Association and the Association of Corporate Approved Inspectors of a steering group to draw up recommendations on a common performance standard applicable to private sector approved inspectors and to local authority building control officers.

Wild Boars

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the wild boar population in *(a)* East Sussex, *(b)* Kent, *(c)* Dorset and *(d)* elsewhere in the United Kingdom; what is his policy in respect of these animals; and if he will make a statement. [43217]

Angela Eagle: The Central Science Laboratory has recently completed a review of the current status and potential impact of wild boar on the English countryside. This Department and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food are currently considering the review and a statement will be made in the near future.

Driving Test Centre, Chelmsford

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the progress being made to move the Driving Test Centre in Beeches Road, Chelmsford, to an alternative site in the town; and if he expects the move to be completed prior to 31 December. [43165]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Planning approval has recently been granted for the building of a new driving test centre at the Chelmer Business Park. We are confident that we shall be able to switch driver testing to there and cease at the current premises in Beeches Road, by the end of this year.

Traffic Conditions (Warrington)

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the effect on weekend traffic conditions on the A49 and on Cromwell Avenue in Warrington of building a new Junction 8 on the M62. [43385]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency, Mr. Lawrie Haynes, to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Helen Jones, dated 2 June 1998:

I have been asked by the Minister for Transport to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the M62.

The results of recent roadside traffic surveys carried out by the Highways Agency in this area are still being assessed. However, we expect them to confirm that the provision of the new junction would reduce significantly weekend traffic on the A49 and on Cromwell Avenue in Warrington.

Vulnerable Road Users

Mr. McWalter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what he is doing to educate all road users to be aware of vulnerable road users, in order to reduce two-wheeler, horse-riding and pedestrian casualties. [42334]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Highway Code contains advice for road users and aims to help prevent accidents by ensuring that all road users follow the same rules. The Code is being revised. We are considering how to highlight the need for motorists to be aware of vulnerable road users. In July there will be a 25 per cent. increase in the number of questions on driver awareness of all vulnerable road users in the driving theory test question bank. We also provide a wide range of publicity and information material for use by Road Safety Officers, police, schools and others to promote consideration for vulnerable road users. Examples include the Horse Sense for Motorists and the Drive Safe Cycle Safe leaflets.

Two-wheeled Vehicles

Mr. McWalter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if it is his policy that steps to restrain motor car use should not apply automatically to powered two wheelers. [42335]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given on 20 May 1998, *Official Report*, column *365*.

Deprivation

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when the updated Index of Local Deprivation will be published. [44135]

Mr. Caborn: I am today placing in the Library copies of a summary of the 1998 Index of Local Deprivation. The Index of Local Deprivation combines 12 up to date measures on different aspects of deprivation into a single indicator for all local authority districts in England. The Index will be used as background information for the development of regeneration policy and programmes. A further review of the Index will be commissioned later this year to take account of new data sources relevant to deprivation which will include income support statistics for areas smaller than local authority districts.

Termites (North Devon)

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what action the Government are proposing to take to control and eradicate the infestation of termites at Saunton, North Devon; and if he will make a statement. [44136]

Mr. Raynsford: The Government are determined to do everything possible to contain and destroy the termite infestation at two properties in Saunton, North Devon. Our priority is to stop the infestation spreading and to destroy it at source.

I can therefore announce that the Government will fully fund a 12 year eradication and control programme, costing some £190,000, which will start immediately the consent of the affected owners has been received.

As my noble Friend Baroness Hayman indicated in Another Place on 28 April 1998, *Official Report, House of Lords*, columns *150–53*, when the presence of this reinfestation became known the Government asked the Building Research Establishment (BRE) to explore, as a matter of urgency, the optimum means of eradicating the termites. The programme—which has been drawn up at my request by the Building Research Establishment together with experts from agencies including the Pest Management Unit of Imperial College (London), the Natural Resources Institute and CTBA-BIOTEC, France—will be based on close monitoring within 500 metres of the affected properties followed by baiting using an insect growth regulator which will prevent the developing insects from maturing.

The Government have accepted these proposals as the best way forward, and the consortium led by the BRE has been asked to implement the eradication strategy forthwith. The proposal, based on the existing knowledge of the extent of the infestation, is to survey and monitor an area within a 500m radius of the known infestation, but to install a more intensive monitoring grid in the grounds of the two affected properties and within a 200m radius of them. If surveys show that the activity extends beyond this area, it will be extended. Once activity is detected within the growth regulator hexaflumuron is proposed to be installed. Bait stations would also be installed at suitable locations within affected timbers in the infested properties. Monitoring will continue for up to ten years after activity has ceased in order to ensure that the treatment has indeed been effective. This work is dependent upon the co-operation of all property and land owners within this area, and officials in my Department are seeking their permissions as a matter of urgency.

It should be stated that it is not possible to be certain of the outcome. The BRE report stresses that total eradication of a termite population is not normally considered feasible in other countries where the termite is endemic. However, since the population appears to be very restricted in this country, on the basis of the knowledge that this is a single infestation centred on two adjacent properties, we are assured by the experts that there is a high probability of success in eradicating the termite colony.

As it is considered essential to do all possible to curtail this infestation before it spreads further, the Government have undertaken to fund the full cost of the eradication and monitoring work.

Leaseholders (Service Charges)

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a further commencement order in respect of the Housing Act 1996, enabling disputes over the reasonableness of service charges between landlords and long leaseholders on which court proceedings began before 1 September 1997 to be transferred to leasehold valuation tribunals. [44137]

Ms Armstrong: Today my Department is publishing for consultation proposals which should be welcome to a number of those leaseholders who have not so far been able to take advantage of the improved arrangements for dealing with service charge disputes under the Housing Act 1996.

Section 83 of that Act allows a residential tenant or landlord to go to the Leasehold Valuation Tribunal (LVT) rather than to a civil court when seeking a decision on whether or not service charges are reasonable. It also gives the court discretion to transfer to the LVT any question relating to the reasonableness of service charges which falls within the Tribunal's jurisdiction. This provision came into effect on 1 September 1997 but it has not so far been applied to cases where court proceedings had begun before that date. Representations have been made that this exclusion is unfair.

Under the further Commencement Order proposed today, the court's discretion would also apply to cases where proceedings had begun before 1 September 1997. This would allow the courts to consider whether the interests of justice would best be served by transferring a service charge dispute in such a case to the LVT.

Subject to consultation, the proposed further Commencement Order should bring these new measures into effect in August 1998. Tenants involved in

proceedings which started before 1 September 1997 may wish to take legal advice about the implications of these proposals.

Reservoirs Act

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he is taking to simplify the procedures in the Reservoirs Act 1975 for making appointments to panels of civil engineers and for enforcing the safety provisions of the Act. [44121]

Angela Eagle: I am today issuing a consultation paper, jointly with the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales, setting out the Government's proposals to amend the Reservoirs Act 1975. These proposals involve the transfer of the Secretaries of States' responsibilities for making appointments to the President of the Institution of Civil Engineers and the transfer of local authorities' enforcement duties in England and Wales to the Environment Agency. I am satisfied that these measures will result in the procedures being made less burdensome both for candidates for appointment and for reservoir undertakers. The amendments would be made by an Order under section 1 of the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994. I have today placed a copy of the consultation paper in the Library of the House.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Sittings of the House

Dr. Tony Wright: To ask the President of the Council on how many occasions since the House adopted the recommendations of the report of the Select Committee on the Sittings of the House business was concluded by 7 pm on Thursdays. [43286]

Mrs. Ann Taylor: The House has risen before 7 pm on Thursdays on three occasions since January 1995 and on a further 15 occasions the business under consideration at that time was the half-hour adjournment. My hon. Friend will be aware that the original Sittings of the House Report in 1991–92, known as the Jopling report, recommended that, on the Thursdays immediately preceding non-sitting Fridays, the House should complete its main business by 7.00 pm and rise after the adjournment at 7.30 pm. The Committee also said that 7.00 pm on the other Thursdays should be the normal time for completion of main business. On the 26 Thursdays before non-sitting Fridays since January 1995, the House rose before 8 pm on 11 occasions and before 9 pm on eight other evenings. On the 83 Thursdays preceding sitting Fridays since then, the House rose between 10 and 10.30 pm on 44 occasions, later than that on eight occasions and adjourned before 9 pm on 26 evenings.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Post Office Users National Council

Mr. Kidney: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will list the members of the Post Office Users National Council and their terms of office. [43327]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: The current members of the Post Office Users National Council, who are generally appointed for individual terms of 3 or 4 years, are:

Member	*Appointment expiry date*
John Hackney (Chairman)	30 September 1999
Eric Diston	31 December 1998
Rodger Gooding	31 December 1998
Gary Hepburn	31 December 1998
David Morris	31 December 1998
Edward Vidler	31 December 1998
Dennis Wilson	31 December 1998
Dr. Stephanie Stray	31 December 1999
Frederick Bell	31 December 2000
Keith Hitchings	31 December 2000
Andrew Robertson[1]	30 September 1999
Eifion Pritchard[1]	30 September 2000
Gerard Trainor[1]	31 August 2000

[1] Sit on the National Council by virtue of their appointments as Chairmen of the Post Office Users Councils for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

In the current round of appointments, I am seeking a more balanced representation in terms of gender and ethnic origin on all the Consumer Councils.

Mr. Kidney: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what the procedures are for nomination and appointment of members to the Post Office Users National Council. [43328]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: The procedures for appointments to the consumer councils for which I am responsible have been drawn up since Lord Nolan published his report and are fully compliant with the Guidance of the Commissioner for Public Appointments. An advertisement for appointments to a number of consumer councils, including the Post Office Users National Council, appears in the press annually. At the time of advertising we also seek nominations from a number of sources including the Council Chairmen, the Public Appointments Unit and all consumer representative organisations and minority groups. Applications are considered by an interview panel, which includes an independent representative, and a short list of candidates is interviewed. Thereafter Ministers select appointees from among all those successful at interview on the basis of merit. This year I expect to be able to confirm the appointments to the Post Office Users National Council by October. I am seeking to ensure that this recruitment provides for better representation of gender and ethnic minorities.

The procedures outlined above were drawn up by a Departmental Appointments Panel which has five independent members.

Small Businesses

Mr. Page: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will list the regulations that have been removed or amended to help small businesses since 1 May 1997. [42777]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 1 June 1998]:* Between 1 May 1997 and 31 May 1998 my Department has laid 8 amending regulations which resulted in compliance cost savings to business. These are as follows:

The Wireless Telegraphy (Network User Stations) (Exemption) Regulations 1997;

The Gas Act 1986 (Exemption) Order 1997;

The Insurance Companies (Accounts and Statements) (Amendment) Regulations 1997;

The Restrictive Trade Practices (Non-Notifiable Agreements) (Sale and Purchase, Share Subscription and Franchise Agreements) Order 1997;

The Restrictive Trade Practices (Non-Notifiable Agreements) (Turnover Threshold) Amendment Order 1997;

The Cosmetic Products (Safety) (Amendment) Regulations 1997;

The Wireless Telegraphy (Licence Charges) (Amendment) Regulations 1998; and

The Trade Marks (Amendment) Rules 1998.

Regulations to reduce the burdens on business are not necessarily targeted on businesses of a particular size. The regulations listed are expected to reduce burdens on business irrespective of size.

EU Structural Funds

Ms Atherton: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what percentage of the United Kingdom population reside in areas in receipt of Objective 1 Funding. [43440]

Mrs. Roche: Of the United Kingdom's population, 6.0 per cent. reside in areas in receipt of Objective 1 Funding.

Source:

European Commission, Structural and Cohesion Fund 1994–99 Regulation and Commentary.

Funeral Industry

Mr. Caplin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what further action is being taken to improve consumer protection in the funeral industry. [43476]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: The Director General of Fair Trading announced on 15 May that he is to instigate an inquiry into the 'at need' funeral industry. I very much welcome this initiative. I share his concern about any allegations of malpractice and aggressive selling techniques in the funerals industry and call upon the industry to raise standards of consumer service.

I am also urgently considering measures to ensure that consumers who purchase their funerals in advance are properly protected. My Department is in regular contact with interested parties.

Business Link North West London

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to her answer of 14 May 1998, *Official Report*, column *193*, on Business Link, London North West, (1) on what basis the committed and actual partner contributions figures include in kind contributions; [43992]

(2) if she will provide a detailed breakdown of the forecast figure of £160,000 partnership income for the financial year 1998–99. [43993]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 1 June 1998]:* For the financial year 1997–98 Business Link North West London received £150,000 as a partnership contribution. Of this sum £25,000 was allocated to the salary of a North West London TEC contracts manager who had the specific duty of servicing the Business Link.

For the financial year 1998–99 the forecast contribution will flow from savings produced as a result of the merger. At this stage it is not possible to provide a detailed breakdown.

Fireworks

Dr. Iddon: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how retailers are to dispose of their stocks if the Fireworks Bill is enacted. [43669]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: The Fireworks Bill is a Private Member's Bill which, if enacted, would provide the capability to deal with issues which cannot be addressed under the presently available powers. However, the fact of the Bill reaching the statute book would not of itself result in any new controls on fireworks being introduced. A key element in the Bill is a provision which would allow for the introduction of a training regime for the organisers of firework displays.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what changes have been made to import controls on fireworks since November 1996; and what plans she has for further changes. [43389]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: There have been no changes to import controls on fireworks since November 1996.

The Fireworks (Safety) Regulations 1997, which I made in September 1997, introduced a number of firework safety measures including banning bangers, flash bangers, fireworks with erratic flight, aerial shells, maroons and other large fireworks from sale to the public. The Regulations also place limits on the size of certain fireworks—such as Roman Candles—which can be sold to the public. These restrictions apply both to imported fireworks and to those manufactured in the United Kingdom.

I am currently discussing with the firework industry the "traceability" of imported fireworks to improve the interception of dangerous ones.

Plutonium

Dr. Moonie: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will publish the figures for the United Kingdom's stock of civil plutonium as at 31 December 1997. [44282]

Mr. Battle: I have today placed in the Library of the House figures for the United Kingdom under the new format showing national holdings of civil plutonium as at 31 December 1997. These figures are published as part of the UK's renewed commitment to improve transparency and openness in its management of our national holding of civil plutonium. This follows the same format as that announced on 2 December 1997 for holdings as at 31 December 1996. In accordance with the requirements of the 'Guidelines for the Management of Plutonium', I have today sent a copy of the figures to the Director-General of the International Atomic Energy Agency, who will be circulating it to Member States in due course.

EC Telecommunications Council

Maria Eagle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement on the outcome of the EC Telecommunications Council on 19 May. [44281]

Mrs. Roche: I chaired the Telecommunications Council held in Brussels on 19 May.

Substantial progress was made towards agreement on two decisions: on the further development of mobile and wireless communications in Europe (universal mobile telecommunications system); and on a multi-annual programme to promote safe use of the internet. Both decisions will be finalised once the European Parliament has given its first reading.

Following a presentation of the report from the ad hoc Working Group on electronic commerce, which examined the Commission Communication on Globalisation and the Information Society, the Council adopted conclusions on this subject. The Commission gave oral presentations of a draft Directive on a European framework for electronic signatures, and a Communication on the radio frequency requirements for Community policies in the context of the World Radiocommunications Conference 1999. The Commission also provided an oral update on discussions with the US on the subject of internet domain name governance.

The Commission and I briefed the Council on progress in tackling the Millennium Bug. In particular, I reported to the Council on the conference hosted by the UK on 8 May this year, in London.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Film Industry

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will list those films which have received lottery funding indicating *(a)* how much lottery money each received, *(b)* their total budgets, *(c)* their release dates, *(d)* the number of screens on which they opened and *(e)* their takings to date. [41802]

Mr. Tom Clarke *[holding answer 13 May 1998]:* The table shows the information available as provided by the Arts Council of England.

Film title	*Lottery award*	*Budget*	*Release date*	*Number of screens*	*Total box office to date (£)*
Glastonbury The Movie Limited	36,061	125,000	Released 12.6.96	Opened on 3; played up to 75	£30,000; other income through its video release
True Blue	1,000,000	3,500,000	Released 15.11.96	108 screens	152,042
Crimetime	302,421	3,817,755	Released 29.11.96	23 screens	13,127
A Midsummer Nights Dream	750,000	2,300,000	Released 29.11.96	6 screens	25,859
Frantz Fanon	84,000	320,000	Released 27.6.97	1 screen, ICA	2,180
The Slab Boys	520,000	2,500,000	Released 29.8.97	8 screens	15,911
Gallivant	170,000	334,366	Released 19.9.97	3 screens	21,000
Photographing Fairies	890,000	3,620,000	Released 19.9.97	60 screens	81,609
Shooting Fish	980,000	2,135,000	Released 17.10.97	206 screens	4,023,915
Wilde	1,500,000	6,000,000	Released 17.10.97	53 screens	1,746,912
The Tango Lesson	690,000	2,700,000	Released 28.11.97	60 screens	207,120
Keep the Aspidistra Flying	1,000,000	2,750,000	Released 28.11.97	9 screens	105,163
The Woodlanders	1,400,000	4,300,000	Released 6.2.98	18 screens	177,442
Downtime	768,898	1,956,495	Released 13.2.98	42 screens	28,135
Bent	561,000	2,154,183	Released 6.3.98	3 screens	27,962
My Son the Fanatic	750,000	2,134,800	Released 1.5.98	16 screens	60,084
Amy Foster	2,000,000	10,500,000	Released 8.5.98	39 screens	20,371
Love and Death on Long Island	750,000	2,300,874	To be released 3.7.98		
The Land Girls	1,500,000	5,800,000	To be released 28.8.98		
Love is the Devil	364,551	1,119,364	To be released 9.98		
The Governess	907,075	2,803,000	To be released 10.98		
The Revengers Comedies	950,000	4,000,000	Release date tbc		
Among Giants	665,000	2,479,000	Release date tbc		
Divorcing Jack	800,000	3,350,000	To be released autumn 98		
Metroland	865,000	2,953,347	Release date tbc		
A Kind of Hush	750,000	2,215,287	Release date tbc		
Food of Love	800,000	2,100,000	UK Distributor tbc		
Peggy Sue	500,000	1,130,000	UK Distributor tbc		
Sixth Happiness	469,727	976,081	UK Distributor tbc		
Nana	160,000	320,000	UK Distributor tbc		
Get Real	800,000	1,808,000	UK Distributor tbc		

Cable Television

Mr. Caplin: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will ensure that future cable television licensing agreements require the provision of high quality local programming by franchise operators and that that provision be monitored by the ITC. [43109]

Mr. Fisher: The award and regulation of cable television licences is, by statute, a matter for the Independent Television Commission (ITC). The terms of the Broadcasting Act 1990 require that licences awarded by the ITC under that Act contain no positive requirements for specific programming categories or quality. The ITC will however continue to monitor conditions relating to local programming in cable licences issued by the Cable Authority under the Cable and Broadcasting Act 1984, for which the Commission is now responsible.

Libraries

Ms Beverley Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what public money is being provided to help libraries take advantage of new technology. [41985]

Mr. Fisher *[holding answer 1 June 1998]:* The Government published their plans for the development of an IT Public Libraries Network on 16 April. £70 million of Lottery funding will be made available from the New Opportunities Fund for the development of new digital resources and the provision of ICT training of public library staff, together with £6 million to support the development of infrastructure.

EU Culture Council

Mr. Caplin: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what was the outcome of the Culture Council on 28 May. [44192]

Mr. Fisher: EU Ministers of Culture met on 28 May 1998 in Brussels. Ministers agreed a common position regarding the proposed European Parliament and Council decision establishing a Community action for "The European City of Culture" event for the years 2005 to 2019. Ministers also agreed the cities to be offered the title "European City of Culture" and "European Cultural Month" for the years 2001 to 2004.

The European Commission presented its proposal for a new culture framework programme. Ministers held an exchange of views on the Commission's proposal.

The Presidency provided the Council with information about an informal meeting between the Cultural Affairs Committee and representatives of the Council of Europe which took place on 16 April and focused on the impact of new technologies upon culture.

The Commission provided the Council with a progress report on its study on cross border fixed book prices in the European Union.

Ministers also held an exchange of views on culture and employment.

Ministers agreed a draft recommendation concerning the protection of minors and human dignity in audiovisual and information services.

The Presidency gave a report on the European Audiovisual Conference, "Challenges and Opportunities of the Digital Age", which was held in Birmingham on 6–8 April. The Council adopted Council conclusions on the outcome of the Conference.

Ministers discussed a proposal to establish a European Film Award and the Commission agreed to undertake a study. Under any other business, access to archives in the European Union, the importance of music and music sector, and Weimar's plans as City of Culture 1999 were mentioned.

WALES

Breast Cancer

Ms Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when up-to-date figures will be available on the incidence of breast cancer among women by unitary authority area and by age. [43473]

Mr. Win Griffiths: The Welsh Cancer Intelligence and Surveillance Unit is dealing with the registration backlog at the rate of one year's data every four months.

This means incidence data for the current calendar year (1998) should be available by February 2000. For 1999 and subsequent years, data will be available in the following September.

Football Trust

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to assist the work of the Football Trust in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [44053]

Mr. Ron Davies: I have no such plans but discussions are ongoing between the Sports Council for Wales, the Football Association of Wales and the Football Trust on how they might make the best use of their joint resources to develop football in Wales.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the year end financial position of each NHS trust in Wales. [44193]

Mr. Win Griffiths: The table shows the unaudited end year financial position of NHS trusts in Wales. Twenty one of the 29 trusts improved on their projected year end position provided in their December quarter returns. The efforts made by the trusts are appreciated.

£000

Trust	*Unaudited year end position*	*December quarter projected figures*
Bridgend and District	25	0
Cardiff Community	315	259
Carmarthen	−1,557	−1,659
Ceredigion	−918	−1,100
Clwydian Community	179	187
East Glamorgan	168	92
Glan Y Mor	13	0
Glan Clwyd	167	127
Glan Hafren	330	330
Gwent Community	66	66
Gwynedd Community	63	97
Gwynedd Hospitals	198	−92
Llandough Hospital	−1,346	−1,822
Llanelli/Dinefwr	−646	−800
Mid Glamorgan Ambulance	69	49
Morriston	−1,667	−2,691
Nevill Hall and District	18	−82
North Glamorgan	54	−308
North Wales Ambulance	4	56
Pembrokeshire and Derwen	−2,039	−2,097
Powys	−900	−1,278
Rhondda	132	116
SEWAT	58	0
Swansea	49	60
University Dental Hospital	7	−92
University Hospital of Wales	−1,462	−4,574
Velindre	23	87
West Wales Ambulance	0	0
Wrexham Maelor	−87	−737
Total	−8,684	−15,806

HOME DEPARTMENT

Immigration

Ms Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to conclude his review of immigration cases where domestic violence is involved; and if he will make a statement. [43200]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The review is nearing its conclusion and I hope to be able to make an announcement shortly.

Reginald Kray

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how often Reginald Kray has been found in possession of alcohol in the last 12 months; and what is its source. [42139]

Ms Quin: While Mr. Kray has not been found in possession of alcohol during the last 12 months, reports prepared for his most recent Parole Board review in March of this year referred to admission by him that he continued to drink illicit alcohol.

Sentencing

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps are being taken to ensure uniformity of sentences for similar offences in different areas; and if he will make a statement. [43610]

Mr. Michael: Provisions in the Crime and Disorder Bill [*Lords*] place a statutory duty on the Court of Appeal to consider producing sentencing guidelines. The Bill also establishes a new sentencing advisory panel which will offer advice to the Court of Appeal. Taken together, we are confident that these measures will help to ensure greater consistency in sentencing.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what instructions he has issued to the Immigration Service regarding arrangements for asylum seekers to be represented at interviews held at ports. [43464]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Current and longstanding instructions to the Immigration Service about representation at interviews of passengers at ports have not altered significantly in recent times.

All passenger interviews, including those of asylum seekers, are conducted under Schedule 2 to the Immigration Act 1971. It is not a mandatory requirement for a representative to be present at any interview. However, at the discretion of the immigration officer, representatives are usually admitted to interviews once their bona fides have been established and provided that no unreasonable delay is involved.

On arrival in the United Kingdom, all port asylum seekers are given written information about access to legal advice including details of the Refugee Legal Centre and The Immigration Advisory Service.

Prison Site, Morecambe

Miss Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the proposed temporary prison at Middleton Sands, Morecambe will close. [43663]

Ms Quin: A condition of the planning clearance is that the period between the opening and closing of the prison should not exceed three years; and the prison should close prior to 31 December 2001.

UK Visa Applications (Turkish Cypriots)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he received a request from the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the hon. Member for Newcastle-upon-Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson), to reply to a query regarding visas for Turkish Cypriots entering the United Kingdom; when he received a letter on the same subject dated 4 February from the right hon. Member for Strangford; and if he will make a statement. [44030]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I have received a number of representations on this issue, including a letter from the right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor) received on 30 April, and will write to the hon. and right hon. Members concerned as soon as possible.

Easter Sunday Trading

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he is taking to prevent indoor retail outlets trading on Easter Sunday. [44031]

Mr. George Howarth: Under the Sunday Trading Act 1994, only those shops with a relevant floor area of more than 280 square metres are prohibited from trading on Easter Sunday. Local authorities are responsible for enforcing the Act's provisions. Contravening the shop opening hours provisions can attract a fine of conviction of up to £50,000.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Travel Expenses

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the total value in real terms of *(a)* staff car mileage claims paid and *(b)* staff rail fares paid in each year since 1989–90; and what was the total amount of staff car mileage for which reimbursement was made and the percentage change in each year since 1989–90. [42551]

Mr. Fatchett: The information required to answer this question is not readily available and to obtain it would involve disproportionate cost.

Thailand

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance has been given to the Thailand Government to prevent cross-border incursions by the Burmese military. [43470]

Mr. Fatchett: We have received no request from the Thai authorities for assistance to prevent incursions from Burma. As EU Presidency, we have condemned recent incursions and highlighted their impact on refugees along

the Thai-Burma border. Our Embassies in Rangoon and Bangkok have raised our concerns with their host governments at a high level.

Most recently, I raised the issue of Burmese refugees in Thailand with General Chettla Thanajaro, Commander in Chief of the Royal Thai Army, in Bangkok on 29 May.

HEALTH

Winter Pressures

14. **Mrs. Heal:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the extra funding provided to the NHS for coping with winter pressures was spent on projects involving joint working with social services. [42190]

22. **Mr. Sutcliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the extra funding provided to the NHS for coping with winter pressures was spent on projects involving joint working with social services. [42198]

Mr. Boateng: Of the £159 million allocated to health authorities in England, over one fifth (some £35 million) was transferred to social services departments for projects where the need was specifically for social care. Details of the precise spend on other projects which involved joint working with social services is not available centrally. However, we made it clear that all projects funded by the additional resources should be developed in consultation with local social services departments.

NHS Quality Standards

15. **Dr. Iddon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he is taking to improve mechanisms within the NHS for the introduction of more demanding quality standards. [42191]

Mr. Milburn: Our White Paper "The New NHS", published last December, set out a range of proposals for driving and supporting quality improvement in the National Health Service. We shall shortly be publishing a consultation paper which sets out some of our key proposals in more detail.

Infertility Treatment (Workington)

16. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on his review of the case of Mrs. X of Workington, whose name has been supplied to him. [42192]

Ms Jowell: I understand that this case is about a woman who has not been able to obtain in-vitro fertilisation treatment in Cumbria as she is not eligible under the North Cumbria Health Authority's criteria for infertility treatment. Like most National Health Service treatments, infertility treatment is funded through the general funding of health authorities, and decisions about the allocation of resources and about who should be eligible for treatment are the responsibility of individual authorities. We are determined to address concerns that the NHS should provide equality of access to services throughout the country and are currently considering what further advice the NHS should be given on infertility service provision.

Health Action Zones

17. **Mr. McNulty:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money he is making available to support the development of health action zones. [42193]

Mr. Milburn: We are making £5.3 million in 1998/99 and £30 million from 1999/2000 available to support the first wave of Health Action Zones.

Health Authorities (West Yorkshire)

18. **Mr. Bill O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has for the reorganisation of health authorities and community trusts in West Yorkshire; and if he will make a statement. [42194]

Mr. Milburn: We have received no proposals to reorganise health authorities or community trusts in West Yorkshire.

Health Information (Men over 40)

19. **Mrs. Dean:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action his Department is taking to provide improved health information to men over 40 years of age. [42195]

31. **Mr. Dismore:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action his Department is taking to provide improved information on health to men over 40 years of age. [42208]

Ms Jowell: I refer my hon. Friends to my oral reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton (Mr. Dobbin) today, *Official Report*, column 161.

Elderly Patients

20. **Mr. Bob Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action his Department is taking to ensure patients aged over 75 years are not discharged without adequate social services available for their care. [42196]

Mr. Boateng: The Department is undertaking a number of relevant activities. Guidance on hospital discharge is under review. Social services inspectors are about to publish a report on local authorities' hospital discharge arrangements. The Department is working with health and social services authorities to develop assessment and care management, including written care plans for all patients on discharge from hospital, rehabilitation and recuperation services and joint investment plans.

Grimsby Hospital

21. **Shona McIsaac:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he is taking to improve mechanisms within the NHS for the introduction of more demanding quality standards at Grimsby hospital. [42197]

Mr. Milburn: Our White Paper "The New NHS", published last December, set out a range of proposals for driving and supporting quality improvement in the National Health Service. We shall shortly be publishing a consultation paper which sets out some of our key proposals in more detail. The proposals for hospitals will apply to all hospital trusts and therefore to Grimsby hospital.

Treatments (Clinical Effectiveness)

23. **Mr. Russell Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans the Government have to enforce NHS guidance on the clinical effectiveness of treatments. [42200]

Mr. Milburn: In the White Paper "The New NHS" we announced the end of the internal market in the National Health Service. The new National Institute for Clinical Excellence will set the standards of care that must be equally available to all. For the first time, the Government will require managers throughout the NHS to give as much attention to the effectiveness of treatments as to efficiency and cost. We will develop and publish National Service Frameworks which will make it clear what patients can expect from the NHS; and we will use the Service Frameworks to drive up quality through our management of NHS performance.

NHS Hospitals

24. **Lorna Fitzsimons:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many new NHS hospitals have been announced since 1 May 1997. [42201]

Mr. Milburn: Thirty hospital schemes have been given the go ahead since 1 May 1997. Twenty-five of these were under the Private Finance Initiative and five publicly funded.

Cancer Treatment

25. **Mr. Wilkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will encourage cancer treatment in hospitals with specialist cancer research facilities. [42202]

Mr. Boateng: The Calman/Hine report on cancer services recognises the importance of high quality research and recommends that this is carried out throughout the cancer care network—in cancer units, cancer centres; primary care and within the voluntary sector. This means that the necessary population is available for research; there is close liaison between the service and the research; and the results leading to improved care can be disseminated quickly.

Prescriptions

26. **Maria Eagle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to ensure consistency between health authorities in respect of the prescription of certain drugs. [42203]

Mr. Milburn: We will work with the professions to produce National Service Frameworks and clinical guidelines which will be relevant to all health authorities. We will challenge and address variations in the provision of clinically and cost effective treatments not based on the health needs and wishes of local people.

Heart Disease

27. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he is taking to reduce the incidence of heart disease. [42204]

Ms Jowell: Coronary heart disease is one of the biggest killers in this country. It accounts for some 120,000 deaths a year including premature deaths. Its incidence shows marked social class inequality. For example, men of working age in the bottom social classes are more than 50 per cent. more likely to die of coronary heart disease than men in the overall population.

The Government are undertaking a variety of initiatives to tackle the risk factors for coronary heart disease. These include the forthcoming White Paper on tobacco control, a major campaign, called "Active for Life" to publicise the significant health benefits of moderately intense physical activity, a review, last year, of effective interventions in the prevention and treatment of obesity, and a directory of weight management services available across the National Health Service in England. We also launched a rolling programme of National Service Frameworks including the development of a framework for the prevention and treatment of coronary heart disease, which will set national standards; put in place strategies to support implementation; and establish performance measures against which progress in reducing preventable death, tackling inequalities, and ensuring consistency of treatment, will be measured. The emerging findings from this work are expected in the autumn, and will be published and disseminated.

Mental Health

28. **Mr. Truswell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how he will ensure community and mental health services in Leeds receive an adequate share of the Government's extra investment in the NHS. [42205]

Mr. Boateng: I am pleased to say that Leeds Health Authority will receive a general allocation of £339.93 million in 1998/99, which is a total cash increase of £15.89 million over 1997/98.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the provision of long-stay beds for the mentally ill in *(a)* the North West Region, *(b)* the county of Cheshire and *(c)* East Cheshire NHS Trust. [42187]

Mr. Boateng: North West Region has resettled almost all long stay residents from the large institutions which provided treatment and care for people with mental health problems. There are still some final moves from some of the sites yet to be achieved. The whole of this was subject to a report submitted to the Independent Reference Group in 1997.

At Winwick Hospital, the local mental health services are still in the process of moving to newly developed areas on the Winwick site and also to a purpose built mental health unit at Halton General Hospital, Runcorn. These moves have been notified to the health authority concerned and will be monitored closely by the North West Regional Office of the National Health Service Executive.

In East Cheshire NHS Trust, patients previously at Parkside Hospital (the largest institution of its type in South Cheshire) have been reprovided for in a range of community based facilities, mostly within their home areas.

Small Pharmacies

29. **Mr. St. Aubyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans his Department has to support the role of small pharmacies in delivering health care. [42206]

Mr. Milburn: All pharmacies which provide National Health Service services receive a fair and appropriate level of remuneration for the work they carry out. We have in place special arrangements—the Essential Small Pharmacies Scheme—to guarantee a minimum NHS income for certain smaller pharmacies which might not otherwise be viable. We plan to continue both these forms of support.

Health Inequalities

30. **Mr. Paul Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent research he has commissioned into health inequalities. [42207]

Ms Jowell: We recently announced eight research projects at a cost of £1.7 million on inequalities in health. This round of commissioning has focused on important areas to do with children and young people as well as health service mechanisms. All the projects are geared to answering the question: what actions on the part of health and other services can be effectively taken to reduce inequalities in health? In addition the Independent Inquiry into Inequalities in Health is reviewing existing research on this issue. Further research will be commissioned in the light of the Inquiry's report.

National Service Frameworks

32. **Helen Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he has taken to introduce national service frameworks in the NHS. [42209]

Mr. Milburn: The annual programme of national service frameworks was launched on 16 April 1998. The initial programme of work will take forward the existing frameworks for cancer and paediatric intensive care, and will begin to develop new national service frameworks for mental health and coronary heart disease.

Each national service framework will be developed with the assistance of an expert reference group which will bring together health professionals, service users and carers, health service managers, partner agencies, and other advocates. The reference groups for mental health and coronary heart disease will be established during the next few weeks, and will begin work in the early summer.

Emerging findings will be published in the autumn and the frameworks in spring 1999. The National Health Service, working with partner agencies, will be expected to begin to plan for implementation from April 1999.

Primary Care Groups

33. **Dr. Starkey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress is being made in respect of primary care groups. [42210]

Mr. Milburn: A great deal of work has been done since publication of the White Paper "The New NHS: Modern—Dependable" to establish Primary Care Groups. We are on course to have Primary Care Groups in place and operational by April 1999.

Local discussions are now well under way to agree Primary Care Group configurations by July this year. We have also been consulting various interested bodies nationally on implementation issues. We have made £22 million available to help get Primary Care Groups off the ground. This £22 million will be deliberately targeted to areas with higher numbers of non-fundholding general practitioners in recognition of the fact that they do not have the resources of the fundholder management allowances to draw on. It takes account of the fact that primary care management resources—including GP computing cash—has been unevenly distributed in the past. This is a first step to restoring equity across practices. It will be for local doctors and nurses to decide with their health authority how this money is best spent. This additional support will help family doctors and community nurses get their local Primary Care Group right so that patients get the maximum benefit from the new arrangements.

Palliative Care

34. **Mr. Flight:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on Government funding for hospices. [42211]

Mr. Milburn: It is the duty of health authorities to arrange the provision of specialist palliative care services (including hospice care) commensurate with the assessed health needs of their populations, in the same way as for other health services. Since 1994/5, funding for this purpose has been built into health authorities' general allocations.

Health Service Commissioner

35. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to increase confidence among parents in the role of the Health Service Commissioner with respect to the NHS complaints procedure. [42212]

Mr. Milburn: As an Officer of Parliament the Health Service Commissioner is independent of the Government and it is not for Ministers to intervene in the way he operates. However, we have every confidence that the Commissioner carries out his role in an entirely appropriate manner.

Care (Young People)

36. **Ms Christine Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he has taken to involve young people in care in consultations on the provision of that care. [42213]

Mr. Boateng: Children Act Regulations prescribe that local authorities shall seek and take account of the views of a child before conducting any review of his case.

Guidance on children's services planning highlights the importance of local authorities seeking children's views and giving due weight to them alongside those of parents and carers.

A care leaver is one of the members of the Ministerial Task Force on children's safeguards, and the Department will be providing funding for the establishment of a new national organisation for young people in care and for care leavers.

Children's Rights

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to appoint *(a)* a United Kingdom children's rights commissioner and (b) an English children's rights commissioner. [24346]

Mr. Boateng: We have no plans to establish an office of Children's Rights Commissioner. During 1998 the Government will be preparing the Second United Kingdom Report to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child in accordance with the requirements of Article 44 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989. We will take into account possible advantages of such an Office and note progress in other countries where such an Office has been established.

Occupational Health

Laura Moffatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many medical and nursing staff have worked in occupational health in the National Health Service for the last five years for which figures are available; and what were the grades of those employees. [42460]

Mr. Milburn: The available information is given in the tables. The introduction of a new method of classifying staff from 1995 means that nursing staff working in occupational health can no longer be separately identified.

Hospital and community health services (HCHS) nursing staff working in occupational health in England as at 30 September each year

Whole-time equivalents

	1990	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Total	630	610	590	600	640

Note:
Figures are rounded to the nearest ten
Source:
Department of Health Non-Medical Workforce census

NHS hospital medical staff occupational medicine staff by grade in England as at 30 September each year

Whole-time equivalents

Grade	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
All staff	70	70	90	100	90
Consultant	30	30	40	50	50
Staff grade	0	0	0	0	0
Associate specialist	—	—	—	0	0
Senior registrar	10	10	10	10	10
Registrar	10	0	0	0	0
Senior house officer	—	—	0	0	—
House officer	—	—	—	—	—
Hospital practitioner	0	0	0	0	0
Clinical assistant	20	20	30	30	20
Other staff	0	0	0	0	0

Notes:
Previous to 1996 occupational medicine was called occupational health
The figure for senior registrars in 1996 includes specialist registrars
Figures are rounded to the nearest 10 whole-time equivalents
Totals may not equal the sum of component parts due to rounding
0 = 5 or less and greater than zero
— = zero
Source:
Department of Health Medical and Dental Workforce Census.

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps are being taken to ensure that the guidance, Occupational Health Services for NHS staff 94(51), is being implemented in each NHS trust. [43598]

Mr. Milburn: Occupational Health Services for National Health Service Staff 94(51) has been superseded by the Management of Health, Safety and Welfare issues for NHS Staff 98(64). This guidance, issued on 18 May 1998 to all chief executives and human resource directors in health authorities and NHS trusts, covers all aspects of health and safety and occupational health.

The NHS Executive is currently working on a new human resources strategy for the NHS. Taking forward occupational health provision will be a priority area for action requiring demonstrable year on year progress.

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps are being taken to make occupational health services available to staff working in primary care. [43601]

Mr. Milburn: The National Health Service Executive is working with representatives of interested parties to examine ways of extending occupational health provision to staff working in primary care, in the light of changes currently taking place in primary care provision.

Glaucoma

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what representations his Department has received in the last year on the extension of glaucoma testing as part of the NHS standard sight test; and if he will make a statement; [42368]

(2) what estimates he has made of *(a)* the number and *(b)* the proportion of opticians who carry out the full three stage test for glaucoma in the course of NHS sight tests; what plans he has to extend the provision of all three tests to all patients receiving NHS sight tests; and if he will make a statement. [42366]

Mr. Milburn: Information from the College of Optometrists, which regularly reviews current practice among its members, suggests that, in testing patients over 40 and other patients predisposed to glaucoma, virtually all optometrists examine the optic disc and measure intra-ocular pressures, and over half routinely undertake a visual field assessment. These data are not broken down between private and National Health Service sight tests, but we would expect optometrists to adopt common practices for both groups of patients.

We have not received representations on this subject.

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evaluation he has made of *(a)* the increased cost of ensuring that every NHS periodic sight test includes all three glaucoma detection tests and *(b)* the additional number of early-stage glaucoma cases that would be detected with universal three test procedures; and if he will make a statement. [42367]

Mr. Milburn: We are aware of research which suggests that the accuracy of referrals could be improved from 60 to 80 per cent. by the combined use of the 3 tests on patients at risk of glaucoma. There is a single fee for undertaking National Health Service sight tests which is set through negotiations between the Department and representatives of optometrists and ophthalmic medical

practitioners. Clinical developments are among the factors taken into account, but it is not possible to isolate their impact.

Spinal Injuries

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many people with spinal cord injury have not received specialist treatment at a spinal injuries unit in each of the last three years; [42653]

(2) how many people with acute spinal cord injury are awaiting admittance to a spinal injuries unit; [42649]

(3) how many people diagnosed with spinal cord injury died before reaching a spinal injuries unit, in each year since 1990–91. [42652]

Mr. Milburn: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what studies have been undertaken or commissioned by his Department on *(a)* the quality of life and *(b)* the long term cost of care of people with spinal cord injury who (i) received treatment and (ii) did not receive treatment at a spinal injuries unit; [42650]

(2) what research his Department *(a)* has commissioned and *(b)* proposes into (i) the incidence and (ii) the prevalence of spinal cord injury. [42648]

Mr. Milburn: The Department's policy research programme and the central National Health Service research and development programmes are not currently supporting any research into spinal cord injuries. However, many NHS trusts support programmes of research and development, some of which are considerable. The NHS supports clinical trials in spinal injuries which are conducted within its facilities. A comprehensive database for the projects funded under these programmes is currently under development.

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people with spinal cord injury are currently being treated in *(a)* spinal injuries units and *(b)* non-specialist hospitals. [42651]

Mr. Milburn: We do not collect the information in the form requested. However, information for in-patient treatment, for the latest year available, 1995–96, is shown in the tables, copies of which have been placed in the Library, and is based on finished consultant episodes; which represent the number of episodes of care under individual consultants.

NHS Drugs (Prices)

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what mechanisms exist to assess, monitor and regulate price increases in drugs used by the NHS. [43030]

Mr. Milburn: The prices of branded medicines sold to the National Health Service are regulated through the pharmaceutical price regulation scheme (PPRS), which is a voluntary agreement between the health departments and the pharmaceutical industry. The scheme sets for each major company a profit cap (with various cost allowances), based on return of capital employed, within which the company is allowed to establish the price of new medicines it proposes to sell to the NHS. Increases in the price of medicines have to be agreed by the Department. Small companies (sales below £20 million per annum to the NHS) are not required to supply such detailed information as a matter of routine, but remain subject to the price restraint provisions of the scheme.

Generic products are not included in the PPRS. We do not control their prices which are determined by competitive market forces.

Slow Sodium Tablets

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the increase in the price of slow sodium tablets per 100 to the NHS between March and May 1998 in actual and percentage terms. [43032]

Mr. Milburn: The list price to the National Health Service of this product increased during this period from 55p to £6.05 per 100, an increase of 1,000 per cent. Officials wrote to HK Pharma specifically on this issue on 28 April. So far they have not replied.

Commission for Health Improvement

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when he will announce detailed plans for user representation on the Commission for Health Improvement; [43156]

(2) what remit the National Institute for Clinical Excellence and the Commission for Health Improvement will have to encourage the spread of good practice in wheelchair services; [43157]

(3) when he will announce detailed plans for user representation on the National Institute for Clinical Excellence. [43155]

Mr. Milburn: We will be consulting shortly on our detailed proposals for the Commission for Health Improvement and the National Institute for Clinical Excellence.

Midwives

Mr. Alan Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list the number of midwife vacancies in the NHS by health authority and NHS trust; [43150]

(2) if he will list the number of midwives employed in the NHS by health authority and NHS trust; [43152]

(3) if he will list the number of whole-time equivalent midwifery posts in the NHS by health authority and NHS trust. [43154]

Mr. Milburn: The National Health Service Executive does not collect information on the number of vacancies or posts (counted as the sum of staff in post and vacancies) in the hospital and community health services. For the information that is available on midwife vacancies and posts in the NHS, I refer my hon. Friend to the reports of the Review Body for Nursing Staff, Midwives, Health Visitors and Professions Allied to Medicine, copies of which are available in the Library.

Information on the number of midwives employed in English health authorities and NHS trusts is given in a table, copies of which have been placed in the Library.

PFI (Loughborough)

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made towards the completion of the private finance initiative project to replace Loughborough's general hospital. [43185]

Mr. Milburn: The National Health Service Executive is expecting to receive a revised full business case (FBC) from Fosse Health NHS Trust for the scheme to replace Loughborough's general hospital under the private finance initiative scheme in June 1998. The FBC will then be considered for approval.

Patients (Dietary Needs)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he will take to ensure that those patients who need assistance in feeding themselves obtain it; and if he will make a statement. [43459]

Mr. Milburn: It is the responsibility of clinical staff in hospitals to identify the needs of individual patients, including identifying people who need help with eating and drinking, for whatever reason, and the Department has issued guidance on meeting the dietary needs of people in hospital.

The Department commissioned further work by the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne to look at the whole issue of meeting the dietary needs of people in hospitals. We issued this work, "Eating Matters", in November 1997 and it was sent to all National Health Service trusts.

We are strongly committed to improving the health and social care services provided to older people. In response to the recent "Dignity on the Ward" campaign by *The Observer* my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has commissioned HAS 2000 to examine the care which acute hospitals provide for older people. HAS 2000 are expected to look at the problem nationwide, and are examining eight hospitals in greater detail. They will report directly to my right hon. Friend, who plans to publish their report. The study is being undertaken between January and June 1998.

Emergency Contraception

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of United States pilot projects allowing pharmacists to prescribe emergency contraception within protocols agreed with local doctors. [43456]

Mr. Milburn: No such assessment has yet been made. The review of prescribing, supply and administration of medicines is considering whether and in what circumstances health professionals other than doctors and dentists should be able to prescribe. We await its report later this year and will then consider our response.

Drugs Treatment

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 19 May 1998, *Official Report*, column *352*, what percentage of the total number of drug users of *(a)* cannabis, *(b)* ecstasy and *(c)* heroin he estimates are in contact with drug treatment services. [43890]

Ms Jowell: Because of the covert and illegal nature of drug taking it is impossible to measure the number of people who take drugs in the general population and therefore to estimate the percentage who attend drug treatment services.

Hospital Doctors (Working Hours)

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the average hours worked each week by hospital doctors in *(a)* the North Thames Region and *(b)* the South Thames Region in (i) the last year for which figures are available and (ii) each of the previous 10 years. [43688]

Mr. Milburn: Figures are not collected on average hours worked each week by hospital doctors. However, the New Deal on junior doctors' hours, begun in June 1991, requires each trust to monitor the hours of work of doctors in training against agreed limits over a series of target dates and to report compliance via regional task forces.

Figures for on-call posts since 1991 for the two regions in question are in the table.

	North Thames			*South Thames*		
	Total number of juniors	*Complying[1] with New Deal*	*Per cent.*	*Total number of juniors*	*Complying[1] with New Deal*	*Per cent.*
September 1991	5,101	3,086	60	3,372	2,481	74
February 1992	5,051	3,078	61	3,358	2,310	69
August 1992	5,144	3,757	73	3,562	2,638	74
March 1993	5,147	4,294	83	3,481	2,705	78
September 93	5,321	4,667	88	3,606	3,037	84
March 1994	5,482	4,115	75	3,639	2,324	64
September 1994	5,388	4,132	77	3,821	3,135	82
December 1994	5,478	4,760	87	3,652	3,114	85
September 1995	5,587	3,813	68	3,858	2,699	70
March 1996	5,558	4,091	74	4,039	3,124	77
September 1996	5,648	4,378	78	3,976	3,188	80
March 1997	5,734	4,816	84	4,280	3,567	83
September 1997	5,754	4,906	86	4,190	3,606	86
March 1998	5,756	4,856	86	4,360	3,936	90

[1] These figures represent hours' targets prevailing during the period; after December 1994 returns were altered to emphasise compliance with actual hours of work rather than contracted hours of duty

1991–1994 (non-compliance with contracted duty hours on-call greater than 72)

1995–98 (non-compliance with actual hours of work on-call greater than 56).

Secure Beds (London)

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many local government secure beds are available in London for females under 18 years of age. [43641]

Mr. Boateng: All secure units are approved to accommodate boys and girls. There are currently 40 approved places within London with an additional 10 places coming on stream at Stamford House later this summer.

NHS Staff (Assaults)

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many assaults on staff in NHS *(a)* London and *(b)* South East hospitals have resulted in serious injury or death of members of staff in the last 10 years. [43449]

Mr. Milburn: There is currently no central collection or collation of data on violence in the National Health Service. There is a requirement for statutory reporting to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1985. This requirement relates to serious injury cases arising from activities on hospital premises, for example: deaths, specified fractures (for example skull or leg), loss of sight, injury requiring hospital in-patient treatment for more than 24 hours, or injury leading to absence from work for more than three days. In addition to this NHS trusts and health authorities collect information locally.

GPs (Terms of Service)

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the duty presently imposed on general practitioners by Paragraph 43 of the NHS Terms of Service will also be imposed on general practitioners who are part of a primary care group; if he will ensure that general practitioners in a primary care group are protected from litigation by patients for refusal to supply a drug solely on the grounds of cost; and if he will make a statement. [43365]

Mr. Milburn: General practitioners will continue to be expected to prescribe medicines to meet the clinical needs of their patients. Patients will continue to be guaranteed the medicines they need.

Chlamydia

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to introduce a screening programme for chlamydia infection. [42199]

Ms Jowell: In line with expert advice we have received we have decided to set up pilot studies to evaluate the use of opportunistic screening for chlamydial infection. Portsmouth and Wirral have been identified as possible pilot sites and work is in hand to establish the detailed arrangements. These will start later this year and this experience will be evaluated to shape the course of future action.

DEFENCE

Sierra Leone

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what tactical and operational advice was given by Sandline officers from HMS Cornwall to Sandline staff. [42141]

Mr. George Robertson: There were no Sandline officers based on HMS Cornwall, and no tactical or operational advice was given by HMS Cornwall to Sandline personnel.

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish all dispatches from HMS Cornwall while on station off West Africa in the last year. [42408]

Mr. George Robertson: A large number of communications were sent from HMS Cornwall covering a very wide range of subjects including operational, administrative and personnel matters. I am not, therefore, prepared to release this material and am withholding it under exemptions 1, 2 and 12 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. Any relevant material will, of course, however, be made available to the independent investigation by Sir Thomas Legg KCB QC.

Depleted Uranium

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated regarding the use and threat of depleted uranium. [43054]

Mr. Spellar: A detailed review of the environmental impact of depleted uranium on the Kirkcudbright and Eskmeals ranges was undertaken by an independent environmental consultant (W. S. Atkins) in 1995. This review concluded that the radiation doses and associated risks from exposure to both the public and the environment were extremely low.

Additionally, a review being conducted within MOD of current developments and trends in munitions may have future clinical implications for the treatment of injured servicemen or women. The medical issues arising from the use of depleted uranium based ammunition against our own forces form part of the review. MOD is not conducting any experimental work on the short or long term effects of depleted uranium on humans, animals or the environment.

Studies are also being carried out by the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency to establish the rate of corrosion of depleted uranium in the marine environment.

Research and development work has been carried out on two tank munitions programmes which use depleted uranium, CHARM 1 and CHARM 3. These anti-tank rounds were developed under commercial contracts at the following locations: Royal Ordance facilities at Birtley and Featherstone, AWE Aldermaston; the former AWE Cardiff, and MOD ranges at Eskmeals and Kirkcudbright.

I am withholding information on any other MOD research programmes involving depleted uranium under exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Helicopter Accident, Mull of Kintyre

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the new evidence he received on 19 May about the crash of Chinook helicopter ZD576 on the Mull of Kintyre; and if he will make a statement. [43177]

Dr. Reid: The information provided is currently being analysed and I will write to the hon. Member when the work is completed. A copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

MINISTER WITHOUT PORTFOLIO

Millennium Dome

Mr. Brady: To ask the Minister without Portfolio when he expects to announce the cost of admission to the Millennium Dome. [43592]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 1 June 1998]:* The New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) will announce the cost of admission to the Dome in due course, taking into account the needs of the travel trade and the Company's aim to put tickets on sale to the public in the summer of 1999.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Consultants

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is her estimate of the expenditure of her *(a)* Department, *(b)* agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies on external consultants in (i) 1995–96, (ii) 1996–97, (iii) 1997–98 to date and (iv) 1997–98 full year; and if she will also estimate the cost savings resulting from the employment of such consultants for each of the above years. [26605]

Mr. Paul Murphy *[holding answer 5 February 1998]:* The information for the Northern Ireland Office and the Northern Ireland Departments is as follows:

£000

	Expenditure		
Year	*(a)*	*(b)*	*(c)*[1]
1995–96	10,284	3,202	1,221
1996–97	7,355	3,291	1,228
1997–98	5,979	4,353	1,235

[1] Information on NDPBs from the Department of Education is not readily available and could be provided only at a disproportionate cost.

As consultants are, in many instances, engaged to contribute particular skills to an element of a much larger process, or where the necessary expertise is not available in-house, it is not possible to quantify savings resulting from the employment of such consultants, but in each instance consultants were engaged on the basis of best value for money.

Public Bodies

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will publish *(a)* the number of places on each of her Department's non-departmental public bodies, *(b)* the number of places that are currently unfilled on each non-departmental public body, *(c)* the total number of members that have resigned since 1 May 1997, *(d)* the total number that have retired since 1 May 1997, *(e)* the total number that have not had their contracts renewed since 1 May 1997, *(f)* the total number that have remained in place since 1 May 1997 and *(g)* the total number that have been appointed since 1 May 1997. [35282]

Mr. Paul Murphy *[holding answer 19 March 1998]:* The information requested has been placed in the Library of the House.

Jackie Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what is the average salary of *(a)* male and *(b)* female members of boards of non-departmental public bodies responsible to her Department; [42808]

(2) what is the average attendance fee of *(a)* male and *(b)* female members of boards of non-departmental public bodies responsible to her Department. [42809]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The majority of board members of non-departmental public bodies give their time and services voluntarily and receive no payment other than normal travel and subsistence expenses. Where members do receive remuneration, this can vary between an annual salary, an honorarium or an attendance fee (which itself can be a daily rate or a half-daily rate, or calculated on a per meeting or per case basis). Individuals' remuneration therefore is not directly comparable. Full details of all payments to board members of non-departmental bodies, by gender, are given in the Cabinet Office publication "Public Bodies". Copies of "Public Bodies 1997" are available in the Libraries of the House.

Public Appointments

Jackie Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when her Department's action plan for increasing the number of women holding public appointments will be published; and if she will place a copy in the Library. [42810]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Northern Ireland's action plan will be published shortly. Copies will be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many sites of special scientific interest there were in Northern Ireland on 1 March; and what was their total area in hectares. [42440]

Mr. Paul Murphy: In Northern Ireland, these sites are known as areas of special scientific interest. On 1 March 1998, there were 139 of them, covering 79,529 hectares.

Ethnic Communities

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps she will take to ensure that the proposed new Equality Commission, addresses the concerns of the *(a)* South Asian and *(b)* Chinese communities in Northern Ireland. [42350]

Mr. Worthington: The White Paper 'Partnership for Equality' invited comments by 12 June on a proposal for the establishment of a new Equality Commission to

take over the functions now exercised by the Fair Employment Commission for Northern Ireland, the Equal Opportunities Commission for Northern Ireland, the Commission for Racial Equality for Northern Ireland and the Disability Council for Northern Ireland. The existing obligations of the Commission for Racial Equality for Northern Ireland and the other equality bodies to combat discrimination and promote equality of opportunity within their respective fields would be fully maintained in the new Commission. Furthermore, the White Paper has proposed that an Equality Commission would have a significant new role in assisting the public sector to fulfil a statutory obligation to provide equality of opportunity and good relations between people of different racial groups.

Agriculture

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the cost to her Department of administering grants to agriculture in the last year; and how many *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time staff were involved. [42436]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The information could be provided in the form requested only at disproportionate cost. However, information about the Department's activities, including details of the running costs associated with each of its principal spending programmes for the year ending March 1998, is contained within the 1998 Northern Ireland Expenditure Plans and Priorities (Cm 3916), copies of which have been placed in the Library of the House.

Voluntary Sports Clubs

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the cost in 1997–98 of mandatory rate relief for voluntary sports clubs in Northern Ireland. [42910]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The amount of the rate relief granted in 1997–98 in respect of premises occupied by clubs, societies or other organisation engaged in certain specified recreations is estimated to have been a little over £1.3 million.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Child Support Agency

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many full-time equivalent vacancies the Child Support Agency had on 14 May; [42766]

(2) how many staff are currently employed on casual contracts by the Child Support Agency; [42767]

(3) how many employees resigned from working for the Child Support Agency in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1996, *(c)* 1995 and *(d)* 1994; and how many employees were appointed by the Child Support Agency in each of those years. [42765]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mrs. Faith Boardman. She will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Mrs. Faith Boardman to Dr. Brian Iddon, dated 1 June 1998:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Questions to the Secretary of State for Social Security about staffing in the Child Support Agency.

I cannot provide precisely the information that you have requested, but have provided as much as possible from the most recent information available.

The number of whole time equivalent vacancies that the Agency had at 1 April 1998 (the difference between staff in post and planned staff numbers) was 183.

At the end of April 1998, the Child Support Agency employed 320 staff on casual appointments.

Information on resignations and appointments are shown in the attached table.

I hope this is helpful.

Child Support Agency—number of employees resigning and the number of new appointments

Year	*Resignations*[1]	*Appointments*[1]
1994–95	606	not available
1995–96	449	not available
1996–97	500	1,557
1997–98	764	1,427

[1] Figures show available information for permanent and fixed term staff

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many absent parents have child support maintenance arrears, excluding Category A interim maintenance assessments of *(a)* £1 to £999, *(b)* £1,000 to £1,999, *(c)* £2,000 to £2,999, *(d)* £3,000 to £3,999, *(e)* £4,000 to £4,999, *(f)* £5,000 to £5,999, *(g)* £6,000 to £6,999, *(h)* £7,000 to £7,999, *(i)* £8,000 to £8,999, *(j)* £9,000 to £9,999, *(k)* £10,000 to £10,999, *(l)* £11,000 to £11,999, *(m)* £12,000 to £12,999, *(n)* £13,000 to £13,999, *(o)* £14,000 to £14,999, *(p)* £15,000 to £15,999, *(q)* £16,000 to £16,999, *(r)* £17,000 to £17,999, *(s)* £18,000 to £18,999, *(t)* £19,000 to £19,999 and *(u)* £20,000 or more; and what is the total amount of arrears outstanding. [43577]

Mr. Keith Bradley: All children are entitled to the financial and emotional support of both their parents wherever they live. It is not right that so many non-resident parents should seek to avoid paying the maintenance which their children are due. An extra £15 million is being invested in the Child Support Agency this year and next, specifically aimed at increasing the amounts of maintenance which are paid.

The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mrs. Faith Boardman. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Faith Boardman to Mr. Steve Webb, dated 1 June 1998:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about child support maintenance arrears.

The numbers of child support maintenance accounts with arrears in the band-widths you have requested are shown in the attached table.

The total amount of child support maintenance outstanding including regular maintenance and arrears but excluding Category A interim maintenance assessment arrears at 20 May 1998 was £726,407,399 relating to a total of 301,507 cases.

Over the last year the Agency has moved away from imposing punitive Category A interim maintenance assessments and has concentrated on completing full maintenance assessments. This has led to an increase in the total full maintenance assessment debt,

but this puts the Agency in a better, more realistic position to increase the flow of maintenance to parents with care. This is demonstrated by the increase in the amount of maintenance collected and arranged during 1997–98 to approximately £547 million compared with approximately £400 million during 1996–97.

To further increase the flow of maintenance and to help non-resident parents pay the arrears that they owe, wherever possible the Agency makes every effort to re-schedule debts; re-scheduled debts are those where the Agency has negotiated a closely monitored agreement with the non-resident parent to pay arrears by instalments. The amount of debt re-scheduled (included in the above) at 20 May 1998 was £340,207,244. This amount related to 204,098 cases and equates to 47% of the debt and 68% of the cases.

I hope this is helpful.

Child Support Agency full maintenance debt—£1 or greater at 20 May 1998

Bands (£)	*Number of cases*
1 to 999	155,790
1,000 to 1,999	42,814
2,000 to 2,999	23,592
3,000 to 3,999	15,245
4,000 to 4,999	10,461
5,000 to 5,999	7,432
6,000 to 6,999	5,673
7,000 to 7,999	4,252
8,000 to 8,999	3,341
9,000 to 9,999	2,521
10,000 to 10,999	1,912
11,000 to 11,999	1,639
12,000 to 12,999	1,205
13,000 to 13,999	888
14,000 to 14,999	724
15,000 to 15,999	531
16,000 to 16,999	403
17,000 to 17,999	305
18,000 to 18,999	206
19,000 to 19,999	158
20,000 or more	781

Flood Victims (Northampton)

Ms Keeble: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what grants or loans are available to pensioners in Northampton who were victims of the recent floods; [42385]

(2) what is the (i) average and (ii) range of time it has taken to process *(a)* community care grants, *(b)* budgeting loans and *(c)* crisis loans from date of receipt of application by the Benefits Agency to receipt of funds by the applicant; [42383]

(3) how many flood victims in Northampton have received *(a)* community care grants, *(b)* budgeting loans and *(c)* crisis loans; and what is the average value of each category of grant or loan. [42382]

Mr. Denham: The administration of the Social Fund is a matter for Peter Mathison, Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Ms Sally Keeble, dated 1 June 1998:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent parliamentary questions about the Social Fund (SF) loans and grants available to the victims of the recent floods in Northampton.

Over the Easter weekend, the Benefits Agency (BA)'s Northampton office was open to personal callers and for telephone enquiries. The Business Manager appeared on BBC Radio Northampton to publicise the additional opening hours and to give advice to the public. Social Services and the Police were also advised of the additional opening. All applications for immediate help on Sunday 12 and Monday 13 April were awarded. On Tuesday 14 April a flood helpline was made available to the public, giving them direct access to staff able to answer their enquiries. This telephone number was advertised in the local press and on local radio. District staff also attended public meetings, held on 14, 15 and 16 April, to offer advice and assistance.

In common with all client groups, pensioners who were affected by the floods in Northampton were eligible to apply to the SF for Community Care Grants (CCGs) if they were receiving Income Support (IS) or income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA(IB)), Budgeting Loans (BLs) if they have been in receipt of IS or JSA (IB) for 26 weeks or more and Crisis Loans (CLs) which might be payable irrespective of whether the applicant was in receipt of benefit.

The BA measures the time taken to process applications to the SF by a series of targets which monitor the time from the date of receipt of the application to the date of the decision, not the date the applicant receives the funds. Information on the time taken to process CCGs, BLs and CLs is contained in the enclosed Table 1.

Information relating to the range of time taken to process CCGs, BLs and CLs is not available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost. Information relating to the number and average value of grants and loans received by flood victims in Northampton is not available in the format requested. The BA collates statistics by BA Districts. These Districts do not correspond to constituency boundaries or specific geographical areas.

The BA does not routinely collate the reasons for SF applications. However, because of the nature of this emergency, the Northamptonshire District has maintained certain details of applications received from flood victims. Such information as is available is contained in Table 2 attached.

I hope that this is helpful.

National Social Fund (SF) clearance targets 1997/98 and Benefits Agency's (BA's) achievement
Table 1

	Clearance targets	*BA achievements in relation to the targets*	*BA's average clearance time*
Community Care Grants (CCGs)	65% cleared in 7 days 95% cleared in 20 days	86% cleared in 7 days 99% cleared in 20 days	5 working days
Budgeting Loans (BLs)	65% cleared in 6 days 95% cleared in 20 days	82% cleared in 6 days 99% cleared in 20 days	5 working days
Crisis Loans (CLs)	On the day the need arises[1]	98%	1 working day

[1] We aim to clear applications that are specifically for CLs on the day the application is received. All applications to the SF are considered for CCGs and BLs initially. At the point when the SF Officer knows that such an award is inappropriate a CL is considered. Whilst the majority of CL applications are made in person, a proportion of postal applications are received. Therefore, for the purpose of measuring performance, the target is considered to have been met if 95% of CL applications are considered on the day on which they were received

Note:

The information has been provided by the BA's Benefit Support SF Accounting Team, is provisional and maybe subject to change

Social Fund applications from victims of the floods during April 1998 administered by the Benefits Agency's (BA's) Northamptonshire District[1]
Table 2

	Total number of applications	*Number of successful applications*	*Average value of award (£)*
Community Care Grants	8	4	573.50
Budgeting Loans	41	36	567.37
Crisis Loans	25	25	46.39

[1] BA's Northamptonshire District includes Corby, Daventry and Kettering Caller Offices, Northampton and Wellingborough. The information is provisional and may be subject to change

Benefits Advisers

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many Benefits Agency offices or their equivalent had one or more benefits advisers on the premises *(a)* in 1979 and *(b)* currently. [43388]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Although the Benefits Agency does not formally employ "benefits advisers", I can confirm that staff in every office of the Agency are able to provide advice about benefit entitlements and related matters, or to obtain such advice. Similarly, in 1979, every local benefits office in the Department of Health and Social Security employed staff who were able to provide or obtain such advice.

Benefit Recipients

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people of working age without disabilities received benefit payments and at what total cost in (i) 1980, (ii) 1990 and (iii) the latest date for which figures are available. [43949]

Mr. Denham: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the table.

Numbers of benefit recipients

000

Benefit	*1980*[1]	*1990*[2]	*For date see note*[3]
Maternity Allowance[4]	119	13	12
Widow's Benefit	452	312	248
Family Credit	n/a	324	766
Housing Benefit[5,6,7]	n/a	1,585	2,201
Council Tax Benefit/Community charge benefit[5,6,7]	n/a	[8]2,360	[9]2,169
Supplementary Benefit or Income Support[5]	1,212	2,347	1,605
Jobseeker's Allowance Income-based[5]	n/a	n/a	1,173
Jobseeker's Allowance Contribution-based only[5]	n/a	n/a	176

[1] Maternity Allowance and Income Support are at May. Widow's Benefit is at November 1979.
[2] Maternity Allowance as at March, Widow's Benefit as at September, Family Credit, Income Support, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit as at May.
[3] Maternity Allowance as at May 1997, Widow's Benefit as at September 1997, Family Credit as at November 1997, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit as at May 1996, Income Support and Jobseeker's Allowance figures are at August 1997.
[4] Maternity Allowance was abolished from April 1987. Statutory Maternity Pay was introduced from 6 April 1987.
[5] Information refers to benefit units or claimants where there is no disability premium in payment.
[6] Information does not include second adult rebate cases.
[7] Community Charge Benefit at May 1990.
[8] Council Tax Benefit at May 1996.
[9] These figures do not take into account benefit overlap.
[10] A detailed breakdown of each benefit by working age could be provided for some benefits and years but this would be at a disproportionate cost.
[11] Figures rounded to the nearest thousand.

Source:
1. Maternity Allowance figures for 1980 and 1990 are from a 1 per cent. sample of claimants and for May 1997 from a 5 per cent. sample.
2. Widow's Benefit is from a 10 per cent. sample in 1980, 1990 and a 5 per cent. sample in September 1997.
3. Family Credit for 1990 is a 1 per cent. sample and for 1997 a 5 per cent. sample.
4. Income Support Statistics Quarterly Inquiry, August 1997.
5. Jobseeker's Allowance Statistics Quarterly Inquiry, August 1997.
6. Annual Statistical Inquiry, 1980 and 1990.
7. Housing Benefit Management Information System, annual 1 per cent. sample inquiry with and without Income Support.

Information on costs

£ million

	Benefit expenditure
1980–81[1]	3,944
1990–91[1]	12,710
1996–97[2]	21,677

[1] Excludes expenditure on Sickness Benefit, Invalidity Benefit, Non-contributory Invalidity Pension (in 1980–81), Severe Disablement Benefit (in 1990–91), Industrial Disablement Benefit and Housing Benefit and Income Support where a Disability Premium is paid.
[2] Excludes expenditure on Incapacity Benefit, Severe Disablement Benefit, Industrial Disablement Benefit, Disability Living Allowance and Housing Benefit and Income Support where a Disability Premium is paid.

Notes:
1. The figures do not include all expenditure to people of working age and also includes some expenditure for people not of working age.
2. The figures in the table are consistent with Table 4 of the Departmental Report 1998 (Cm 3913) which provides a general guide to benefit expenditure of people of working age, people over working age and people under working age.

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people of working age received disability benefit payments and at what cost in *(a)* 1980, *(b)* 1990 and *(c)* the latest date for which figures are available. [43950]

Mr. Denham: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the tables.

Numbers of benefit recipients[1]

000

Benefit	*1980*[2]	*1990*[3]	*1997–98*[4]
Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit	127	116	171
Attendance Allowance	82	192	n/a
Mobility Allowance	144	388	n/a
Disability Living Allowance	n/a	n/a	1,163
Disability Working Allowance	n/a	n/a	14
Sickness Benefit/Invalidity Benefit or Incapacity Benefit	945	1,106	1,560

Numbers of benefit recipients[1]

000

Benefit	*1980*[2]	*1990*[3]	*1997–98*[4]
Non-Contributory Invalidity Pension (NCIP) and Housewives' NCIP or Severe Disablement Allowance	158	247	329
War Disablement Pension	163	56	71
Supplementary Benefit or Income Support with Disability Premiums[5]	[5]199	[5]330	841
Income-Based Jobseeker's Allowance with Disability Premiums[5]	n/a	n/a	17
Housing Benefit with Disability Premiums[5, 6]	n/a	289	665
Council Tax Benefit with Disability Premiums[5, 6]	n/a	440	727

Notes:

[1] These figures do not take into account any benefit overlap

[2] Attendance Allowance as at March, Sickness Benefit, Invalidity Benefit, Incapacity Benefit, NCIP, Housewives' NCIP and Severe Disablement Allowance as at May, Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit as at September, and Mobility Allowance and War Disablement Pension as at December. Supplementary Benefit figures are from the Annual Statistical Inquiry 1980

[3] Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit, Attendance Allowance, Sickness Benefit, Invalidity Benefit, Incapacity Benefit, NCIP, Housewives' NCIP and Severe Disablement Allowance as at March, and Mobility Allowance and War Disablement Pension as at December. Income Support figures are from the Annual Statistical Inquiry 1990, and Housing Benefit figures as at May 1990

[4] Disability Living Allowance as at February 1997, Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit as at April 1997, Sickness Benefit, Invalidity Benefit, NCIP, Housewives' NCIP and Severe Disablement Allowance as at May 1997, War Disablement Pension as at February 1998, Income Support and Jobseeker's Allowance figures as at August 1997 and Disability Working Allowance figure as at October 1997, Housing Benefit and Council Tax figures as at May 1996

[5] The 1980 figures show number of claimants receiving Supplementary Benefit on grounds of incapacity. The 1990 figures show number of claimants receiving Income Support (i) who also receive NI sickness, injury, disablement or widows industrial injury benefit or invalidity pension or allowance and (ii) who are sick or disabled, under pension age and incapable of work, and not in receipt of NI benefit

[6] Claims for Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit, Income Support and Jobseeker's Allowance may be in respect of a single person or a couple.

[7] There is an overlap between Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit as a high percentage of claimants receive both Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit. Figures do not include second adult rebate cases

[8] Figures rounded to the nearest thousand.

Sources:

1. Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit is based on a 10 per cent. sample. Attendance Allowance, Mobility Allowance, and War Disablement Pension on a 100 per cent. count. Sickness Benefit/Invalidity Benefit and Severe Disablement Allowance for 1980 and 1990 are taken from a 1 per cent. sample. The Incapacity Benefit and Severe Disablement Allowance figures for 1997, the War Disablement Pension figures for 1998 and the Disability Living Allowance figure are based on a 5 per cent. sample

2. Income Support Statistics Quarterly Inquiry, August 1997 (5 per cent. sample)

3. Jobseeker's Allowance Statistics Quarterly Inquiry, August 1997 (5 per cent. sample)

4. Disability Working Allowance Statistics Quarterly Inquiry, October 1997 (100 per cent. count of claims)

5. Income Support Annual Statistical Inquiry, 1980 and 1990 (1 per cent. sample)

6. Housing Benefit Management Information System, annual 1 per cent. sample) inquiry with and without Income Support, taken at the end of May 1990 and May 1996.

Expenditure on disability benefits

Year	*£ million*
1980–1981	2,740
1990–1991	7,388
1996–1997	18,906

Notes:

1. Total of expenditure on Sickness Benefit, Invalidity Benefit, Non-Contributory Invalidity Pension, Industrial Disablement Benefit and Housing Benefit and Income Support where a Disability Premium is paid. Severe Disablement Benefit replaced Non-Contributory Invalidity Pension in 1984

2. Sickness Benefit and Invalidity Benefit were replaced by a single Incapacity Benefit in April 1995. Disability Living Allowance and Disability Working Allowance introduced in 1992

3. The figures do not include all expenditure to people of working age—for example, War Pensions paid to disabled people. Table 4 of the Departmental Report attributes expenditure for a particular benefit to the group where the majority of expenditure arises—in the case of War Pensions this applies to people over working age. The figures also include some expenditure for people not of working age. The figures for Disability Living Allowance include payments made in respect of children under age 16 and to people over age 60

4. The figures in this table are consistent with Table 4 of the Departmental Report 1998 (Cm 3913) which provides a general guide to benefit expenditure of people of working age, people over working age and people under working age

5. A detailed breakdown of each benefit by working age could be provided for some benefits and years but this would be at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Reviews

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many reviews have been initiated by his Department since 1 May 1997; how many of these have reported; and what the cost of these reviews has been to date. [44002]

Mr. Denham: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) on 12 May 1998, *Official Report*, columns *101–02*.

TREASURY

Environmental Appraisals

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many environmental appraisals were produced by the European Commission to accompany proposals presented to ECOFIN at its meeting on 16 February. [42664]

Dawn Primarolo: No formal Commission proposals were put to ECOFIN on 16 February.

European Structural Funds

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the scope and nature of his responsibilities in relation to the review of European structural funds in respect of Wales, indicating the timetable for action by his Department. [42469]

Mrs. Liddell: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to him on 21 May 1998, *Official Report*, columns *543–44*, by my hon. Friend the Minister for Small Firms, Trade and Industry. The Treasury has an interest in the proposals for reform of the Structural and Cohesion Funds in view of the implications for the EC Budget and the UK contribution to it.

Economic and Monetary Union

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assistance the Government are offering to the financial services sector in respect of software problems originating from the formation of EMU. [43140]

Mrs. Liddell: This is primarily a matter for the industry. However, the Euro Preparations Unit in HM Treasury provides general information and advice on business preparations for the introduction of the euro on 1 January 1999 and will shortly be publishing a factsheet on the IT aspects of this.

Investment Ombudsman

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received on the appointment of an Investment Ombudsman to consider complaints relating to the handling of investments by banks and other financial institutions. [43311]

Mrs. Liddell: Complaints relating to banks and other financial institutions authorised to do investment business under the Financial Services Act 1986 are currently dealt with by the PIA Ombudsman Bureau, the SFA Complaints Bureau and Arbitration Service, the Investment Ombudsman (for firms supervised by IMRO) and the FSA Direct Regulation Unit and Independent Investigator. The Government have announced plans to introduce a single Financial Services Ombudsman scheme as part of the planned legislation to reform the financial services regulatory structure. A number of representations have been received on these proposals, including in response to the Financial Services Authority's consultation on this issue.

Motorists (Petrol)

Ms Rosie Winterton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the average annual excise duty paid by a motorist using *(a)* leaded and *(b)* unleaded petrol in (i) 1997–98 and (ii) 1998–99. [43189]

Dawn Primarolo: The average annual excise duty paid by a motorist is estimated to be:

£

	1997–98	*1998–99*
(a) Leaded petrol	715	805
(b) Unleaded petrol	635	720

These figures do not include vehicle excise duty which is currently £150 per car. The estimate is based on Department of Transport data for total car mileage, number of cars and fuel consumption. It also assumes that there will be no further rise in road fuel excise duty before the end of the financial year.

Duty Free

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his policy towards recent actions by the Government of the Republic of Ireland in respect of the abolition of duty free sales. [43163]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 1 June 1998]:* The Government have always said they would not oppose a Commission study into the impact of the abolition of intra-EU duty free sales should there be a consensus amongst member states in favour of such a study. This matter was discussed at the ECOFIN Council meeting on 19 May 1998 but there was no consensus in favour of such a study.

Income Tax

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will estimate the total number of individuals paying any part of their income tax at the lower rate of income tax in *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98 and *(c)* 1998–99; [43985]

(2) if he will estimate the total number of individuals paying any part of their income tax at the higher rate of income tax in *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98 and *(c)* 1998–99; [43983]

(3) if he will estimate the total number of income tax payers in *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98 and *(c)* 1998–99; [43981]

(4) if he will estimate the total number of individuals paying any part of their income tax at the basic rate of income tax in *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98 and *(c)* 1998–99. [43982]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 1 June 1998]:* The latest estimates are given in the table. They are based on the 1995–96 Survey of Personal Incomes and are provisional.

Number of taxpayers (thousands) paying some income tax at:

	Lower rate	*Basic rate*	*Higher rate*
1996–97	25,900	18,600	2,100
1997–98	26,100	18,700	2,300
1998–99	26,200	18,700	2,300

All taxpayers pay at least some of their income tax at the lower rate of tax.

Capital Gains Tax

Mr. Loughton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the number of individuals affected by the proposed abolition of retirement relief. [43618]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 1 June 1998]:* It is estimated that there are about 10,000 people with CGT retirement relief each year.

Mr. Loughton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place in the Library the results of the consultation exercise on changes to capital gains tax before consideration of the relevant clauses in the committee stage of the Finance (No.2) Bill. [43295]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 1 June 1998]:* The results of the consultation exercise on capital gains tax were set out as an Annexe to the Budget day Press Release on capital gains tax reform (press release Inland Revenue 16). This press release is available in the House of Commons Library.

Mr. Loughton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the estimated saving to the Treasury from the proposed abolition of bed and breakfasting in respect of Capital Gains Tax; and how many savers he estimates currently take advantage of this facility. [43613]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 1 June 1998]:* The Capital Gains Tax yield from the provisions to counter bed and breakfasting of shares may be of the order of £50 million in the long term, but the short term yield is likely to be low and to grow slowly. The number of people undertaking such transactions is highly uncertain but could be of the order of 100,000.

Small Businesses

Mr. Page: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the regulations that have been removed or amended to help small businesses since 1 May 1997. [42787]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 1 June 1998]:* The Government have concentrated on a number of measures to help small businesses although no specific regulations have been removed or amended, a number of measures such as cuts in the small companies' rate of corporation tax and enhanced first year capital allowances. Future changes, such as the transfer of the Contributions Agency to the Inland Revenue from April next year, will also help to ease the burden on smaller businesses. No specific regulations have been removed or amended.

Inflation

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures he will take to ensure that the delivery of the Government's inflation target is subject to the Government's objectives for employment and growth. [43970]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 1 June 1998]:* The Government have put in place monetary and fiscal frameworks designed to achieve economic stability. The Government set, and take responsibility for, the objectives of monetary policy through the inflation target. It is the job of the Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee to set interest rates to achieve the Government's inflation target.

SCOTLAND

Prisoners (Television)

Mr. Roy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he proposes to allow prisoners to have televisions in their cells; and if he will make a statement. [44219]

Mr. McLeish: Except in a very limited number of cases for educational purposes, prisoners in Scotland have not been allowed to have televisions in their cells.

However, having taken into account the support for wider availability of in-cell television evinced by a number of studies—and most recently by the review by the Social Work Services and Prisons Inspectorates of community disposals and the use of custody for women offenders in Scotland—I have decided that in-cell television should be made available on a limited pilot basis as a suicide prevention measure at Cornton Vale women's prison.

The first sets will become available this Autumn. Eligible prisoners will pay a charge of around £1.00 per week to cover the cost of the sets, out of a weekly wage of around £6.00 per week, from which prisoners have to buy all of the items they are allowed but which are not provided by the prison authorities, including 'phone cards, additional toiletries, tobacco and sweets. They will have access to terrestrial channels only, during "lock-up" hours.

Our expectation is that in-cell television will assist greatly in the normalisation of the prison environment at Cornton Vale, and reduce instances of self-harm among the more damaged members of its population. We shall monitor its use in the pilot study to ensure that it has no detrimental effect on prisoners' participation in the regime of the establishment.

Consideration is also being given as to when this provision might be extended as an opportunity for a relatively small number of more responsible prisoners at the top end of the prison regime in Scotland, who would earn the privilege of access to in-cell TV through responsible behaviour. Out of a prison population of more than 6,000, such an extension would result in some 500 prisoners qualifying over time.

Road Traffic Convictions

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many convictions there have been

under section 1 of the Road Traffic Act 1988 for each year of its operation; if he will list the sentence imposed in each case; and if he will indicate those offences which relate to incidents involving fatalities. [43605]

Mr. McLeish: The available information is set out in the table. Section 1 of the Road Traffic Act 1988 refers to the offence of causing death by dangerous or reckless driving. Therefore a fatality was involved in each of the cases in the table.

Persons with a charge proved where the main offence is an offence under section 1 of the Road Traffic Act 1988, Scotland 1988–96

Year of disposal	*Number of persons given a custodial sentence*	*Number of persons given a community service order*	*Number of persons fined*	*Number of persons given probation*	*Number of persons admonished*	*Total*
1988[1]	11	3	8	—	—	22
1989[1]	14	5	4	—	—	23
1990[2]	14	8	1	—	—	23
1991	11	9	8	—	—	28
1992	14	2	4	—	—	20
1993	17	3	4	—	1	25
1994	8	4	3	1	—	16
1995	12	4	2	2	—	20
1996	13	4	1	1	—	19

[1] Persons with a charge proved under section 1(1) of the Road Traffic Act 1972. Section 1(1) of the Road Traffic Act 1972 was replaced by section 1 of the Road Traffic Act 1988 (as later amended by the Road Traffic Act 1991)
[2] Includes one person with a charge proved in 1990 who was proceeded against under section 1(1) of the Road Traffic Act 1972

NHS Budget

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was his Department's budget for the NHS (i) in cash terms, (ii) in real terms in 1998–99 prices and (iii) as a percentage of Scottish gross domestic product in each year since 1978–79; and how much was spent per head of population on the NHS in Scotland in *(a)* cash terms and *(b)* real terms, in 1998–99 prices in each of these years. [43390]

Mr. Galbraith: The information requested is set out in the table.

Year	*Cash expenditure*[1] *£ million*	*Expenditure at 1998–99 prices*[1] *£ million*	*Percentage of Scottish GDP*[2]	*Per capita expenditure (cash)*[2] *£*	*Per capita expenditure (real)*[2] *£*
1978–79 outturn	870	2,833	6.8	167	543
1979–80 outturn	1,036	2,890	7.1	199	555
1980–81 outturn	1,307	3,082	7.8	252	593
1981–82 outturn	1,492	3,208	8.1	288	619
1982–83 outturn	1,614	3,239	8.1	312	627
1983–84 outturn	1,720	3,299	7.9	334	640
1984–85 outturn	1,845	3,370	8.1	359	655
1985–86 outturn	1,954	3,383	7.7	380	659
1986–87 outturn	2,071	3,481	7.6	404	679
1987–88 outturn	2,248	3,587	7.5	440	702
1988–89 outturn	2,501	3,741	7.6	491	734
1989–90 outturn	2,721	3,804	7.5	534	746
1990–91 outturn	2,972	3,847	7.4	582	754
1991–92 outturn	3,343	4,067	7.9	655	796
1992–93 outturn	3,668	4,284	8.2	718	838
1993–94 outturn	3,777	4,285	8.1	738	837
1994–95 outturn	3,948	4,414	7.9	769	860
1995–96 outturn	4,092	4,452	7.8	797	867
1996–97 outturn	4,240	4,480	7.8	827	874
1997–98 estimated outturn	4,394	4,521	n/a	858	883
1998–99 plans	4,626	4,626	n/a	898	898

[1] Expenditure covers the period 1 April to 31 March
[2] Gross Domestic Product for Scotland and population figures are available only for the calendar year i.e. 1 January to 31 December
[1] Provisional
n/a = not applicable

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Periodicals

Mr. Cran: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many magazine articles relating to agriculture he has written in the last four months; and if he will list them. [43001]

Dr. John Cunningham *[holding answer 21 May 1998]:* In the past four months, I have contributed by-lined articles to: the Parliamentary Review, on reform of the Common Agricultural Policy of the EU; the Parliamentary Monitor, on the Government's proposals to establish a Food Standards Agency; the Newcastle Journal, on the Informal Council of EU Agriculture Ministers held in the North East on 10–12 May 1998.

Correspondence

Mr. Cran: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many letters sent to him before 31 January from hon. Members have not been answered to date; and if he will make a statement. [43006]

Dr. John Cunningham *[holding answer 21 May 1998]:* The Department has 34 overdue letters from hon. Members, prior to 31 January, awaiting a substantive reply. These letters raise particularly complex issues requiring detailed inquiries before replying. All overdue letters are sent holding replies and interim replies where possible.

Mr. Cran: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the most common factor underlying delays in his responses to letters from hon. Members of more than four months. [43007]

Dr. John Cunningham *[holding answer 21 May 1998]:* While every effort is made to ensure that all letters are dealt with within the target set by the Department, there are occasions when replies may be delayed owing to factors not necessarily within the Department's control.

Mr. Cran: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his target period for replying to letters from hon. Members; and what is the percentage of occasions when the target is met. [43003]

Dr. John Cunningham *[holding answer 21 May 1998]:* The Department aims to reply to letters from hon. Members and Peers within 15 working days. MAFF received over 8,500 such letters in the 12 month period ending April 1998 and 70 per cent. of these received a reply within this target.

Whaling

Mr. Lock: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the outcome of the recent meeting of the International Whaling Commission; and if he will make a statement. [44283]

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will make a statement on the progress of the consultative forum on whaling in respect of making permanent the existing moratorium on commercial whaling; [43429]

(2) if he will make a statement on the Irish proposals on commercial whaling. [43430]

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the proposal of the Commissioner for Ireland to end the 12 year moratorium on commercial whaling; and what representations he has made on this subject. [43052]

Mr. Morley: The International Whaling Commission's 50th annual meeting was held in Oman from 16 to 20 May. The United Kingdom delegation was composed of officials from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, assisted by officials from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions and by representatives of environmental organisations.

At this meeting our delegation emphasised that the UK remains strongly opposed to all whaling, other than some limited subsistence whaling by indigenous people. We made it clear that we would like to see all other forms of whaling, including so-called 'scientific' whaling, brought to an end and a permanent, comprehensive international ban on whaling introduced.

It is with these objectives in mind that we are participating in consideration of ideas put forward by Ireland at the IWC's last annual meeting in Monaco last October. These ideas are intended to provide the basis for a compromise solution acceptable both to those countries opposed to, and to those countries in favour of, whaling. There was only limited further discussion of the Irish proposals in Oman. The UK delegation made it clear once again that while we were prepared to discuss these proposals, and all other possible ways of improving the conservation of whales, we continued to have serious reservations about some aspects of them, in particular those concerning coastal whaling. We and a number of other countries also stressed that further progress on them was unlikely unless the two whaling countries, Norway and Japan, indicated a readiness to end pelagic, and in particular so-called 'scientific', whaling and to accept a ban on international trade in whalemeat: this they declined to do. Nevertheless, the Irish Commissioner, who is the current chairman of the IWC, said that the proposals would remain on the table and that he would continue to try to advance them.

Throughout the meeting the UK delegation stressed our strong support for the current moratorium on commercial whaling. We opposed a request by Japan for a quota of 50 minke whales, which I am pleased to say was again defeated, and we supported resolutions criticising Norway and Japan's continued whaling activities; although these do not conflict with the letter of the IWC's rules we and many others believe that they are contrary to their spirit and undermine the credibility of the IWC and of the moratorium.

In recent years the UK has been arguing that environmental pollution and climate change may pose significant long term threats to whales and other cetaceans, and urging the IWC to devote more effort towards assessing these threats. At this meeting two significant resolutions were adopted. The first confirms that environmental issues are central to the IWC and directs the IWC's scientific committee to continue its work on the development of long term research programmes on the effects of pollution and climate change on cetaceans. The second deals with the financing of these programmes: it records an agreement in principle to find the necessary funds, drawing if need be on the IWC's financial reserves, and to consider establishing a dedicated Environment Research Fund. I very much welcome the increased emphasis that the IWC is now placing on this important area.

The UK delegation again expressed our concern about the cruelty involved in killing whales. It was agreed that a workshop comprising scientific and veterinary experts would meet next year, immediately before the next annual meeting, to consider ways of improving the humaneness of whale killing methods. The UK will be playing a full role in the workshop.

Small cetaceans continue to be threatened by human activities in many parts of the world. We took the lead in putting forward a resolution which drew attention to the number of beluga whales killed in subsistence hunts in

West Greenland and to doubts among scientists that the current level of exploitation may not be sustainable. The IWC Scientific Committee will be examining this issue at its meeting next year. We also drew attention to the numbers of Dall's porpoise killed in directed takes in Japan.

Other important issues were discussed at this meeting. We and a number of other delegations expressed concern at evidence presented to the IWC's Scientific Committee suggesting that illicit trade in whalemeat may be taking place, and a resolution was adopted reaffirming the need for close co-operation between the IWC and CITES on trade issues and calling on all IWC members to respect previous resolutions on illegal trade in whalemeat. There was a positive debate on whalewatching. The UK highlighted the continuing expansion of this popular tourist activity and underlined the importance of the IWC's role in preparing guidelines and overseeing development in this area. Finally, Japan's proposal to amend the IWC's rules of procedure to allow secret voting on policy issues was heavily defeated.

Overall, I believe that this was a successful meeting for the UK. We achieved the majority of our objectives: in particular the moratorium on commercial whaling has not been weakened and there was further recognition of the increasing importance to the IWC of environmental issues. I will now be working with the environmental organisations and Government departments represented on the Consultative Forum on Whaling to formulate our objectives for the IWC's next annual meeting, which will take place in Grenada in June 1999.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what quotas of minke whales were granted to Norway and Japan over the past five years. [43431]

Mr. Morley: None. Under the terms of the current International Whaling Commission moratorium, commercial catch limits have been set at zero. Norway's commercial whaling is carried out under objection to the moratorium and its quota is self-awarded. Japan issues special permits to take minke whales in both the Southern Ocean and the North Pacific as part of its scientific research programme.

Driftnets

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food for what reasons he is opposing an EU ban on driftnets. [43220]

Mr. Morley: The Government are actively seeking agreement to an EU ban on those drift nets which result in unacceptable by-catches of dolphins.

Set-aside

Mr. Lock: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the agronomic and environmental implications of set-aside under the arable area payment scheme; and if he will make a statement. [44284]

Mr. Morley: In 1995 MAFF commissioned a three year agronomic and environmental evaluation of set-aside in England from a consortium including the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology, the British Trust for Ornithology and ADAS and this has now been completed. The evaluation concluded that for most farmers the agronomic costs of set-aside are small, with if anything a yield benefit to crops following set-aside and few increases in pest, weed or disease problems.

Many farmers have observed positive environmental effects from set-aside and studies indicated that set-aside has benefited some species of farmland birds whose numbers have been in decline in recent years. Field studies showed that set-aside was an important habitat for these birds providing breeding sites and valuable food resources. The Government will consider how voluntary set-aside and the agri-environment schemes can be used to help to retain these benefits if the rate of compulsory set-aside is reduced as a result of EU Commission CAP reform proposals.

I am placing copies of the full report of the evaluation in the Library of the House.

EU Agriculture Council

Mr. Lock: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the outcome of the Agriculture Council held in Brussels on 25 and 26 May; and if he will make a statement. [44285]

Dr. John Cunningham: I chaired a meeting of the European Union Agriculture Council in Brussels on 25 and 26 May. My noble Friend Lord Donoughue, the Parliamentary Secretary responsible for the farming and food industry, represented the United Kingdom, and my noble Friend Lord Sewel, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, was also present.

The principal business of the Council was to assess progress in negotiations on the Commission's proposals for CAP reform made in the framework of Agenda 2000. Those negotiations were launched at a special meeting of the Council which I chaired on 31 March 1998, and have continued at an intensive pace at expert level since then. In the Council, EU Ministers recognised the excellent start which had been made to this work, and discussed draft conclusions which I circulated as Presidency summarising the work to date, identifying the principal issues central to the on-going negotiation, and committing the Council to continuing its intensive work on the Agenda 2000 proposals from now on.

I am pleased to say that the Council was able to give unanimous approval to those conclusions, which will now be submitted to Foreign Ministers for inclusion in the report to Heads of Government meeting in Cardiff on 15–16 June. The Agriculture Council will then continue its discussions of Agenda 2000 at its July meeting.

The Council also debated the Commission's proposal on reform of the EU olive oil regime, and noted the principal questions remaining to be resolved on that proposal. I undertook to continue work on the proposal in the hope of finding a basis of agreement at the Council in June.

The Council had a presentation from the Commission of its proposals for a decision on an EU/Canada veterinary agreement. The Council also reached agreement by qualified majority on a regulation setting out detailed

rules for genetically modified soya and maize intended for sale to the final consumer; Italy, Sweden and Denmark voted against.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Healey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when he expects to complete the review of the future role and funding of TECs; and what plans he has to publish the findings. [42673]

Dr. Howells: The review will lead to the publication of new Strategic Guidance to TECs in the Autumn. Any resulting changes to the way the Government fund and contract with TECs will also be reflected in TEC contracts for 1999–2000.

Regional Development Agencies

Mr. Healey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) from what source the development fund he plans for use by regional development agencies to analyse and tackle regional skills shortages in their area will be provided; [42674]

(2) how much he plans to allocate to the development fund for use by regional development agencies to analyse regional skills shortages and to design and implement solutions; [42675]

(3) when the development fund for use by regional development agencies to tackle skills shortages in their areas will be made available; and whether the shadow RDAs will be able to make use of it. [42676]

Dr. Howells: The Development Fund for Regional Development Agencies along with all Government funded programmes is currently being reviewed as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer said in his Budget statement of 17 March 1998, *Official Report*, columns 1097–112, that an announcement about the Review would take place in the summer. The Development Fund for RDAs will be available from 1 April 1999.

Higher Education Students

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what changes he plans in eligibility for access and hardship funds for higher education students in 1998–99; [42369]

(2) what is the planned increase in budget for access funds and hardship funds for higher education students in 1998–99. [42370]

Dr. Howells: From the beginning of the 1998–99 academic year the amount available for the higher education Access Funds will be doubled to £44 million in England and eligibility will be extended to part-time students.

In addition, a new £250 Hardship Loan will be available to students eligible for student loans who are in financial difficulties. This will cost £5 million in England and Wales in the current financial year.

Women Scientists

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what percentage of PhDs in science subjects were awarded to women in each of the last five years; [42915]

(2) what percentage of *(a)* MScs and *(b)* BScs were awarded to women in each of the last five years. [42916]

Dr. Howells: The information covering the five years up to 1996–97, the latest year for which it is available, is given in the table:

Science[1] degrees awarded in UK higher education institutions 1992–93 to 1996–97[2] by level of degree: percentage awarded to women

Level	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*
Doctorate	26	27	28	31	31
Masters	30	31	32	34	35
First Degree	34	35	38	39	41

[1] Science subjects are: Medicine and Dentistry, Subjects Allied to Medicine, Biological Sciences, Veterinary Science, Agriculture and Related Subjects, Physical Sciences, Mathematical Sciences, Computer Science, Engineering and Technology, Architecture, Building and Planning. Combined degrees are not included

[2] Because of a change in data collection arrangements in 1994–95, the figures before and from that date may not be directly comparable

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many women currently hold professorships in the sciences. [42917]

Dr. Howells: In the 1995–96 academic year, the latest year for which figures are available, there were 280 professors in science subjects who were female, in higher education establishments in the UK. This figure covers those employed within the Professor grade in institutions. There may be others who carry the title of Professor but are employed in other grade structures and so are not included in this figure.

Tuition Fees

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment who is liable to pay the tuition fees if the relationship between the student and parent breaks down during the education tenure. [43035]

Dr. Howells: On admission to a higher education institution, a student is personally liable for the fees charged and liability will continue irrespective of the student's personal circumstances. Where the student holds a mandatory award from an LEA and is eligible for assistance with fees because he or she is from a lower-income family, the LEA will assess and make a contribution from public funds. We have asked higher education institutions to be sensitive in collecting the private contribution in the early months of the degree course having regard to individual circumstances as necessary.

Education Development Plans

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what guidelines his Department has issued to local education authorities on the content of education development plans. [43036]

Mr. Byers: On 18 February the Department for Education and Employment issued for consultation draft Guidance on Education Development Plans. The deadline for responses was 8 May and officials are currently analysing the responses received. Final guidance in the light of those responses will be issued in due course.

Further Education

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to replace discretionary grants as a means of support for students wishing to take up courses of study at further education colleges; and if he will make a statement. [43367]

Dr. Howells: The Government are committed to replacing LEA discretionary awards with a better targeted system of support for students at Further Education Colleges. We are continuing to consult on this matter and, as part of this process, we will be publishing the report of the Further Education Student Support Advisory Group later this month.

New Deal (Unemployed Adults)

Mr. Stephen Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has for local New Deal partnerships to organise and deliver the New Deal to those unemployed adults covered by the pilot initiatives due to commence in November. [44286]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Government wish, through the use of high quality and innovative provision, to build on the experience gained from the New Deal for 18–24 year olds in taking forward the pilots for unemployed adults aged 25 and over, which were announced by the Chancellor in the Budget, 17 March 1998, *Official Report*, columns 1097–112, and which are due to begin in November.

In the answer that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Mr. Quinn) on 14 May 1998, *Official Report*, columns *181–82*, I announced an invitation to existing private sector led New Deal partnerships to bid for the delivery of ten of the pilots. I am now inviting by means of a letter distributed this week through Employment Service Regional Directors, each of the remaining New Deal partnerships to bid for the delivery of one of the rest of the pilots. The bids will be assessed in terms of both quality and innovation and their provision of a robust basis for evaluation. For this reason we will not be inviting bids from areas which overlap with any of the prototype Employment Zones established in February. We will also need to consider carefully the case for pilots in areas where in-work benefits Earnings Top Up schemes are operating.

We aim to announce the successful bidders, which will number around 20, by September.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 3 June 1998

DEFENCE

Porton Down (Document)

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a copy of the letter dated 22 February 1941 from the Experimental Station, Porton near Salisbury reference numbers S.B. 3288/R.D. Arm 6 and Ptn/1552 (R.2840) SS/PB. [43928]

Mr. Spellar: This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA). I have asked the Chief Executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Robert Key, dated 3 June 1998:

I have been asked to reply to your question requesting a copy of a letter from the former Experimental Station at Porton Down to be placed in the House of Commons library.

Staff at DERA's Chemical and Biological Defence sector (CBD) have been unable to trace the document in which you are interested. The reference you gave of S B 3288/RD Arm 6 dated 22 Feb 1941 is not recognised by the archivist at Porton Down. The Ptn/1552 reference is recognised as being part of a file series dated from 1936 to 1941. The files in this series were forwarded to the Public Record Office in 1992.

I am sorry to have been unhelpful on this occasion. If you can let me have any additional details about the letter I will be happy to make further enquiries.

Abandoned Ordnance

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the outcome of the major incident co-ordinating group meeting held at the chemical and biological defence division of DERA at Porton Down on 1 May, in relation to unidentified buried ordnance at the defence nuclear, biological and chemical centre at Winterbourne Gunner; who attended that meeting; and when the next meeting will be held. [43924]

Mr. Spellar: This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA). I have asked the Chief Executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Robert Key, dated 3 June 1998:

I have been asked to reply to your question asking for details of the outcome of the major incident co-ordinating group meeting which took place at the Chemical and Biological Defence (CBD) Sector of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA), Porton Down on 1 May. In particular, you asked for information in relation to the discussion on the unidentified buried ordnance at the nuclear, biological and chemical centre at Winterbourne Gunner.

Firstly, I should explain that Headquarters Land Command, not CBD/DERA, is responsible for the Defence Nuclear Biological Chemical Centre (DNBCC) at Winterbourne Gunner. That said, CBD/DERA would expect to be involved in an advisory and support capacity in any plan to clear the land. The meeting on 1 May was a routine meeting, the venue for which was provided by CBD/DERA. It was chaired by Wiltshire's Assistant Chief Constable and the minutes were taken by the County Emergency Planning Officer, Emergency Planning Unit, Wiltshire. He should be able to provide you with a record of the meeting and let you know the arrangements for future meetings.

I am sorry that I am unable to be more helpful on this occasion.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when *(a)* Wiltshire Constabulary, *(b)* Wiltshire Fire Brigade and *(c)* the County Emergency Planning Officer for Wiltshire were consulted as part of Operation Abbott concerning expended and unexpended mortar bombs and shells; and what assessment he has made of how many contained mustard gas and phosgene. [43926]

Mr. Spellar: The Wiltshire Constabulary and the County Emergency Planning Officer (CEPO) for Wiltshire County Council, also acting on behalf of Wiltshire Fire Service, were advised in July last year of the possible need for an Army clearance operation in Winterbourne Gunner, to be called Operation Abbott. However, further consultation was postponed pending a detailed survey of the land in question, and subsequent discussion in my Department of the need for a clearance operation. The Wiltshire Fire Service and the CEPO, also acting on behalf of Wiltshire Constabulary, were then invited to a meeting on 18 May this year, to discuss my Department's current position regarding the clearance.

My Department has made no assessment of how much ordnance expended at Winterbourne Gunner contained phosgene; however, on the evidence of ordnance that has emerged at Winterbourne Gunner in the past, we estimate that some 15% of ordnance fired there might have contained either chemical agents or harmless chemical simulants.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what abandoned ordnance was found at Home Farm, West Cottingworth, York, at RAF Escrick, at RAF Clifton, York and at Clifton Moor and Royde Mills, Huddersfield; if the ground has now been cleared; and at what cost. [43927]

Mr. Spellar: RAF Escrick, situated on Home Farm land at West Cottingworth, was cleared in 1995 in an exercise known as Operation Capsicum Jar. This clearance operation removed six live 61b ground bombs, 2 inert 61b ground bombs and some 4,600 flame floats. Costs of the clearance are not held centrally, and could now be obtained only at disproportionate cost, but we know 728 man-days were spent on the task. Assuming average pay rates this would equate to a rough order of manpower costs of some £30,000. There would have been further costs for plant hired during the clearance operation, but these are not available.

We are unable to find any reference to clearance exercises at RAF Clifton.

We believe that Royde Mills was an ICI establishment, which was sold to the local authority in 1991.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the chemical and biological defence division of DERA was first asked to prepare a plan for the clearance of ordnance and other metal objects from fields adjacent to the Defence Nuclear Biological and Chemical Centre

at Winterbourne Gunner; what was their estimate of the cost; and what were the reasons he decided not to proceed. [43925]

Mr. Spellar: The Chemical and Biological Defence, CBD, sector of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency, DERA, has not been asked to prepare a plan for such a clearance. It has provided expert advice to Headquarters Land Command, which has the responsibility for preparing such a plan in this instance, and we would also expect CBD/DERA to provide technical advice and support in the disposal of any chemical weapons materials were a clearance operation to be mounted. No decision has been taken to mount or not to mount a clearance operation at this site.

Hunting

Jackie Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to issue licences for cub hunting on his Department's land; and what restrictions will be placed on these licences. [43862]

Mr. Spellar: Foxhunting with hounds takes place on the Defence Estate under licence and is conducted in accordance with the rules of the Master of Foxhounds Association and the additional restriction that the practices of digging out and holding up are not permitted.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Birmingham Northern Relief Road

Dr. Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what are the projected costs to the public purse of works associated with the construction of the Birmingham Northern Relief Road. [43285]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Under the concession agreement with Midland Expressway Limited (MEL) the costs and risks of constructing the Birmingham Northern Relief Road (BNRR) and its link roads are for MEL. There are, of course, certain non-works costs involved in promoting a private finance scheme that fall to the Government.

Works associated with the BNRR include reconstruction of the existing M42 near Water Orton to enable its use by BNRR traffic. Under the agreement the major part of the costs of this work is to be met by MEL, but the Department is to contribute a share currently estimated at £20m. This provision reflects the fact that not all traffic on that section will use the BNRR.

Further costs to the public purse could result from any changes imposed by the Department to the specifications included in the Concession Agreement, for example changes reflecting revised engineering standards. Where imposed changes involve extra costs to the Concessionaire the Department must meet the costs involved. At present the costs of identified changes seem unlikely to exceed £1.5m.

Motorists

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many motorists there were on British roads in (i) 1994, (ii) 1995, (iii) 1996 and (iv) 1997. [43482]

Ms Glenda Jackson *[holding answer 1 June 1998]:* Information on the number of 'active' driving licence holders (the nearest equivalent available data) is normally derived from the National Travel Survey; however, annual estimates cannot be made from this source. It is estimated that there were an average of 30.1 million full car licence holders for the years 1994–96.

Yearly estimates of licensed vehicle stock in Great Britain are available on an annual basis and are detailed.

At end of year	*All vehicles*	*Of which motorcars*
1994	25,231.3	21,199.2
1995	25,369.4	21,394.2
1996	26,301.9	22,237.5
1997	26,973.8	22,831.7

Piracy

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what steps he is taking to enlist the support of *(a)* the United Nations and *(b)* the European Union for measures to protect British seafarers against piracy; and if he will make a statement; [44028]

(2) when he expects to complete the revision of and re-issue the Piracy and Armed Robbery Merchant Shipping Notice (No. 1517); and if he will make a statement. [44027]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I refer the hon. Member to my answer on 8 April 1998, *Official Report*, column *285*, and reiterate that the best and most sensible way to combat piracy and armed robbery at sea is through concerted international action through the International Maritime Organisation (IMO). The IMO is the United Nations special agency for dealing with maritime issues. We coordinate with EU partners on issues at IMO, including piracy; the European Union has observer status at IMO which enables it to keep abreast of discussions on the subject.

In addition to playing an active role at the IMO as one UN Forum, the UK intends to raise its concerns about piracy and armed robbery at sea at the UN General Assembly this Autumn. At UNGA we coordinate with EU partners on maritime subjects. We expect therefore to raise piracy in a coordinated manner, through an EU joint statement.

The UK voiced its support for action at the IMO Maritime Safety Committee meeting in London last month supporting, in particular, the planned missions and seminars for key piracy areas. The UK has already made a financial contribution to help fund these initiatives and hopes that they are successful.

The revised piracy and armed robbery advice is now contained in a Marine Guidance Note (MGN 75) which will be distributed towards the end of June. Copies are being made available to the Chamber of Shipping and NUMAST, the mariner's union, for onward transmission to their members and it will, for the first time, be available on the internet.

Transport White Paper

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the basis of Mr. Mike Craven's involvement in the drafting of the Transport White Paper. [43692]

Mr. Prescott: I have taken advice on the content and drafting of the Transport White Paper from a variety of sources including officials here and in other Government Departments, my Panel of Advisers on the White Paper, environmental and transport user groups, academics, the public consultants, advisory groups and special and other advisers. Mr. Craven is one such source of advice. The White Paper is being drafted in the normal way by my Department.

Fossil Fuel Emissions

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what progress his Department has made in implementing its long-term strategy for the reduction of fossil fuel emissions in terms of *(a)* encouraging greater energy efficiency, *(b)* encouraging the use of renewable energy and *(c)* introducing an integrated transport policy. [43301]

Angela Eagle: We are aiming to consult this summer on the policy options for delivering our climate change targets. This will largely focus on delivering our legally binding commitment from Kyoto, but will also consider how we might move towards our separate 20 per cent. domestic aim. The consultation paper will build on the outcomes of other reviews, including those on Integrated Transport Policy, Energy Policy, and Utility Regulation. We will then develop a balanced climate change programme under which all sectors of the economy will play their part.

Carbon Monoxide Emissions

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the main contributors, in percentage terms, to total carbon monoxide emissions in the United Kingdom. [43302]

Angela Eagle: The latest figures available for United Kingdom carbon monoxide emissions are for 1996. Road transport account for 71 per cent. of such emissions, other transport for 17 per cent., industry for 7 per cent., power stations for 4 per cent., and 1 per cent. from waste treatment and disposal.

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the role of the reduction of speed limits as a method of reducing carbon dioxide emissions. [43304]

Angela Eagle: We intend to publish this month our Integrated Transport White Paper which will address the whole issue of traffic management and set out our transport policy to help deliver many environmental, economic and social objectives.

The Government are aware that the way speed limits are set and enforced can affect emissions of greenhouse gases and local air pollutants. It is a complex relationship which merits further consideration.

This summer we will launch an open and wide ranging consultation exercise on the sort of measures needed to meet our legally binding Kyoto target for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and move towards our domestic aim of reducing carbon dioxide emissions to 20 per cent. below 1990 levels by 2010.

South Gloucestershire (Electoral Review)

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects to conclude the periodic electoral review of South Gloucestershire; and if the 1999 unitary election will be conducted on the basis of the new boundaries. [43748]

Mr. Raynsford: We are currently considering the representations which we have received on the Commission's recommendations, and intend to announce our preliminary response to the recommendations shortly. Our present intention is for the new arrangements to be established in time for the 1999 elections.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Magistrates Courts

Mr. Todd: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list those urban communities of greater than 30,000 population which are more than 60 minutes travel by public transport from the nearest magistrates' court administered by the magistrates' court committee of that county. [43025]

Mr. Hoon: The information requested is not collected centrally and could be provided only at a disproportionate cost.

In accordance with section 56 of the Justices of the Peace Act 1997, decisions on the provision of magistrates' courts are for the relevant magistrates' courts committee to determine, after consultation with its local paying authority.

Mr. Todd: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what will be the annual running cost of adopting the PFI proposal of Derbyshire Magistrates' Court Committee relative to maintaining the status quo; and how this cost is to be funded. [43027]

Mr. Hoon: Current property related running costs amount to c£637,000. No firm figures are currently available for the future cost of the PFI scheme as bids have not yet been invited but, based upon a Public Sector Comparator, the maximum estimate of the running cost element of the annual PFI charge will be c£720,000. Running costs will be paid from the Magistrates' Court Committee's revenue budget which is funded by 80 per cent. direct grant from the Lord Chancellor's Department and a 20 per cent. contribution from the local authority. The capital element of the annual PFI charge will be supported by PFI Credits which will entitle the paying authorities to additional revenue support grant.

Mr. Todd: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what factors may be taken into account by sponsoring authorities when they consider proposals from county magistrates' court committees for reorganisation of courts. [43026]

Mr. Hoon: Section 56 of the Justices of the Peace Act 1997 provides that magistrates' courts committees must consult their paying authority and gives the paying authority sole right of appeal against a magistrates' courts committee's proposals.

There are no restrictions on the factors taken into account by a paying authority when considering whether to appeal against a magistrates' courts committee's determination.

Deaf Jurors

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, pursuant to his answer of 12 May 1998, *Official Report*, columns *69–70*, on deaf jurors, for what reasons palantypists are not available for deaf jury members; and if his Department will permit deaf people carrying out jury service to be allowed a palantypist where this is their preferred means of communication support. [42909]

Mr. Hoon: The Crown Court must comply with the Court of Appeal decision that no one, other than a member of the jury, can sit with the jury when they are considering a case. This would make it impossible for a palantypist, or any other person supporting a deaf jury member, to assist during this part of the proceedings.

PRIME MINISTER

Mr. Stephen Kock

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Prime Minister (1) what information was provided to Foreign Office officials by civil servants as to the nature and occasions on which representatives or organisations funded by Government met Mr. Stephen Kock; [38546]

(2) what sums of money were paid *(a)* by Her Majesty's Government and *(b)* by those acting on its behalf in salary and expenses to Mr. Stephen Kock between 1985 and 1992. [38552]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to paragraphs F3.19 and F3.27 in Volume III of the Report of Sir Richard Scott's Inquiry into the Export of Defence Equipment and Dual-Use Goods to Iraq.

Homelessness

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Prime Minister (1) what assessment he has made of the effect of the Social Exclusion Unit on rates of homelessness in Coventry; [41212]

(2) what plans the Social Exclusion Unit has to reduce homelessness in the West Midlands Region. [43015]

The Prime Minister *[holding answers 11 May and 1 June 1998]:* The Social Exclusion Unit have been looking into the problem of rough sleeping as one of its first three priorities. I will announce the Government's decisions shortly. Any policy changes proposed will have clear targets and evaluation plans. Policy on wider homelessness issues remain with my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister.

Housing

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Prime Minister what research the Government have *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on links between poor housing and (i) educational under-achievement, (ii) ill-health and (iii) crime; and what priority will be given in future spending programmes to tackling housing disrepair and housing shortages. [43198]

The Prime Minister: The Government are examining links between poor housing and a wide range of issues, including health, crime and education.

Current research for the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR) by Bristol University is looking at the effects of poor housing in early life on factors such as poor health and educational attainment later on; Imperial College, London is undertaking a project sponsored by DETR and the Department of Health (DH) examining the links between winter mortality levels and poor housing; a joint DETR/DH research programme is studying the effects of air pollution and damp in the home.

Research is also evaluating area based programmes designed to tackle high unemployment, high levels of crime and fear of crime, poor housing, poor environmental quality, poor educational achievement and poor health.

The Comprehensive Spending Review was set up to ensure that Government spending is in line with current priorities. It is considering the need to spend on maintaining the existing housing stock and on the provision of new homes.

Older People

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Prime Minister (1) what cross-department fora have been established since 1 May 1997 concerning older people; what are their terms of reference; which departments are represented; and to whom they report; [43696]

(2) what plans he has to establish Cabinet level co-ordination of Government policy for older people. [43697]

The Prime Minister *[holding answers 1 June 1998]:* Many Government departments are involved in work which affects older people. This work is being taken forward within existing Government machinery, including ad-hoc inter-departmental groups of officials.

Ministerial colleagues and I are taking a close interest in these issues. We recognise that it is important that central Government work together in a co-ordinated way to improve the quality of life for all older people and are considering the best way to achieve this.

We recognise that this co-ordination also needs to happen at a local level. On 5 June, we will be formally launching the Better Government for Older People programme. The programme will establish 28 pilots centred on local authorities but involving scores of other local partners to improve public services for older people by better meeting their needs, listening to their views, and encouraging and recognising their contribution.

Duty Free

Mr. Gale: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his oral answer of 20 May 1998, *Official Report*, column 315, relating to the abolition of duty free, on what factors he based his statement that there was evidence that other countries were prepared to support reversing the position on duty free trade. [43591]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 1 June 1998]:* In my oral answer of 20 May I said that there is no evidence that other countries are prepared to support reversing the position on the abolition of intra-EU duty free sales. I made this statement on the basis of the previous day's discussions at the ECOFIN Council meeting.

No. 10 Website

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Prime Minister if the Government consulted non-Governmental organisations representing visually-impaired people prior to the design of the No. 10 Downing Street Website. [43553]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 1 June 1998]:* Since the launch of the No. 10 website on 16 April, we have been in contact with non-governmental experts in the field of site design for people with disabilities, including the visually impaired. We are currently considering options for making the site more accessible for these people.

Anti-poverty Strategy

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Prime Minister if he will ensure that under his presidency the EU adopts the anti-poverty strategy targets set for 2005 and 2015 by the Development Assistance Committee. [43576]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 1 June 1998]:* Yes. One of our top development priorities during the UK Presidency is to increase the EU's commitment to implementing the International Poverty Eradication Strategy, of which targets form an important part, and ensuring poverty eradication is at the heart of European development programmes.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development organised a high level seminar on 17 March for the Development Ministers from Member States, and representatives from the Commission and the European Parliament to discuss how to put the International Poverty Eradication Strategy into practice.

Heavily Indebted Poor Countries

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Prime Minister how many of the G8 representatives have adopted the five provisions of the Mauritius Mandate. [43841]

The Prime Minister: Agreement was reached at both the G8 foreign and finance ministers meeting on 9 May and at the Birmingham Summit itself on issues raised in the Mauritius Mandate. Both meetings agreed to the speedy and determined implementation of debt relief to more countries under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative, and encouraged all eligible countries to have begun the process of securing debt relief by the year 2000. The meetings also urged all countries that had not already done so to forgive aid-related bilateral debt or to take comparable action for reforming poor countries, and to use export credits to countries eligible for debt relief under the HIPC initiative only for productive expenditure. These agreements follow directly from proposals originally made by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in the Mauritius Mandate.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Prime Minister what steps have been taken by his Ministers since 1 May 1997 to relieve the debt burden of the poorer Third World countries. [44015]

The Prime Minister: Since this Government came to office, they have taken an international lead in tackling the problem of debt relief for the world's most heavily indebted countries. In September my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer launched his Mauritius Mandate, which set out many proposals aimed at the speedy and determined implementation of debt relief under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative. Many of my right hon. Friend's proposals were endorsed by the G8 at the recent Summit in Birmingham, at which debt was a major issue.

Following another British initiative, launched by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer at the G8 foreign and finance ministers meeting on 9 May, agreement was also reached in Birmingham on the need to consider ways for debt relief mechanisms to be used to release more resources for essential rehabilitation in poor countries that have recently emerged from conflict, particularly where those countries have arrears to the International Financial Institutions.

Amongst other actions that the British Government have undertaken on debt relief, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer held a seminar on the issue which church leaders and charity directors at Downing Street; the Government took an international lead in helping to solve the problems of financing debt relief for Mozambique by announcing that they would donate a further $10 million to Mozambique above the debt relief already provided through the Paris Club and other mechanisms; and the Department for International Development announced that they will cancel up to a further £132 million of old aid loans to poor Commonwealth countries committed to structural reform.

The Government remain committed to the HIPC initiative, and will continue to strive to meet the targets for debt relief set out in the Mauritius Mandate.

NORTHERN IRELAND

RUC

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans she has to establish a commission to examine the future structure of and operational matters pertaining to the RUC; and if she will make a statement. [37381]

Marjorie Mowlam: The Government have appointed a Chairman and seven Members to the independent Commission on Policing for Northern Ireland, which is one of the elements in the Belfast Agreement (Command 3883).

The Chairman is the right hon. Chris Patten, the former Governor of Hong Kong and Minister in the Northern Ireland Office. In addition, the seven Members each contributes different expertise, effectively under four headings. There are two representatives with policing expertise. One representative of either side of the community in Northern Ireland, but bringing with them a great deal more than this. Two leading academics and a senior, and significant business figure.

The names are Sir John Smith, former Deputy Commissioner in the Metropolitan Police, who also has previous experience as one of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Constabulary. Kathleen O'Toole, having begun her career in the Boston police, is now Secretary for Public Safety in Massachusetts and has vast experience in the law enforcement field. There is no questioning her knowledge of policing, and she has already worked with the RUC, for example on training.

Peter Smith, a QC who has over 20 years' experience at the Bar, is widely regarded as one of the most acute legal practitioners here, and Dr. Maurice Hayes has his wide experience as a former senior civil servant and subsequently Ombudsman. He produced a well received review of the police complaints system in 1997 and has made contributions to policing issues over many years.

Professor Clifford Shearing, who is the Director of the Centre of Criminology at the University of Toronto, has agreed to bring his academic expertise to bear. He has extensive knowledge of policing, having examined the subject in his native South Africa, Australia and Canada. Another expert in this area is Dr. Gerald Lynch, President of John Jay College, New York which has been judged to be the best criminal justice institute in the USA. He has done a great deal of work on policing worldwide, including developing a course on police and community relations for the United States Department of Justice.

The seventh member is Lucy Woods, the very able Chief Executive of British Telecom in Northern Ireland, whose experience of management in a large organisation, delivering a service to a demanding public, will be very valuable.

The entire membership is of the highest standing. Individually and collectively they have a considerable amount of expertise and ability to offer the Commission.

The functions of the Commission are set out clearly in the terms of reference contained in the Good Friday Agreement. It will convene shortly to take this work forward. It will be expected to consult widely and to report by Summer 1999. The Government will publish the report, and consult on the recommendations, as set out in the Agreement.

School Transport

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list *(a)* the average number of school children in Northern Ireland travelling by school transport each day and *(b)* the number of (i) fatalities and (ii) injuries of school children involved in road accidents associated with school transport in each of the last five years. [42420]

Mr. Worthington *[holding answer 21 May 1998]:* The average number of children in schools in Northern Ireland in receipt of assistance with home to school transport over the period 1992–93 to 1996–97 was 103,414.

The number of road accident casualties in Northern Ireland who were school pupils going to or from school by bus or coach for each of the last five years is shown.

School child casualties (aged 4–16) travelling to or from school by bus or coach in Northern Ireland

School year (September—June)	*Fatalities*	*Injured*
1992–93	1	32
1993–94	0	10
1994–95	0	62
1995–96	0	67
1996–97	0	158

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Sportsmatch

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what funding his Department has provided to Sportsmatch in each year of its operation. [43575]

Mr. Banks *[holding answer 1 June 1998]:* The Sportsmatch scheme in England, which has been successful in attracting over £16.6 million in commercial sponsorship to grass roots sport since its inception, has received the following funding from my Department:

	£ million[1]
1992–93	0.9
1993–94	3.0
1994–95	3.3
1995–96	3.7
1996–97	3.2
1997–98	3.2
1998–99	3.2

[1] Sportsmatch was launched in November 1992

Millennium Bank Holiday

Judy Mallaber: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans there are for an additional bank holiday to mark the Millennium. [44557]

Mr. Chris Smith: I am pleased to announce that the year 2000 will be heralded by a one-off additional Bank Holiday throughout the United Kingdom on Friday, 31 December 1999. A recent consultation exercise conducted by the Government has confirmed that this decision commands overwhelming support among the many organisations which responded, and I know that large numbers of people will welcome this opportunity to prepare for the festivities on New Year's Eve and New Year's Day 2000.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Youth Justice

Mr. Rapson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the Government have identified areas to pilot the new youth justice measures and the procedural changes to reduce delays in youth and adult cases contained in the Crime and Disorder Bill [*Lords*]. [44417]

Mr. Michael: We have identified nine areas in which, in principle, we would like to pilot the new youth justice measures contained in the Crime and Disorder Bill. These measures are the final warning scheme; the reparation order; action plan order; child safety order and parenting order; and youth offending teams.

Four areas have been identified to pilot all of these measures. This will demonstrate how the new powers operate together and how the youth offending team structure can best deliver the associated intervention work. The four areas are the London Boroughs of Hammersmith and Fulham, Kensington and Chelsea and the City of Westminster (jointly); Hampshire, Southampton, Portsmouth and the Isle of Wight (jointly); Wolverhampton; and Sheffield.

Five areas have been identified to pilot the child safety order and parenting order, together with youth offending teams. This will ensure that we have sufficient information to evaluate the operation of these two orders. The five areas are the London Borough of Lewisham; Luton and Bedfordshire (jointly); Devon; St. Helens; and Sunderland.

We will be undertaking further detailed work in these nine areas with a view to establishing the pilot projects from October 1998. The pilots will operate for a period of 18 months. They will help develop good practice and allow us to assess the costs and savings which nation-wide implementation will involve. The pilots will inform decisions over the timing of full implementation of these measures.

We are also considering how we might best support other areas, including those others which expressed interest in taking part in the pilots, in planning and developing their arrangements for youth offending teams and the other youth justice measures.

In addition, six areas have been identified to pilot procedural changes recommended by the Review of Delay in the Criminal Justice System, some of which are contained in the Crime and Disorder Bill. These are expected to reduce delays in youth and adult cases. The pilots are being organised under the auspices of the Trials Issues Group and they will also be used to inform the setting of statutory time limits in due course for both youth and adult cases. The six areas are Tyneside; Croydon; Blackburn and Burnley; Northamptonshire; North Staffordshire; and North Wales. Two of these areas—Blackburn and Northamptonshire—will also operate the final warning scheme and youth offending teams, since these arrangements will have an effect on speed through the system and procedures in young offender cases.

Sir Iain Glidewell's Review of the Crown Prosecution Service supports the changes which are to be piloted, and proposes some further changes which he recommends should be incorporated in the pilots. The Government will be considering how best to take this forward.

These pilots reflect the Government's determination to test innovative and effective ways of delivering services and programmes across Government Departments and agencies. Experience from these pilots and other area-based initiatives will help to ensure new measures are implemented effectively at local level.

Firearms

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what date his Department held consultative meetings on the Review of the Firearms Forms and Rules with (i) the British Medical Association and other professional medical representative bodies, (ii) the National Farmers Union (England and Wales), (iii) the National Farmers Union (Scotland), (iv) the Country Landowners Association (England and Wales), (v) the Country Landowners Association (Scotland), (vi) firearms clubs and associations, (vii) the British Deer Society, and the Deer Commission for Scotland, and (viii) the British Sports Association for the Disabled; when he plans to conclude the review of Firearms Forms and Rules; when he plans to implement the proposed new Forms and Rules; for what reasons the Home Office Note of the main issues raised at the meeting on 19 February to discuss the forms, was not sent to all consultees when requesting further written submissions; and when he intends to meet consultees to discuss these matters. [44101]

Mr. Michael: The arrangements made for meeting representatives of shooting organisations to discuss the proposed new Firearms Rules and forms are as set out in my answer to the hon. Member of 18 May 1998, *Official Report*, column *241*. The new Rules and forms are planned to come into effect on 1 September 1998. The minutes of the working group meeting held on 19 February 1998 were intended solely as a record for those attending but were reflected in the draft forms subsequently sent out for comment. No further meetings are planned.

Joint Enterprise Killings

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the law relating to killings described as joint enterprise killings in non-UK jurisdictions. [44055]

Mr. Michael: When the Law Commission drew up their proposals contained in their consultation paper (No. 131) entitled "Assisting and Encouraging Crime" in September 1993, they looked at how the law in Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States of America deals with those who participate in a common criminal enterprise. An account of the law in each of these jurisdictions is set out in an Appendix to their consultation paper.

The Law Commission expect to produce a report in due course and I understand that they will bear in mind the experience of these other jurisdictions. Once the report is received, the Government will consider whether the law in this area needs to be changed.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to revise the law relating to killings described as joint enterprise killings. [44057]

Mr. Michael: The doctrine of joint enterprise is under consideration by the Law Commission who discussed the issues as part of their consultation paper (No. 131) entitled "Assisting and Encouraging Crime", issued in September 1993. Although completion of the project has been delayed to take into account the implications of the House of Lords decision in R *v.* Powell and another and R *v.* English, I understand that a report will be available in due course and that it will reflect the responses to the consultation paper and the development of the law, including any subsequent decisions and problems that have emerged. The Government will then consider whether the law in this area should be revised.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received on the law relating to killings described as joint enterprise killings. [44056]

Mr. Michael: Some 41 letters were received about the death of Sarah Adams, whose parents were convicted of cruelty, together with one other representation about joint enterprise, in the past six months. The Department does not keep records which would enable use to identify this topic with certainty: it may arise in the context of crimes other than murder, or on an appeal; such representations may be recorded in a way that does not identify a link to the doctrine of joint enterprise.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were being detained on 28 February who had sought asylum at some stage, broken down by *(a)* length of detention and *(b)* immigration status. [44039]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The available information, relating to 27 February 1998, is given in the table:

Number of people recorded as being detained[1,2] on 27 February 1998 who had sought asylum at some stage, by length of detention[3] and immigration status

Length	*Port*	*Illegal entrants*	*Subject to deportation action*	*Total*
0–1 Month[1]	69	169	4	242
1–2 Months	46	86	1	133
2–6 Months	148	127	11	286
6–12 Months	21	34	15	70
12 Months+	8	6	7	21
Total	292	422	38	752

[1] Persons detained solely under the powers contained in Schedule 2 or 3 of the Immigration Act 1971

[2] These figures include people who have been in detention for less than a month. Because of the delay in recording receptions into, and releases from, detention and the large number of persons detained for a short period, the figures should be used with caution

[3] In some cases the date a person enters detention may be understated due to the method of recording.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 26 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *232*, if he will list the criteria on the basis of which asylum seekers detained under the Immigration Acts are classified as Category A status. [44041]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Under an agreement with the Prison Service, a number of places are made available for immigration detainees in Prison Service establishments other than Haslar and Rochester. These prisons may also contain Category A accommodation as well as accommodation of other categories.

Prison staff are required to identify those prisoners charged with certain serious offences which are listed in section 36 of Part C of the Prison Service Manual on Security. A copy of the Manual is available in the Library. The cases of those prisoners charged with such offences which meet any one or more of a list of specified criteria, also set out in the Security Manual, are reported to Prison Service Headquarters where it is decided whether the inmate should be placed in Category A.

In the interests of public protection, the guidance and criteria set out in the Security Manual are also applied to administrative detainees, which includes persons detained under the Immigration Act 1971, who are believed to have been involved in the commission of serious offences abroad. The overriding consideration must be the safety of the public and the lack of potential dangerousness presented by the individual prisoner.

Child Deaths

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cases involving the death of a child there have been since 1993 where neither parent or carer has been charged with either murder or manslaughter because both parents or carers have denied responsibility, but no third party involvement is suspected. [44058]

Mr. Michael: The information requested is not available.

The police are not required to specify the reason why any person suspected of homicide is not charged for statistical purposes. Moreover, they have to supply details of a person initially suspected of a homicide only when that person is arrested or charged with the offence or if a suspect subsequently commits suicide.

The table shows all currently recorded homicides of children (aged under 16) where no conviction had been recorded as at 1 August 1997. All suspects who committed suicide were parents.

All offences currently recorded as homicide where the victim was aged under 16 and no conviction had been recorded as at 1 August 1997

	Number of offences	*Of which, suspect committed suicide*
1993	9	4
1994	23	13
1995	26	15
1996	33	14

Prisoners

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the total prison population expressed as a percentage of total prison capacity. [44010]

Ms Quin: The total prison population of England and Wales expressed as a percentage of the total prison capacity (operational capacity) was 95.8 per cent. for Friday, 29 May 1998.

Road Policing

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was total spending on road policing by *(a)* police forces in England and Wales and *(b)* each individual police force in the latest year for which figures are available; what such spending was as a proportion of the total spending on policing in each case; and what guidance his Department gives to police authorities on the proportion of overall spending which should be allocated to road policing. [43995]

Mr. Michael: The information requested is not collected centrally. The allocation of resources to particular functions and the deployment of officers are operational matters for individual chief constables. We have issued no guidance to police authorities on the allocation of resources to road policing.

Road traffic offences and other crimes do not necessarily occur separately. A large part of traffic officers' time is spent dealing with ordinary crime or carrying out ordinary police duties. Conversely, officers on general beat duties are able to take prompt action against breaches of road traffic law.

Alcohol (Young Persons)

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he has taken to ensure the enforcement of the Confiscation of Alcohol (Young Persons) Act 1997. [44038]

Mr. Michael: Responsibility for the enforcement of the Confiscation of Alcohol (Young Persons) Act 1997 is an operational matter for chief officers of police. Guidance on the Act, which came into force on 1 August last year, has been issued to all chief officers. The Act is intended to allow the police to deal with situations where drinking by young people causes a nuisance to others or may lead to other bad behaviour. The guidance makes it clear that it was not Parliament's intention that the new powers should be used where young peoples' drinking is not perceived to be a problem. A copy of the guidance (Home Office Circular 38/1997) is in the Library.

TREASURY

Private Finance Initiative

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list by Department the capital expenditure under the private finance initiative in *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 1997–98, and estimates for 1998–99 (i) in real terms and (ii) in cash. [43920]

Mr. Darling: The information required in cash terms for 1996–97 was given in an answer to the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) on 10 December 1997, *Official Report*, columns *572–73*. The information for subsequent years is contained in Table B15 at Annex B to the Financial Statement and Budget Report (HM Treasury, March 1998). The information required for the calculation of real terms figures is contained in Table B1.

Taxation

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 5 May 1998, *Official Report*, columns *331–34*, if he will make it his policy to continue to publish the updated series for the tax burden until a new methodolgy for updating the tax burden can be introduced; by what date he expects to introduce improved statistics for the tax burden; and if he will make a statement. [42148]

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what action officials in his Department are taking to make information on the burden of indirect taxes on household types more meaningful and reliable; [43986]

(2) when he expects to publish more meaningful and reliable information on the burden of indirect taxes on household types; [43979]

(3) on what date he first instructed officials in his Department to consider ways in which information on the burden of indirect tax on household types could be made more meaningful and reliable. [43984]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answers 18 May and 1 June 1998]:* I have nothing to add to my answer of 5 May 1998, *Official Report*, columns *331–34*, to the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce).

Transsexuals

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer in what way he proposes to amend the Births and Deaths Registration Act 1953 following the out-of-court settlement with Alan Veale; and if he will review the Act to consider whether other amendments should be made to enable transsexuals to have their birth certificates amended. [44299]

Mrs. Liddell: In order to correct an error or fact or substance in a birth or death register the Birth and Deaths Registration Act 1953 requires two statutory declarations to be made. The declarations must set out the nature of the error and the true facts of the case. I propose to amend the legislation to allow a Court Order to be accepted in place of one of the statutory declarations. The same provisions apply to the correction of the sex of an individual where it was wrongly recorded at birth.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has for the total level of the local government financial settlement for 1999–2000. [43353]

Mr. Darling: Future plans for public spending, including provisions for local authorities, will be set out in the Comprehensive Spending Review, to be completed in the summer.

Heavily Indebted Poor Countries

Mr. Reed: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to write off the remaining debts owed by heavily indebted poor countries to the United Kingdom Government. [43469]

Mrs. Liddell: The Government remain fully committed to the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative, and continue to press for full debt relief to all eligible countries that are committed to economic and structural reforms, for example through the Chancellor's Mauritius Mandate and at the recent G8 Summit in Birmingham.

Methadone Deaths

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total number of deaths in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* Scotland from methadone in each of the last four years; and if he will make a statement. [44011]

Mrs. Liddell: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated June 1998:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your parliamentary question on the total number of deaths in (a) England, (b) Wales and (c) Scotland from Methadone for each of the last four years.

The data requested are shown in the table below.

Deaths involving methadone in England, Wales and Scotland 1994–1997

	1994	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*[1]
England	246	273	328	286
Wales	8	18	16	13
Scotland	55	58	101	87
Total	309	349	445	386

[1] 1997 data are provisional

Notes:

Data for England and Wales represent the number of deaths occurring in each year

Data for Scotland represent the number of deaths registered in each year, and were supplied by the General Register Office for Scotland

The deaths included correspond to those with an underlying cause of death of drug dependence, nondependent abuse of drugs, accidental poisoning, suicidal poisoning or poisoning undetermined whether accidentally or purposely inflicted and where methadone was mentioned on the death certificate.

The figures include deaths attributed to methadone in combination with other drugs. In some cases, therefore, the death may not be directly or solely due to methadone.

Economic and Finance Council

Mr. Timms: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the Council meeting of the Economic and Finance Ministers of the European Union held on 19 May. [43749]

Mr. Gordon Brown: I chaired the Economic and Finance Council—ECOFIN—of the European Union in Brussels on 19 May. The Economic Secretary represented the UK.

The Council began with a presentation by Commissioner Liikanen of the Commission's Preliminary Draft Budget for 1999. The Council stressed the need for continued budgetary rigour.

On Agenda 2000, the Council held a wide-ranging discussion on the economic and financial issues arising from the proposals published by the Commission on 18 March concerning future financing and the reform of the Community's main spending policies (the Common Agricultural Policy and the Structural and Cohesion Funds). The next ECOFIN will return to these issues, and consider ECOFIN's input to the Cardiff European Council.

Commissioner Liikanen gave a progress report on the Sound and Efficient Management (SEM 2000) initiative. The Council agreed conclusions on the report.

Commissioner Gradin presented the annual report on the fight against fraud and the future work programme. The Council adopted conclusions on the documents, including a call for the convention on the Protection of the Communities' Financial interests to be ratified as soon as possible.

The Council unanimously supported conclusions endorsing the report of the High Level Group on alcohol and tobacco fraud, and welcoming the Commission's Communication.

The Council approved the Commission's Recommendation on Greece's excessive deficit.

Commissioner de Silguy presented the Commission's recommendations for this year's Broad Economic Guidelines. These will be discussed at the next ECOFIN.

The Presidency's proposals on the procedure for surveillance of progress on economic reform were agreed. These include the presentation by Member States and the Commission of short annual progress reports on product and capital markets, which will complement the procedure already established on labour markets.

There was a first discussion of National Employment Action Plans, substituted by all Member States. Employment will again be discussed at the next ECOFIN, which will contribute to the preparation of the Cardiff European Council.

Under Any Other Business, Irish Finance Minister McCreevy presented a study on the impact on Ireland of the abolition of the duty free regime on 30 June 1999. The Commission agreed to produce a working document clarifying the existing instruments available to member States for addressing the adverse consequences of abolition. The decision to abolish duty free was taken in 1991 and there was no unanimous view to reopen this issue.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

BMARC

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if commissions were paid by BMARC to companies owned by or connected to Her Majesty's Government. [38898]

Mrs. Beckett: Not to my knowledge. Any legitimate commissions for services rendered paid by BMARC to companies owned by or connected to Her Majesty's Government would have been a matter solely for BMARC or its parent company and the provider of the service. Evidence of any improper commissions paid to companies owned by or connected to Her Majesty's Government should be passed to the relevant authorities.

Export Licences (Indonesia)

Ann Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many applications for licences for the export of *(a)* paramilitary, *(b)* security and *(c)* police equipment to Indonesia have been (i) granted, (ii) refused and (iii) revoked since 20 March; and what was the export licence category in each case. [42626]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 19 May 1998]:* The Export Control Organisation's computer databases have been interrogated and the results are as follows. Between 7 March and 10 May 1998 inclusive, 8 Standard Individual Export Licences (SIELs) and 7 Open Individual Export Licences (OIELs) were issued to export to endusers or consignees in Indonesia goods subject to export control by being listed in Part III of Schedule 1 to the Export of Goods (Control) Order (the so-called "Military List"). In the same period no individual licences for such exports were revoked, and no applications for such licences were refused. This does not include Media OIELs, which are Open Individual Export Licences authorising the export to any destination of protective clothing, mainly for the protection of aid agency workers and journalists when working in areas of conflict.

Individual licences issued between 7 March and 10 May 1998 covering the export to Indonesia of goods on the Military List

Rating	*Number of SIELs issued covering goods with this rating*	*Number of OIELs issued covering goods with this rating*
ML2	2	0
ML3	1	0
ML6	1	0
ML9	0	1
ML10	0	3
ML11	1	3
ML15	1	0
PL5006	2	0

This information should be considered in light of my answer to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) on 30 October 1997, *Official Report*, columns *870–71*.

As I said in my answer to my hon. Friend of 8 April 1998, *Official Report*, columns *345–47*, it is not possible to break down these data in the manner requested as the equipment covered by many entries in the Military List could be used by military, paramilitary or police end-users.

Bulldog Trainer Aircraft

Mr. Hancock: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what representations she has received concerning the award of the contract to replace the Bulldog trainer aircraft; [43023]

(2) what assessment she has made of the potential benefits to United Kingdom industry of the contract for the replacement of the MOD's Bulldog trainer aircraft. [43024]

Mr. Battle: The President has received a variety of representations, mainly pressing for the selection of the Slingsby Firefly as the replacement for the Bulldog trainer aircraft. These have contributed to the continuing assessment being made by the Department of the potential impact on the UK aerospace industry of this procurement, which is being discussed with the Ministry of Defence.

Truck Refrigeration Systems

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans she has to subject auxiliary engines for refrigeration systems on trucks to noise limits; what assessment she has made of emissions from these units; and if she will make a statement. [43488]

Mr. Battle: I have no plans to subject such units to noise limits. However, the European Commission has recently proposed a directive on noise emissions by equipment used outdoors [COM(1998)46 final] which includes the proposal to subject this type of equipment to noise labelling only. The directive has yet to be agreed by the Member States. An Explanatory Memorandum (6363/98) was submitted to both Houses on 26 March 1998.

The Department has not undertaken an assessment of noise emissions from these units.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Stunell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will exempt renewables generated within the NFFO arrangement from the fossil fuel levy. [43736]

Mr. Battle: I have no plans to do so. Generators who generate electricity from renewable sources of energy under the non-fossil fuel obligation (NFFO) arrangements receive financial support through the scheme which makes the electricity they generate competitive with other leviable forms of generation. I see no need to give such generators further special treatment.

Mr. Stunell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proposals she has to provide incentives for *(a)* suppliers and *(b)* consumers to develop the renewable energy industry in the United Kingdom. [43668]

Mr. Battle: I expect to provide a further incentive to the development of the renewable energy industry in the United Kingdom when I make the fifth Order under the Non-Fossil Fuel Obligation (NFFO) later this year. The NFFO places an obligation on the Public Electricity Suppliers in England and Wales to obtain a specified amount of electricity from renewable sources, providing a protected market in which the industry can grow. Similar arrangements operate in Scotland and Norther Ireland.

More widely, this Government propose to undertake a new and strong drive to develop renewable energy sources in line with its manifesto commitment. To this end, DTI Ministers are reviewing policy, including considerations of what would be necessary and practicable to achieve 10 per cent. of UK electricity needs from renewable sources by the year 2010 and how renewables can make

an effective contribution to meeting requirements for future greenhouse gas reduction commitments. The outcome of that review will be announced later this year.

Money-lenders

Kate Hoey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many money-lenders lost their licences in the last full year for which figures are available. [44037]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: During 1997 the Director-General of Fair Trading revoked 35 consumer credit licences.

Information on individual cases is published each year in the Annual Report of the Director-General of Fair Trading, issues of which up to 1996 are in the Library. The Report for 1997 will be published shortly. Information is also published periodically in the OFT Journal "Fair Trading".

Kate Hoey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what penalties are applied to unlicensed money-lenders. [44051]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: A trader who offers credit facilities to consumers must be licensed under the Consumer Credit Act 1974. A trader who engages in a consumer credit business without obtaining the necessary licence from the Office of Fair Trading commits an offence punishable by a fine of up to £5,000, if he is prosecuted in a magistrates court, or by an unlimited fine or 2 years' imprisonment or both, if he is prosecuted in the Crown Court.

WALES

Waiting Lists

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much of the estimated £25 million allocated to the NHS in Wales is to be spent on reducing waiting lists; and on what projects the balance will be spent. [43665]

Mr. Win Griffiths: £20 million will be spent on reducing waiting lists, £18 million of which has already been allocated to the NHS. £2 million has been held back for issues arising in-year.

The balances is expected to be used mainly to fund costs arising from new variant CJD in blood products and to contribute to Welsh costs associated with the trust reconfiguration exercise and the production of a corporate strategy for NHS Wales.

Further Education

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the average funding per student in further education in Wales; and what assessment he has made of this level relative to that applying in *(a)* England and *(b)* Scotland. [42684]

Mr. Hain: The average funding per student in further education in Wales in the financial year ending 31 March 1998 was £2,993, compared to £2,842 in England for the same period. No assessment of the level applying in Scotland has been made.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Debt Reduction

1. **Dr. Palmer:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the steps to be taken in reducing the debt of poor countries, following the G8 meeting. [42496]

9. **Sir Sydney Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what progress she expects to be made in the reduction of debt among the poorest countries in the next 18 months. [42506]

Clare Short: At the G8 Summit in Birmingham on 15–17 May, we made useful progress in speeding up the implementation of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPC). The Communiqué set out the objective of getting all eligible countries, likely to be about 20 in number, into the process by 2000. This constitutes a significant step towards meeting the Government's Mauritius Mandate which aims for at least three quarters of eligible countries to have received debt relief within the next few years. And following a British initiative, the Summit also agreed on the need to look at ways of providing more and earlier debt relief, to help heavily indebted post-conflict countries. We will be pressing in all appropriate fora for the implementation of these targets.

11. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent discussions she has had with the International Monetary Fund in respect of third world countries' indebtedness; and if she will make a statement. [42508]

Clare Short: Together with my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, I most recently discussed developing country debt with the Managing Director of the IMF in Washington in mid-April. Despite the progress that has been made in implementing the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative, we agreed that more must be done, and that we should look at ways for speeding the process up.

24. **Dr. Starkey:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what progress is being made on expanding the scope of international debt reduction programmes. [42521]

Clare Short: At last month's G8 Summit in Birmingham, leaders agreed to support the speedy and determined extension of debt relief under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries' (HIPC) debt Initiative. Following a British proposal, leaders also agreed on the need to look at ways for providing more and earlier debt relief to help post-conflict countries. We shall be pressing for this work to be taken forward urgently. As a first step, at the donors' meeting in Stockholm earlier this week, we announced a significant contribution to the multi-donor Debt Trust Fund for Rwanda.

25. **Mr. Ian Stewart:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what further actions her Department intends to take to reduce the debt burden of the world's poorest and most indebted countries. [42522]

Clare Short: We shall continue to press for the speedy and determined implementation of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries debt Initiative, and for the urgent consideration of ways to provide earlier and more debt relief for post conflict countries. As a first step, at the

donors' meeting in Stockholm earlier this week, we announced a significant contribution to the multi-donor Debt Trust Fund for Rwanda.

Niger

8. **Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans she has to assist the Government of Niger in combating disease among children. [42504]

Mr. Foulkes: Although Niger does not have close links with Britain, we provide support through our commitments to multilateral institutions, particularly the EC, the UN and the World Bank which provide significant levels of assistance to Niger. The EC, the World Health Organisation and UNICEF all have health programmes in Niger.

Iraq

12. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what percentage of British aid to Iraq since 1991 has been spent on administration costs; and if she has any conveniently available figures. [42509]

Clare Short: Published figures for UK humanitarian aid to Iraq do not include DFID administration costs, which come from a separate departmental budget and represent some 0.7 per cent. of this year's programme. NGOs and other agencies which we fund typically spend three to seven per cent. of project costs on headquarters administration.

I am pleased to announce that my department has just approved a much needed £2 million project to improve water and sanitation in Baghdad-controlled Iraq. This is part of the £7 million aid package for the region which I announced on 12 March 1998, *Official Report*, column 297.

Microfinance

13. **Mr. Goggins:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what action she is taking to support the use of microfinance in developing countries. [42510]

Mr. Foulkes: We believe that microfinance—savings and credit—can be a powerful tool to support the livelihoods of large numbers of poor people in developing countries. For the past ten years, the UK has provided increasing support to projects and institutions engaged in microfinance. Our current commitments to date and projects in the pipeline amount to about £60 million and we anticipate increasing resources in this field.

Emergency Relief

14. **Dr. Julian Lewis:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what proportion of the United Kingdom aid programme was devoted to emergency relief operations, and disaster preparedness and prevention programmes in 1997–98; and what provision she has made for 1998–99. [42511]

Clare Short: The Department for International Development (DFID) expenditure figures for the financial year 1997/98 are not finalised. However, we estimate that the proportion of the bilateral aid programme provided to disaster relief, emergency food aid, short-term refugee relief and disaster preparedness will be around 8 per cent. of total bilateral expenditure.

Full statistical information for 1997/98 will be published later in the year as the British Aid Statistics and I will place copies in both Houses. Adequate provision has been built into 1998/99 planning for both foreseeable relief needs and unforeseeable emergencies.

Bilateral Aid

15. **Mr. Gerald Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the top five recipients of United Kingdom bilateral aid, and the amounts paid to them in the year 1997–98. [42512]

Clare Short: The Department for International Development expenditure figures for the financial year 1997/98 are not finalised but the top five recipients will be India, Bangladesh, Uganda, Tanzania and Montserrat.

Full statistical information for 1997/98 will be published later in the year as the British Aid Statistics and copies will be placed in the library of both Houses.

Rwanda

16. **Mr. McNulty:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps her Department is taking to support conflict prevention and peacebuilding in Rwanda. [42513]

Clare Short: The focus of the UK support programme for Rwanda has moved away from emergency interventions towards longer term rehabilitation efforts. In close collaboration with the Government, we are implementing a £25 million rehabilitation package targeted on key Government priorities. But we need to do more.

Donors and Government of Rwanda are meeting in Stockholm on 3 June under the chairmanship of the World Bank, to discuss Rwanda's long-term external financing needs and initiatives to address debt. My Department is attending the meeting and will be advocating the need for flexible long-term support underpinned by a deeper, more transparent policy dialogue with Government on issues related to Governance and human rights. We will announce a new 3 year financial commitment for Rwanda at the Stockholm meeting.

Security Sector Reform

17. **Mr. Derek Twigg:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what actions her Department is taking to support security sector reform in developing countries. [42514]

Clare Short: Security sector reform is an important part of the work of my new Department. A security sector that is well tasked and managed can better serve the interests of all. But a military sector that is inappropriately tasked, badly managed and indisciplined can hinder development. We know from our surveys that for very poor people, decent law and order, and a safe and secure environment, are a top priority.

My Department has taken a number of important initiatives to address this problem. We are supporting an OECD initiative to incorporate greater transparency, civilian accountability and control of the security sector as part of development assistance.

I have had discussions with the Secretary of State for Defence on these issues. I gave evidence to the Defence Select Committee and am due to give evidence shortly to the Development Committee on this and related subjects.

Last month my Department sponsored a major seminar on security sector reform with the research group, Saferworld, that brought together a range of leading experts in this area. This seminar will lead to a substantial report later this year, setting out a range of practical ways in which the British government can support security sector reform in developing countries, both bilaterally and through the multilateral institutions.

Religious Freedoms

18. **Mr. Laurence Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent discussions she has had with heads of state of developing countries regarding the use of development assistance to support religious freedoms. [42515]

Clare Short: I frequently meet senior members of the governments of developing countries; my discussions with them cover issues related to the establishment of practical partnerships to work for the elimination of poverty.

All our work places a strong emphasis on human rights. Freedom of worship is a fundamental freedom. Persecution of people for their religious belief is a breach of international human rights conventions. Our human rights work for crises focuses on the human rights of poor and disadvantaged people this includes those who may be discriminated against because of their religion.

Sudan

19. **Mr. Hope:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps her Department has taken to provide humanitarian assistance to the people of Sudan; and if she will make a statement. [42516]

Clare Short: In February, we pledged £4 million to the United Nations 1998 Consolidated Appeal for Sudan. On 6 May this was increased to £5.23 million. This has been given to UN agencies and international NGOs in Sudan with the current crisis in Bahr El Ghazal region a key focus. I approved a further £5 million on 15 May which will be used over the coming months to meet urgent humanitarian needs in this region and wherever else they arise in Sudan.

The war is the direct cause of the current crises. The problem in providing humanitarian relief is not a lack of resources but lack of access. The Government of Sudan have approved increased flights and is willing to offer a ceasefire—which is the best solution to the problem of access. The SPLA has refused to consider a ceasefire. Without peace, humanitarian crises will recur.

Multilateral Agreement on Investment

20. **Mr. Dismore:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on progress on the multilateral agreement on investment and its impact on developing countries. [42517]

Clare Short: The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Ministers, meeting at the end of April, reaffirmed their commitment to a successful and timely conclusion of the negotiations on the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI), and to seeking broad participation in it. The next meeting of the negotiating group will be in October 1998. Ministers also affirmed their commitment to pursuing an active dialogue with non-member countries, including on their development interests. The independent study on the development implications of the MAI commissioned by my Department earlier this year concluded that the MAI could have a positive developmental impact, if appropriate arrangements are made for developing countries to accede to the Agreement. The OECD Secretariat is now carrying out further analytical work on the MAI and development. Officials from my Department are in close touch with the OECD Secretariat, and will continue to contribute actively as this analytical work moves forward.

Child Labour

21. **Mr. Rammell:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the outcome of the ILO Conference on the international convention on child labour. [42518]

Clare Short: The committee on Child Labour will be meeting between 3 and 16 June. The Conference is likely to adopt the report of the committee on 18 June. I will place a copy of the report in the Library of the House.

Jubilee 2000

22. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on progress made in relation to the Jubilee 2000 initiative. [42519]

Clare Short: Jubilee 2000 seeks the cancellation of the unpayable debt of developing countries by the year 2000. The campaign has been tremendously successful in raising public awareness of debt issues, helping to keep the international debate on debt alive. I was pleased to address some of their supporters who gathered in Birmingham at the time of the G8 Summit last month.

The UK Government are pressing for speedy and flexible implementation of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative, which also seeks the early remission of such countries' unpayable debt. One element of the Mauritius Mandate, launched last year by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, aims to ensure that by the year 2000 all eligible countries have embarked on the process which will lead to debt relief under the Initiative. I therefore welcome the agreement by leaders at the G8 Summit to encourage all eligible countries to take the policy measures needed to bring them into the HIPC process by then. But it is important to bear in mind that debt relief is not provided for its own sake, it must be linked to poverty reduction.

Rain Forests

23. **Mr. Sawford:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what is her Department's policy on the use of development assistance for the preservation of the rain forests; and if she will make a statement. [42520]

Clare Short: My Department's aim is the elimination of poverty through the promotion of sustainable development, which requires conservation of the environment. Our approach towards the conservation of rain forests and the problem of deforestation is to support work to improve management of forest resources in ways that lead to a range of benefits to poor communities as well as helping to secure the global environmental benefits that forests offer.

In the past year, DFID has also supported a number of important new initiatives, for example:

- a grant of £3 million to the Guyana Sustainable Human Development Project, which will benefit forest-dependent communities encircling the Iwokrama Rain Forest.
- a grant of £2 million to the UNDP's Global Programme on Forests: Forest Management to Support Sustainable Livelihoods Project, which will promote public and private sector partnerships for sustainable forest management.
- a grant of £400,000 to the Forest Resource Accounting (FRA) 2000 project—FAO's global assessment of the status and condition of forest resources.

DFID has played an active part in the development and implementation of the Action Programme on Forests endorsed by Heads of Government at the G8 Birmingham Summit and all other international forestry initiatives.

Details of my Department's forestry activities are set out in our publication: *forests* MATTER and our DFID Forestry Sector Projects, both of which are in the Libraries of the House and are available on request from DFID's Environment Policy Department.

Indonesia

26. **Mr. White:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on what aid is being given to Indonesia *(a)* by her Department and *(b)* by non-governmental organisations to alleviate the current economic crisis. [42523]

Clare Short: The most important step is implementation of political and economic reforms in Indonesia. This is critical if the reduction of poverty in recent years is not to be reversed and if benefits are to be more widely shared. The UK supports the IMF economic reform programme and is also contributing £5 million to the Asia Europe Meeting (ASEM) Trust Fund which will underpin the efforts of Asian Governments, including Indonesia, to combat the social effects of the crisis and reform their financial sectors. We have provided £375,000 of assistance to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to help with nutrition, hygiene and medical needs for the people of Irian Jaya; and continue to monitor the food situation more widely.

We are also providing support to trade union education. We are currently exploring urgently any additional measures, through civil society, which might bring effective help to the most vulnerable people suffering the effects of the crisis.

Sierra Leone

27. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the current level of aid being provided to Sierra Leone by *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* the EU. [42524]

Clare Short: Since the return of President Kabbah's democratically elected government, we have provided £1 million to re-establish core functions and services, £1 million for NGOs delivering humanitarian and development assistance, and £1 million to the ICRC to continue its humanitarian aid and protection work. The EC is providing 2 million ecu for seeds and tools and 200,000 ecu to help refugees in Guinea to return home.

We are looking at what more we can do to strengthen governance and bring immediate relief to the people. We hope in the future to be able to assist in demobilising and re-integrating ex-combatants.

European Union Development Council

Mrs. Dean: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the outcome of the European Union Development Council meeting on 18 May. [44496]

Clare Short: The Council discussed the development co-operation aspects of the EU's draft negotiating mandate for the renegotiation of the Lomé Convention, which covers EC aid, trade and development relations with 71 African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) States and expires in the year 2000. The Council held a useful discussion, resolving most of the outstanding issues on the development aspects of the mandate. Trade aspects are still to be agreed but we are aiming to have the mandate adopted at the General Affairs Council in June.

The Council agreed Conclusions on follow up to the 1993 Poverty Resolution and on follow up to the 1995 Gender Resolution. The Conclusions refer to experience in implementing the Resolutions and set out what more needs to be done to improve effectiveness in these key areas. Procedural Conclusions were also agreed on Microfinance, Indigenous Peoples, Evaluation, and Humanitarian Aid.

Ministers also discussed Rwanda, Nigeria, the nuclear test in India, Cuba's request to become an observer in the negotiations on the future of ACP-EU relations, aid untying, the DAC Chairmanship, the successor to the current administrator of UNDP, and a proposal to set up an expert group on migration. They also agreed conclusions on the situation in Southern Sudan, noting with extreme concern the grave situation there and the plight of more than 350,000 people in Bahr el Ghazal. The Conclusions reflect the fact that the Council feels that the root of the problem there is the long-term conflict and commit the EU to continuing to provide flexible assistance, urging other donors to do the same.

HEALTH

Breast Screening

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to include women of 64 years of age in the breast screening programme; and if he will make a statement. [43116]

Mr. Boateng: The National Health Service breast screening programme invites all women aged 50–64 to be screened by mammography every three years. Breast screening for women aged 65 and over is available three-yearly on request, and this is widely publicised by the NHS breast screening programme and Age Concern.

We are funding three pilot studies to evaluate the effectiveness of extending the breast screening programme to invite routinely women aged 65–69. These are due to end in 1999/2000. In view of the importance of this issue, we are now planning to ask the National Screening Committee, which advises Ministers on extensions to or modifications of existing screening programmes, to consider this matter in July. The Committee will assess the case for routinely inviting older women in the light of the evidence emerging from the pilot studies, and the workforce and other implications of extending the programme nationally.

Midwives

Mr. Alan Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to encourage health authorities and trusts to implement the National Health Service Executive recommendation of a minimum 'F' grade for midwives on the clinical grading scale. [43153]

Mr. Milburn: The National Health Service Executive recommended in 1995 (Executive Letter (95)77) that an "F" or "G" grade, or equivalent, would normally be appropriate for posts in which a midwife, regardless of the route to registration, has a defined caseload of women to whom she/he gives the full range of midwifery care. The Review Body for Nursing Staff, Midwives, Health Visitors and Professions Allied to Medicine recommended in January 1998 (paragraph 77) that

"where midwives' roles have changed in line with the criteria given in EL(95)77, their pay and grading should reflect the fact. We therefore recommend that the Health Departments ensure implementation of the agreement EL(95)77 at Trust level."

The Advance Letter promulgating the nurses' pay increase this year, to be distributed on 4 June, will draw this recommendation to the attention of employing authorities and ask them to act upon it.

NHS Trusts (Health and Safety)

Dr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if National Health Service commissioners are required to stipulate health and safety performance standards in their contracts with NHS trusts. [43737]

Mr. Milburn: National Health Service commissioners are not required specifically to stipulate health and safety performance standards in their contracts with NHS trusts. Guidance issued by the NHS Executive (Health Service Guidelines (97)6) commends the inclusion of health and safety performance in the contracting process.

Tuberculosis

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to monitor *(a)* links between human TB and bovine TB and *(b)* the incidence of TB; and if he will make a statement. [43683]

Ms Jowell: There are established procedures for reporting, investigating and treating cases of tuberculosis, including the screening of contacts. Guidance on these matters is contained in the reports of the Interdepartmental Working Group on Tuberculosis, which were published in July 1996, copies of which are available in the Library, and in the publications of the British Thoracic Society and other specialist groups. Additionally, Veterinary Officers notify local authority environmental health officers when a restriction of movement order is imposed on a herd of cattle which has shown positive reactors, so that contact tracing can ensue.

Cases due to *M-bovis* infection, the strain which infects badgers and cattle, are identified through culture of the infecting organism. Around 30 to 40 cases of human tuberculosis each year are confirmed to be due to *M-bovis* infection. These are mainly in older people who were exposed to bovine tuberculosis before sterilisation of milk and routine testing of herds for tuberculosis were introduced and are not thought to be due to recent transmission. However, as cases of bovine TB in cattle are increasing in the United Kingdom, this is something we are monitoring carefully.

Tuberculosis is a notifiable disease. The incidence of cases is monitored nationally and by health authorities, and surveillance of laboratory confirmed cases is conducted on a routine basis by the Public Health Laboratory Service (PHLS). There were 5,913 notifications of tuberculosis reported in England and Wales in 1997 (provisional figure).

The PHLS has taken steps to improve surveillance of tuberculosis, including resistant strains, and local initiatives by health authorities have been undertaken to improve completeness of notifications. In addition, the Department is funding the PHLS Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre to conduct a further 5-yearly survey of notifications of tuberculosis during 1998 to provide a more detailed picture of the disease in England and Wales.

Hospital Closures (Cornwall and Scilly)

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 18 May 1998, *Official Report*, column 265, what factors underlay the delays in considering proposals put forward by the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Health Authority. [43366]

Mr. Milburn: The proposals put forward by Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Health Authority remain under consideration by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. The decision will reflect the best interests of the people of Cornwall and will be announced when all the relevant factors and information have been properly scrutinised.

Emergency Contraception

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will take steps to ensure that women at risk of unwanted pregnancy use emergency contraception. [43453]

Ms Jowell: The Health Education Authority ran a major public awareness campaign on emergency contraception in 1995 and 1996. The campaign was coordinated by the Contraceptive Education Service (CES), which is funded by the Department. CES continues to promote awareness of emergency contraception and made this its focus during Contraceptive Awareness Week in February. Earlier this year CES launched a new pack containing leaflets, posters and "credit cards" giving key information, plus guidance for professionals providing an emergency contraceptive service.

User Groups

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidelines the NHS Executive has issued concerning procedures for health authority and NHS trust consultations with user groups. [43817]

Mr. Milburn: Health authorities are required to consult on proposals for substantial variations in service. Guidance on these consultations was set out in Executive Letter (90)185 and EL(96)17, copies of which are available in the Library.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance the NHS Executive has issued on procedures for users to chair health authority and NHS trust user groups. [43818]

Mr. Milburn: None.

Dental Services

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has held with dentists to encourage them to undertake work on the NHS. [43487]

Mr. Milburn: We are in regular contact with dentists and their representatives on a wide range of issues.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Western Sahara

Mr. Lepper: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment the Government have made of the current state of voter identification being undertaken by the United Nations Mission for a Referendum in Western Sahara; and what plans he has to provide a UK military contingent or other logistical support to MINURSO. [41773]

Mr. Fatchett: We are satisfied with progress made by MINURSO since the resumption of the Voter Identification Process in December 1997. The UN Secretary General reported on 13 April that 101,772 applicants have been identified, that fewer than 60,000 remain to be convoked, but the issue of the disputed tribes remains unresolved. We agree with the assessment of the UN Special Representative, Mr. Charles Dunbar, that delays mean it is possible that the Referendum will take place in 1999 rather than as originally scheduled on 7 December 1998.

We have no current plans to contribute personnel or logistical support to MINURSO at the current time.

Indonesia

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what mechanisms are in place to monitor the end use of British-made military equipment in Indonesia, separately identifying those relating to water cannon. [41545]

Mr. Fatchett *[holding answer 11 May 1998]:* No formal mechanisms exist at present for systematically monitoring the use that has been made of British defence equipment once it has been exported. Our Embassy in Jakarta does however report on the use of British-supplied defence equipment in the light of any information that they obtain.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to review his policy on arms sales to Indonesia. [43485]

Mr. Fatchett: All applications for defence sales to Indonesia, and to other countries, are considered case by case against the new criteria we introduced last year. In accordance with the criteria, we keep the situation in recipient countries under review.

Sierra Leone

Mr. Howard: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the letters which his Department has received from Sandline's solicitors indicating in each case (i) the date, (ii) the date of the response, (iii) to whom it was sent and (iv) who replied to it. [41726]

Mr. Robin Cook *[holding answer 12 May 1998]:* S. J. Berwin & Co, acting for Sandline International, wrote to me on 24 April. The Permanent Under-Secretary replied on 1 May. S. J. Berwin & Co also wrote to me on 8 May clarifying a reference in their letter of 24 April.

S. J. Berwin & Co wrote to the Permanent Under-Secretary on 8 May to say that they were releasing their letter of 24 April to the press.

I have also been sent a copy of a letter from S. J. Berwin & Co to the Chairman of Customs and Excise, and the Permanent Under-Secretary has been sent copies of letters to the editors of *The Sunday Telegraph* and *The Observer*.

Arms Exports

Mr. Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made towards an agreed EU Code of Conduct on arms sales; and if he will make a statement. [43865]

Mr. Fatchett: On 25 May, the General Affairs Council reached agreement on the text of an EU Code of Conduct for Arms Exports, which will be formally adopted at a future meeting of the Council. The text is annexed to the Council Conclusions, a copy of which will be placed in the House Library.

Agreement on the Code of Conduct is an important achievement, and fulfils the commitment given by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary to my. hon. Friend the Member for East Ham (Mr. Timms) on 28 July 1997, *Official Report*, columns 26–29. The detailed elaboration

of the eight EU Common Criteria agreed in 1991 and 1992 is a major step towards the establishment of high common standards for arms exports from all Member States. In addition the mechanism that requires Member States to circulate information on licence refusals and to consult before undercutting another Member State's denial is the first of its kind ever applied by a group of states to their conventional arms exports. It will help to ensure the criteria are applied in a consistent fashion and to produce a level playing field for British companies.

Our efforts to promote responsibility and transparency in conventional arms transfers will not end with agreement on the Code of Conduct. We will continue to take steps in support of these principles at both national and international level. Member States will have the opportunity to review the operation of the Code itself after a year and agree any necessary improvements.

I will make a further statement on the national implementation of the provisions of the Code following its formal adoption by the General Affairs Council.

Colombia

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the recent trends in human rights violations in Colombia; and what representations he has made to the Colombian Government on this issue. [43948]

Mr. Fatchett *[holding answer 1 June 1998]:* The recent upwards trend in violence in Colombia is of serious concern, as is the increasing number of attacks on human rights workers. We take every opportunity to express our concerns to the Colombian Government. Most recently, as EU Presidency, we made a demarche to the Colombian Government following the murders of two more human rights workers at the end of April. The new British Ambassador will take advantage of his introductory calls to raise again our human rights concerns with the Colombian Government.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received on action being taken to implement the arrest warrants against Fidel and Carlos Castano Gil, in respect of the assassinations of two CINEP human rights workers on 19 May 1997; and if he will make a statement. [43973]

Mr. Fatchett: We have received no representations with regard to the arrest warrants issued against Fidel and Carlos Castano Gil for their part in the murders of the CINEP human rights researchers. Britain, both as EU Presidency and bilaterally, has strongly urged the Colombian Government to pursue the arrest of these people with the utmost vigour.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received on the search of the Justice and Peace Office in Bogota on 13 May by the Colombian Army's Special Anti-Guerrilla Forces. [43946]

Mr. Fatchett *[holding answer 1 June 1998]:* We understand that the search of the offices of the human rights NGO, Justicia y Paz, was carried out under the supervision of the Colombian Fiscalia, the Prosecution Service. A local NGO has confirmed that the paperwork for the search was in order and that the Fiscalia, a civilian body, stopped the search from progressing to eight other organisations named on the warrant. Officials at the British Embassy in Bogota are in close touch with a number of local NGOs about this issue.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures have been taken by the Colombian Government to implement the recommendations made in the report by the High Commissioner for Human Rights at the 54 Session of the UNCHR. [43947]

Mr. Fatchett *[holding answer 1 June 1998]:* The Colombian Government have taken a number of steps in pursuit of objectives outlined in the recommendations of the UNCHR 54th Session. These include measures to further the peace process, such as authorising a number of Departmental Governors to negotiate regional peace agreements with guerrillas. The armed forces Commander has sent written and verbal instructions to regional commanders to desist from any form of cooperation with paramilitary groups—another recommendation by the UNCHR. The 20th Intelligence Brigade, subject of numerous allegations of human rights violations, has also been disbanded. However, a number of other recommendations made by the High Commissioner for Human Rights are unlikely to be addressed until the new Colombian Government are installed in August. In the meantime, we shall continue to monitor the situation through our Embassy in Bogota and by other means.

Nuclear Tests (South Asia)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on actions taken to reduce nuclear testing in South Asia following the Indian nuclear test. [43945]

Mr. Tony Lloyd *[holding answer 1 June 1998]:* As my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary made clear in his statement to the House on 1 June 1998, *Official Report*, columns 21–22, the UK nationally and through the G8, EU and UN Security Council has exerted and continues to exert strong diplomatic pressure on India to adhere to the CTBT and NPT without conditions, and enter into negotiations on a global treaty to end the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons. We have called upon Pakistan to do the same and made it clear that the best way to reduce tension in the region is to cease nuclear testing.

In addition to issuing EU Presidency statements immediately following the first Indian and Pakistani tests, we recalled our High Commissioners in New Delhi and Islamabad for consultations, and summoned the Indian and Pakistani High Commissioners here. Heads of EU Troika missions made demarches in New Delhi and Islamabad on 12 and 13 May respectively. The UN Security Council issued Presidential statements on 14 and 29 May, strongly deploring the Indian and Pakistani actions. The G8 Heads of Government issued a statement on 18 May condemning the Indian tests. In the wake of the subsequent Pakistani tests we have invited G8 Foreign Ministers to meet in London on 12 June.

The GAC issued a declaration on 25 May calling on India to take a number of arms control and non-proliferation measures. In addition, Member States of

the EU have agreed to work for deferral of consideration of International Financial Institution loans to India and to consider further measures should India not accede to the relevant non-proliferation agreements. The UK has additionally suspended certain high-level military visits and is reviewing contacts in the defence field.

We expect comparable measures to be agreed for Pakistan, following their tests.

Palestinian Authority

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he has taken during the United Kingdom presidency of the EU to increase the prosperity of the Palestinian people. [43833]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 1 June 1998]:* The EU remains the single largest donor of aid to the Palestinian Authority, contributing 444 million mecu (about £290 million) in financial assistance to the Palestinian Authority in the period 1993–1998. The UK Presidency is working to ensure that this commitment is maintained in future. At the instigation of the UK, the EU has engaged Israel in a dialogue on ways to improve the Palestinian economy. The Minister of State co-chaired a plenary session of the dialogue during his visit to the region in January.

Dependent Territories

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to review the procedures whereby grant support to the Dependent Territories is administered. [43474]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We are establishing a new Overseas Territories Department within the FCO which will provide a single focus and a direct point of contact for all our Overseas Territories. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development also plans to establish an Overseas Territories Unit which will administer DFID assistance to Anguilla, the British Virgin Islands, Montserrat, the Turks and Caicos Islands and St. Helena. The Dependent Territories Regional Secretariat in Barbados will be closing later this year.

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received on support for the Turks and Caicos Islands to assist them in dealing with large-scale unauthorised immigration from Haiti; and what response he has made. [43424]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Following representations from the Turks and Caicos Islands (TCI) Government, HMG contributed £200,000 towards a project managed by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) to regularise the immigration status of Haitians living in the TCI and to assist with the orderly repatriation of illegal immigrants. Under this project, which ended in April 1998 having achieved its objectives, 2,654 illegal migrants have been returned to Haiti since January 1997 and 973 others have had their immigration validated. Those returned to Haiti have been assisted with relocation expenses, skills training and small business grants. The TCI Department of Immigration has received assistance with training and a computerised migrant management system.

Congo

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he is making to the United Nations regarding the withdrawal of the United Nations investigation team from the Democratic Republic of Congo. [43727]

Mr. Fatchett: The UK and our European Partners fully endorsed the UN Secretary General's decision to withdraw the Investigative Team, although we did so with regret. We believe a thorough and impartial investigation into human rights violations could make a valuable contribution to the process of reconciliation, leading to long term stability, security and economic development in the Great Lakes region and as a whole.

The investigative team has continued its inquiries outside the Democratic Republic of Congo, and is currently drafting a report for the UN Secretary General. On the strength of the report and the Secretary General's recommendations, we will consider what further action might be appropriate.

Ponsonby Rule

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell), of 13 February 1998, *Official Report*, column *406*, on the Ponsonby rule, if he will provide the same information for those treaties laid before Parliament since 1 February. [43300]

Mr. Tony Lloyd *[holding answer 2 June 1998]:* A total of 9 treaties subject to the Ponsonby Rule have been laid before Parliament since 1 February 1998. They are listed. The last day of the 21 day period is indicated on the list. These treaties have all been laid with an Explanatory Memorandum (EM) bringing to the attention of Parliament the main features of the treaty with which it is laid.

Protocol to the agreement between the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Government of the Republic of South Africa for the promotion and protection of investments.

Publication reference—South Africa No. 1 (1998) Cm 3857

EM No. 21

Presented to Parliament—11 February 1998

Last date of 21 day period—13 March 1998

The European Charter of Local Self-Government

Publication reference—Miscellaneous No. 1 (1998) Cm 3884

EM No. 22

Presented to Parliament—2 March 1998

Last date of 21 day period—31 March 1998

Agreement between the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago concerning mutual assistance in relation to crime

Publication reference—Trinidad and Tobago No. 1 (1998) Cm 3900

EM No. 24

Presented to Parliament—27 March 1998

Last date of 21 day period—7 May 1998

Protocol to the agreement on cooperation and customs union between the European Economic Community and the Republic of San Marino consequent upon the accession of the Republic of Austria, the Republic of Finland and the Kingdom of Sweden to the European Union with Final Act

Publication reference—European Communities No. 1 (1998) Cm 3899

EM No. 23

Presented to Parliament—3 April 1998

Last date of 21 day period—14 May 1998

Protocol to the North Atlantic Treaty on the accession of the Republic of Poland

Publication reference—Miscellaneous No. 2 (1998) Cm 3929

EM No. 25

Presented to Parliament—7 April 1998

Last date of 21 day period—18 May 1998

Protocol to the North Atlantic Treaty on the accession of the Czech Republic

Publication reference—Miscellaneous No. 3 (1998) Cm 3930

EM No. 26

Presented to Parliament—7 April 1998

Last date of 21 day period—18 May 1998

Protocol to the North Atlantic Treaty on the accession of the Republic of Hungary

Publication reference—Miscellaneous No. 4 (1998) Cm 3931

EM No. 27

Presented to Parliament—7 April 1998

Last date of 21 day period—18 May 1998

Agreement between the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Government of the Kingdom of Belgium relating to the transmission of natural gas through a pipeline between the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Kingdom of Belgium

Publication reference—Belgium No. 1 (1998) Cm 3943

EM No. 28

Presented to Parliament—29 April 1998

Last date of 21 day period—9 June 1998

Agreement between the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Government of Japan for cooperation in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy

Publication reference—Japan No. 1 (1998) Cm 3948

EM No. 29

Presented to Parliament—8 May 1998

Last date of 21 day period—18 June 1998.

Iran

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is Her Majesty's Government's policy on the export of arms to Iran. [44492]

Mr. Fatchett: There has not been any change to current policy, as set out in the answer given by the Minister for State, my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd), to my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. King) on 28 January 1998, *Official Report*, columns *273–74*. We will not approve licences for any equipment where there is knowledge or reason to suspect that it would go to a military end-user to be used for military purposes.

However, this department has recently approved the issue by the Department of Trade and Industry of a licence for the export of industrial gas turbine parts to Iran for civil end use. This particular industrial engine has been developed from a military engine and is commonly used to drive pumps and electrical generators. The engine is not subject to export control when it is exported as a complete unit. However, when it is broken down into component form, a very small percentage of its parts are unchanged from their original form and, as military components, come within the scope of the UK's arms embargo and are controlled under Part III of Schedule 1 to the Exports of Goods (Control) Order 1994. However, we are satisfied that Iran does not possess any aircraft powered by the original military engine, and that the risk of the components being diverted to use by the Iranian military is minimal. We have therefore approved the export.

Hong Kong Elections

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment Her Majesty's Government have made of the Hong Kong legislative elections held on 24 May. [44493]

Mr. Fatchett: We welcome the fact that these elections have been held. The high turn-out demonstrates the determination of people in Hong Kong to play a full role in the democratic process. While we retain strong concerns about the framework for the elections, particularly the sharp reduction in the franchise for the functional constituencies, we believe that the conduct of the elections reflects well on the HKSAR Government and the independent Electoral Affairs Commission, which ensured strict adherence to the rules and fair treatment for all candidates.

These elections are a step towards a legislature elected entirely through universal suffrage. We hope that the HKSAR Government will build on this achievement and work towards early realisation of this goal.

Argentina

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what new exceptions there have been to the arms embargo on Argentina. [44494]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We have recently granted two exceptions to the embargo, one in respect of the sale of two hunting rifle barrels to a private individual in Argentina, another in respect of the sale of twenty deactivated weapons to an Argentine importer. These represent exceptions but not changes to the embargo.

China

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what restrictions apply with respect to arms sales to China other than those general criteria announced on 28 July 1997. [44495]

Mr. Fatchett: The EU introduced a ban on arms sales to China on 26 June 1989, but the scope of that ban has, in the absence of agreement on a common interpretation, been left for national interpretation. The UK interprets this ban to include:

lethal weapons such as machine guns, large calibre weapons, bombs, torpedoes, rockets and missiles; specially designed components of the above, and ammunition;

military aircraft and helicopters, vessels of war, armoured fighting vehicles and other such weapons platforms;

any equipment which might be used for internal repression.

All applications are considered case by case in the light of these criteria as the overall criteria governing defence exports announced by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary on 28 July 1997, *Official Report*, columns *26–29*.

St. Helena

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects to change the Governor of St. Helena. [44059]

Mr. Fatchett: We expect the next Governor of St. Helena to take up his or her appointment in 1999, when the present Governor's tour of duty is due to end.

Ascension Island

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs under what terms and conditions *(a)* the BBC and *(b)* the United States of America operate on Ascension. [44060]

Mr. Fatchett: The BBC, which runs a World Service relay station on Ascension, and other organisations on Ascension operate there on the basis that they meet the costs of the Administration and the cost of providing common services. They do this by means of an annual contribution to the common services budget prepared by Ascension Islands Services JV, the main supplier of common services. The BBC is the joint owner, with Cable and Wireless, of Ascension Island Services.

The terms and conditions covering the presence of the United States of America on Ascension are set out in a series of bilateral Agreements and Exchanges of Notes, between Her Majesty's government and the Government of the United States of America. Copies are available in the Libraries of the House.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Bees

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much his Department plans to spend on research into the control of the varroa parasite in each of the next three years. [43398]

Mr. Rooker: Committed expenditure on research into the control of the varroa parasite over the next three years is as follows:

1998–99: £215,109

1999–2000: £240,118

2000–01: £122,813.

Requirements for further research will be considered as these projects near completion.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what subsidies under the Common Agricultural Policy are available to bee-keepers; and if he will make a statement; [43394]

(2) how much money he received from the European Commission to support bee-keeping in the United Kingdom in each of the last five years; [43400]

(3) what regulations cover the distribution of funds allocated by the European Commission to bee-keeping. [43402]

Mr. Rooker: Council Regulation 1221/97 to improve the production and marketing of honey provides for reimbursement of up to 50 per cent. of Member States' expenditure on certain measures including technical assistance to bee-keepers and control of varroa and related diseases. The main aim of the Regulation is to alleviate the burden on industry caused by varroa. Commission Regulation 2300/97 (as amended) lays down the detailed rules to implement 1221/97.

The UK hopes to receive around 680,000 ecu (roughly £474,000) for 1997–98. This is the first year such funding has been available.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what the funding allocated by the European Commission in 1997 to support bee-keeping in the United Kingdom will be spent on; [43401]

(2) how much of the funding allocated by the European Commission in 1997 to support bee-keeping in the United Kingdom has been distributed to bee-keepers in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* Scotland. [43403]

Mr. Rooker: Funds requested from the European Commission will be used partly to finance the Governments' bee health programme. In particular, this will cover inspection and testing arrangements for varroa, training and advice on bee husbandry and research and development. No funds have yet been received.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what representations his Department has received concerning the funding allocated by the European Commission in 1997 to support bee-keeping in the United Kingdom; [43395]

(2) what representations his Department has received concerning the use of public funds to research the varroa parasite. [43396]

Mr. Rooker: We have received a number of representations on these issues.

Animal Welfare

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if it is his policy to seek to ensure that EU member states can introduce restrictions on exports in order to protect the health and welfare of animals. [42985]

Mr. Morley: I see no scope at present for a new initiative on these lines. Such restrictions have already been tested in the courts.

Chicken Imports

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what controls exist on the importation of chickens which have been fed on meat and bone meal. [43218]

Mr. Rooker: The UK is the only EC country to have prohibited the feeding of mammalian meat and bone meal (MBM) to all farmed livestock, including poultry. MBM produced to EC rendering standards can still be fed to non-ruminants in other Member States. All poultry must be imported into the UK in compliance with detailed

animal health rules. These rules do not include any provisions directly relating to the feed given to the poultry in the country of origin.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the maximum percentage of water allowed in chickens imported for sale. [43219]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 2 June 1998]:* For frozen whole chickens the standards laid down in the EC Poultrymeat Market Standards Regulations must be met by both domestic production and imports. These require that levels do not exceed the minium amounts technically unavoidable for water absorption during processing. These values are dependent upon the method of chilling and which of the two methods of analyses laid down in the Regulations are used. For the drip test method up to 1.5% of the weight of an air chilled chicken may be water; 3.3% for air spray chilling; and 5.1% for immersion chilling. For the chemical test, the weights are 0.1% air chilling; 2.0% for air spray chilling; and 4.5% for immersion chilling. If these limits are exceeded, the chicken must be labelled 'Water content exceeds EEC limit'.

Following the recent adoption of an amendment to the Council Regulation on poultrymeat marketing, the Commission is starting work on detailed rules on chicken cuts. Meanwhile the provisions of the Food Labelling Regulations apply which require that added water exceeding 5% of the finished product should be declared in the ingredients list.

Small Businesses

Mr. Page: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the regulations that have been removed or amended to help small businesses since 1 May 1997. [42782]

Mr. Morley: Between 1 May 1997 and 30 April 1998 one Statutory Instrument, the Potatoes Originating in The Netherlands Regulations 1997, resulted in a lower cost than under the previous regulations and another Statutory Instrument, the Animals and Animal Products (Examination for Residues and Maximum Residue Limits) Regulations 1997, in part led to reduced costs, while the Welfare of Animals (Transport) Order 1997, inter alia, simplified the legislative framework by removing 15 Statutory Instruments. These instruments were not targeted on businesses of a particular size but many affected are small ones. In addition, administrative changes to scheme forms and procedures were introduced to reduce the burden of paperwork on farmers.

Gluten-free Food

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to require that all gluten-free food products are so labelled. [43647]

Mr. Rooker: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to him on 21 May 1998, *Official Report*, columns *509–10*. The Government have no plans to make "gluten free" a compulsory statement on the labels of gluten free food products.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Vaccine Damage

Dr. Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the total cost of making an interim payment of £100,000 to all the vaccine-damaged children who received an original payment of £10,000. [43287]

Mr. Denham: The maximum total cost of making a payment of £100,000 to all recipients of the original £10,000 would be £79.5 million.

Income Support

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many applications for income support have been refused by reference to the habitual residence test in the last 12 months broken down by *(a)* ethnic background and *(b)* nationality. [43282]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the table.

Number of income support claimants who failed the habitual residence test between May 1997 and April 1998

Categories	*Number*
European economic area nationals	933
United Kingdom nationals	2,891
Other nationals	973
Total	4,797

Household Income

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of households with children in Wales have a household income below the United Kingdom average. [43596]

Mr. Keith Bradley: It is estimated that in 1995/96, just over seven in ten households with children in Wales had a household income below the Great Britain average.

Notes:

1. A child is defined as an individual aged under 16 or an unmarried 16 to 18 year old on a course up to and including 'A' level standard.
2. The FRS does not include data for Northern Ireland and so the reply uses Great Britain average income and not the UK average income.
3. This figure relates to both the before and after housing costs measures, regardless of whether or not the self-employed are included.

Source:

The data are taken from Households Below Average Income (HBAI) based on the Family Resources Survey (FRS). The 1995/96 financial year is the latest period for which data are available.

Widowers

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if the Government will review the implications of the Human Rights Bill [*Lords*] for gender discrimination against widowers within the social security system; and if he will make a statement. [43847]

Mr. Denham: I refer my hon. Friend to the written answer I gave to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (Mr. Gorrie) on 23 June 1997, *Official Report*, column *415*.

Means-tested Benefits

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people are currently dependent on means-tested benefits; and how many were in *(a)* 1978–79, *(b)* 1979–80, *(c)* 1981–82, *(d)* 1982–83, *(e)* 1986–87, *(f)* 1987–88, *(g)* 1991–92, *(h)* 1992–93, *(i)* 1996–97 and *(j)* 1997–98. [43919]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The information is not available in the format requested. Such data as are available are set out in the tables.

Beneficiaries of means tested benefits

Year	*Supplementary Benefit*[1]	*Family Income Supplement*[1]
1978–79	4,598,000	313,000
1979–80	4,370,000	n/a
1981–82	6,121,000	382,000
1982–83	7,070,000	526,000
1986–87	8,291,000	723,000
1987–88	8,205,000	794,000

[1] Family Credit replaced Family Income Supplement in April 1988. Income Support replaced Supplementary Benefit in April 1988

Beneficiaries of one or more means tested benefit

Year	*Beneficiaries in benefit units with one or more means-tested benefit*
1991–92	13,650,000
1992–93	14,550,000
1996–97	15,070,000

Notes:

1. Means tested benefits are Income Support, Income based Jobseeker's Allowance, Family Credit, Disability Working Allowance, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit.
2. Beneficiaries are defined as the claimant, their partner and any dependants.
3. Figures for one or more means tested benefit are rounded to the nearest ten thousand. All other figures are rounded to the nearest thousand.
4. Figures on one or more means-tested benefit are for May of each year and refer to benefit units, which may be a single person or a couple. Family Income Supplement data is given as at December 1978 for 1978–79, and April of each year thereafter. Figures are not held for 1979–80. Supplementary Benefit figures are for November in 1978–79 and 1979–80, December for 1981–82 and 1982–83, February 1986 for 1986–87, and May 1987 for 1987–88.
5. Overlap between benefits has been taken into account.
6. Adult dependants are defined as the partner of the claimant.
7. Family Income Supplement figures include estimates. Housing Benefit/Council Tax Benefit figures include estimates due to the data collection procedures in Scotland.
8. Disability Working Allowance was introduced in April 1992.
9. Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance replaced Income Support for the unemployed from October 1996.
10. Council Tax Benefit replaced Community Charge Benefit in April 1993.
11. Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit figures exclude cases where there is no entitlement because of non-dependant deductions.
12. Council Tax Benefit cases do not include second adult rebate cases.
13. Figures are not available on all means-tested benefits for 1997 therefore no figure is quoted for 1997–98.
14. Data on Housing Benefit and previous schemes providing financial assistance with domestic rent and rates cannot be broken down prior to 1988. Prior to 1983 financial assistance with rent and rates was provided under two separate schemes-Supplementary Benefit and the Local Authority rent rebate allowance schemes. Data on the Local Authority schemes are not available.
15. Samples sizes:
Supplementary Benefit: Supplementary pension cases 1 in 200;
Supplementary Allowance cases 1 in 50;
Income Support: 1 per cent. up to and including 1992, 5 per cent. thereafter;
Family Income Supplement: 10 per cent.;
Family Credit: 5 per cent.;
Disability Working Allowance: 100 per cent.;
Housing Benefit & Council Tax Benefit: 1 per cent.
16. n/a denotes not available.

Source:

1. Supplementary Benefit Annual Statistical Inquiries, 1978, 1979, 1981, 1982, 1986 and 1987.
2. Income Support Statistics Quarterly Inquiries, May 1991, May 1992 and May 1996.
3. Family Credit Statistics Quarterly Inquiry, November 1997.
4. Disability Working Allowance 100 per cent. count of claims.
5. Housing Benefit Management Information Statistics, annual 1 per cent. sample inquiries without Income Support taken at the end of May in each year given. Social Security Statistics, 1978, 1981, 1982, 1987 and 1988.

War Pensioners

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what changes have been made to the granting of compensation to war pensioners suffering from hearing difficulties since October 1996; and what plans she has for further changes. [43917]

Mr. Denham: There have been no changes to war pensions legislation on hearing loss since January 1993. The approach to the assessment of service related noise-induced sensorineural hearing loss for war pensions purposes has, however, been changed to bring it in line with the current scientific understanding of the subject. This change in approach took place in December 1996 and was based on the current understanding that the combination of sensorineural hearing losses due to noise and age are not more than additive. Claims were previously assessed on the basis that losses due to noise were more than additive, which resulted in assessments for service related noise-induced sensorineural hearing loss being increased with time to reflect the supposed interaction with age related hearing loss.

The current understanding has been confirmed by independent experts who reviewed the scientific evidence at the request of my noble Friend, the Baroness Hollis of Heigham. The review team also recommended that the matter be reviewed again in a year. My noble Friend has therefore asked the medical policy adviser to review the position and report to her in February 1999.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what changes have been made to rent allowances for war pensioners since October 1996; and what plans she has for further changes. [43916]

Mr. Denham: No changes have been made to this allowance since October 1996 apart from the uprating in line with the annual increase in the retail price index from April 1997 and April 1998. There are no plans for any changes to this allowance.

Under the War Pensions Scheme, a rent allowance may be payable in respect of the death of a member of the armed forces to a widow, widower or unmarried dependant who lived as the spouse of the member.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Roy: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will publish for each Great Britain local authority, a breakdown, for each of the last five years, of housing benefit overpayment, in terms of *(a)* numbers, *(b)* amounts for each category of claimant and fraudulent errors and *(c) (b)* expressed as a percentage of *(a)*. [41653]

Mr. Field: The information requested can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Incapacity Benefit

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the average time taken to deal with claims for incapacity benefit submitted by people in receipt of the jobseekers' allowance in Warrington, North constituency in the latest period for which figures are available. [43386]

Mr. Denham: The administration of Incapacity Benefit is a matter for Peter Mathison, Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Helen Jones, dated 2 June 1998:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking what is the average time taken to deal with claims for Incapacity Benefit (IB) submitted by people in receipt of jobseeker's allowance (JSA) in the Warrington North constituency.

Information is not available in the form requested. Such information as is available relates to the average time taken to process all claims for IB. We are unable to identify claims made by customers transferring from JSA.

The following table compares the national average in days for actual clearance times for IB claims with that for the Benefits Agency's North Cheshire District, which includes the Warrington North parliamentary constituency, during the three month period ending March 1998.

	North Cheshire	*National*
January 1998	10.0	12.9
February 1998	12.1	10.1
March 1998	9.0	10.1
Average	10.4	11.0

Prior to January 1998, Districts were not obliged to hold details of average actual clearance times and many Districts, including North Cheshire, did not record this information.

I hope that this is helpful.

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people in Warrington, North in receipt of jobseeker's allowance have submitted claims for incapacity benefit over the past 12 months; and what percentage of those claims have been disallowed because the applicant had insufficient national insurance contributions. [43387]

Mr. Denham: The administration of Jobseeker's Allowance and Incapacity Benefit is a matter for Peter Mathison, Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Helen Jones, dated 2 June 1998:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many people in Warrington North in receipt of Job Seekers' Allowance (JSA) have submitted claims for Incapacity Benefit (IB) over the past 12 months; and what percentage of those claims have been disallowed because the applicant had insufficient national insurance contributions.

The information is not available in the form requested. Such information as is available is provided in the following tables. Please note that the areas covered by the Employment Services and Benefits Agency in Warrington are not co-terminus.

Table One: Flows from the Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) claimant count to Incapacity Benefit (IB)

September 96 to August 97	*Flow*
Great Britain	254,500
Warrington Employment Services	760

Notes:

Flows from JSA to IB are defined as all claims where a claim for IB is made within 28 days of ending a spell of JSA. Claims are also counted as flows when spells of IB and JSA overlap by up to seven days. The Claimant Count data is taken from the joint unemployment and Vacancies On-line System (JUVOS) Cohort file IB Link, which is a database consisting of a 5% sample of computerised claims for unemployment related benefits based on the customers National Insurance number. This count excludes a small number of clerically processed cases.

Table Two: IB claims allowed and disallowed (due to contribution conditions)

September 96 to August 97	*Total Incapacity Benefit claims allowed (excluding Statutory Sick Pay cases)*	*Total Incapacity Benefit claims disallowed at outset (excluding Statutory Sick Pay cases)*	*Percentage of total claims disallowed due to insufficient National Insurance contributions (excluding Statutory Sick Pay cases)*
Great Britain	418,920	447,349	52%
Warrington Benefits Agency office	3,573	3,217	47%

Notes:

Data source is the 100% scan of the Benefit Computer system and it therefore excludes a small number of clerically processed cases.

I hope this is helpful.

Pension Provision Group

Mr. Pond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when she will publish the report of the independent Pension Provision Group, chaired by Tom Ross. [44497]

Ms Harman: The Group's Report will be published tomorrow, Thursday 4 June. Copies will be placed in the library. A summary of the Report's findings will be issued to all hon. Members.

The Pension Provision Group was set up last summer as part of the Government's wider Pensions Review, to provide an independent analysis of current and future patterns of pension provision. Their Report provides a clear and authoritative statement which will serve as an important background document for the pensions Green Paper which will be published later in the year.

I am grateful to all members of the Group for the time, commitment and expertise they provided and particularly to Tom Ross for his chairmanship.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Information

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if his Department operates a monitoring exercise of persistent inquirers for information. [42633]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 19 May 1998]:* From April 1997 to March 1998 the DfEE's Public Inquiry Unit handled over 150,000 telephone inquiries and over 25,000 items of correspondence.

The Department has no monitoring exercise of persistent inquiries for information. All requests for information are handled in line with the requirements of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information: second edition (1997) and the 6 Whitehall Standards. Procedures in place are outlined in 'Departmental Openness', DfEE's guidance on the Code. The guidance is comprehensive and is available to all staff. Some parts of the Department may have established named individuals as a first point of contact for frequent callers to facilitate an effective and efficient service.

New Deal (Young People)

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many people have had their benefits sanctioned under the New Deal for the Young Unemployed to date; what reasons have been given for the sanctioning; how many people his Department expects to sanction over the current financial year; and if he will make statement. [42569]

Mr. Andrew Smith *[holding answer 20 May 1998]:* Since the start of New Deal, around 170 cases have been referred to Independent Adjudication and approximately 35 sanctions have been applied. Main reasons for sanctions are failure to attend adviser interviews and leaving options early. New Deal is a client driven initiative and there are no estimates or targets for sanctions.

Rural Schools (Closures)

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment by what mechanisms his Department is informed of proposed closures of rural schools; if local education authorities are required to inform him of proposals to close such schools; what criteria he will use to assess the viability of such schools; and if he will make a statement. [43486]

Mr. Byers: If a local education authority proposes to close a school, it must publish a statutory proposal and send a copy of the published proposal to the Secretary of State. In the case of proposals to close a rural school, we announced in February that it was our policy to give notice to the local education authority that the proposals would need to be decided by the Secretary of State. In assessing the viability of the school, we will take into account the advice of Ofsted in relation to the standard of education provided at the school, and consider other relevant factors, including the capacity of the school and the projected demand for places. We shall, of course, take account of all relevant factors in reaching a decision but the presumption will be against closure, and proposals will therefore be approved only when we are convinced that this is the best option.

Grammar Schools (Admissions)

Mr. Salter: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what arrangements will be made, under the School Standards and Framework Bill, for the conduct of parental ballots on the admission arrangements of grammar schools. [44431]

Mr. Byers: The Department has today issued draft regulations for consultation which detail how parents will be able to petition and ballot over the future of grammar schools' selective admission arrangements. We are issuing at the same time the associated draft order designating grammar schools. Copies of the draft regulations and order are being sent to all grammar schools, all local education authorities, and a number of representative national organisations, seeking comments by 31 July. Copies have also been placed in the Library.

Student Loans

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the second competition to sell more of the student loan portfolio. [44432]

Dr. Howells: I have today announced the launch of a second competition to sell student loan debt. This is the continuation of a policy first announced in September 1996, and follows the successful completion of the first sale in March 1998 when NatWest Markets was the chosen bidder for a loan portfolio in the region of £1 billion.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer said in his statement of 10 July 1997, *Official Report*, columns *607–08*, that we would continue the policy of student loan debt sales, underlining our commitment to developing a wide range of public-private partnerships which involve a transfer of risk to the private sector. This sale transfers to the private sector much of the risk of loans defaulting. It also helps us to meet our pledge to work within the spending plans already announced for the first two years of our term.

We have appointed the merchant bank N. M. Rothschild and Sons and the commercial lawyers Lovell White Durrant as advisers to the sale. It makes sense to do so as they also acted as advisers to the first debt sale and have extensive knowledge and experience of these types of transactions. They will assist us in running a vigorous competition and help ensure the participation of some of the world's most prestigious financial institutions so that we obtain the most competitive bid possible.

We aim to sell loans of a similar value or greater than in the first sale. All the loans sold will have been made

under the current scheme. None of the new income contingent loans available from the beginning of the 1998–99 academic year will be involved.

Playgroups

Mr. Dawson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what support he plans to make available to playgroups in the current financial year. [43422]

Ms Estelle Morris *[holding answer 1 June 1998]:* I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) on 12 May 1998, *Official Report*, column *86*. In addition, pre-schools and playgroups have benefited from the extra £6 million for childcare places announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 6 May, and the Pre-School Learning Alliance will receive a grant of £1.6 million for training and other support for pre-schools.

SCOTLAND

Consultation Papers

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the consultation papers published since 1 May 1997 giving the date of publication, closing date for submissions and the number of respondents. [42253]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 1 June 1998]:* The Scottish Office and Associated Departments have issued a total of 24 consultation papers since 1 Mary 1997, as summarised in the table.

	Number
The Scottish Office	
Agriculture, Environment and Fisheries Department	151
Constitution Group	1
Department of Health	6
Development Department	36
Education and Industry Department	17
Finance Group	1
Home Department	26
Executive Agencies	
Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency	1
Student Awards Agency for Scotland	2

A comprehensive list has been deposited in the House Library.

Prestwick Airport

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much money from public funds has been allocated to Prestwick Airport since BAA sold it in 1992. [42853]

Mr. McLeish *[holding answer 19 May 1998]:* The following amounts have been allocated to Prestwick Airport from public funds since 1992:

Enterprise Ayrshire

£974,000: environmental improvements to airport surrounds/car parks (includes money for works which were not of direct benefit to the operation of the airport itself);

£426,000: contribution to link between railway station and airport; and

£97,000: contribution to freight development activity including consultancy/market feasibility studies.

Approval has also been given for funding of up to £1.5 million in relation to the development of airfreight facilities. No sum has yet been paid.

Strathclyde Passenger Transport/Strathclyde Regional Council

£500,000: contribution to railway station.

European Regional Development Fund

£367,033: contribution to railway station; and

£63,260: contribution to airport approach radar.

Regional Selective Assistance

£240,000: contribution by October 1994 to acquisition and operation of Prestwick Airport.

Other assistance

Other local authority assistance was provided in the form of loans/shares. These have all been repaid/redeemed for the same amount.

Special Advisers

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many special advisers, political advisers and other political appointees are working in his Department; and what was the position in the last full year of the last Government. [43331]

Mr. Dewar: There are currently three Special Advisers in my Department. In the last full year of the previous administration there were two.

Smoking

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of teenage *(a)* boys and *(b)* girls in Scotland was smoking tobacco (i) in 1988 and (ii) at the most recent date for which figures are available. [44021]

Mr. Galbraith: The information requested is detailed in the table. The most recent year for which figures are available is 1996.

Percentage of teenage smokers in Scotland by sex: 1988 and 1996

Percentage

	1988	*1996*
Boys		
Regular smokers	10	14
Occasional smokers	4	8
Girls		
Regular smokers	14	14
Occasional smokers	6	9

Source:
Social Survey Division of the Office for National Statistics

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the estimated gross cost of anti-smoking campaigns in Scotland aimed at children and young people has been since 1988; and what assessment he has made of the impact of the campaigns on teenage *(a)* boys and *(b)* girls. [44020]

Mr. Galbraith: Since its inception in 1991, the main responsibility for mounting national anti-smoking campaigns has rested with the Health Education Board for Scotland (HEBS)—information on expenditure prior to that is not held centrally. Details of expenditure in this area since 1991–92 are set out in the table, which shows the total amount spent on all anti-smoking activities and the proportion attributable to the teenage population (many of the campaigns are not targeted at any specific age group).

Expenditure by HEBS on anti-smoking campaigns aimed at teenagers since its inception

£

Year	*Total expenditure on smoking (actual)*	*Expenditure attributable to teenage smoking*
1991–92	431,020	Not available
1992–93	2,254,513	993,000

Expenditure by HEBS on anti-smoking campaigns aimed at teenagers since its inception

£

Year	Total expenditure on smoking (actual)	Expenditure attributable to teenage smoking
1993–94	1,469,816	883,000
1994–95	790,424	432,000
1995–96	851,616	341,000
1996–97	702,077	270,000
1997–98	743,504	330,000
1998–99	[1]708,000	236,000

[1] Intended

Activities and outputs by HEBS are subject to extensive developmental research and are implemented only if the approaches in question have been proven to be effective. Activities are also the subject of post-implementation evaluation to confirm that the message has been communicated successfully. The relatively high response rate to the HEBs Smokeline by teenagers suggests that the messages are being received and responded to. There has been no gender-based assessment by HEBS of the impact of its campaigns on teenagers.

European Structural Funds

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the costs were in each year since 1990 of administering European Structural Fund programmes in Scotland. [43843]

Mr. Macdonald: The information is set out in the table.

Expenditure £ million

Financial year	The Scottish Office[1]	Programme Executives[2]	Objective 3 Sector Managers[3]
1990–91	0.285	nil	nil
1991–92	[4]0.409	nil	nil
1992–93	[4]0.573	0.134	nil
1993–94	[4]0.788	0.233	nil
1994–95	[4]1.114	0.541	0.119
1995–96	1.045	1.098	0.486
1996–97	1.005	1.449	0.493
1997–98	0.965	1.528	0.328

[1] The Scottish Office: Implementing Authority responsibility and programme management for three 5b Programmes in Borders, North and West Grampian and Rural Stirling and Upland Tayside

[2] Programme Executives: Responsibility for implementation of Highlands and Islands Objective 1, Eastern and Western Scotland Objective 2, and Dumfries and Galloway Objective 5b Programmes

[3] Objective 3: Organisations contracted to undertake certain implementation activities for Objective 3 in Scotland (Scottish Enterprise; Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations; Further Education College Sector for Scotland; and Convention of Scottish Local Authorities)

[4] For these years the expenditure includes work carried out on general European issues. It is not possible to identify costs relating solely to Structural Funds activities.

Royal Deeside Partnership

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many requests he has received to meet the Royal Deeside Partnership; and if he will make a statement. [43210]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 1 June 1998]:* None.

Education Expenditure

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was his Department's budget for primary and secondary education (i) in cash terms and (ii) in real terms in 1998–99 prices and (iii) as a percentage of Scottish gross domestic product in each year since 1978–79; and how much was spent per *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary pupil in Scotland in (1) cash terms and (2) real terms, in 1998–99 prices, in each of these years. [43391]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 2 June 1998]:* Direct expenditure by The Scottish Office on the education of school pupils in public sector schools is limited to grants made available to Jordanhill School, a grant-aided school; and Dornoch Academy and St. Mary's Episcopal Primary School, which are both self-governing schools. The annual recurrent grant for these schools in financial year 1997–98 totalled £3.283 million.

Details of actual expenditure per primary and secondary pupil in local authority schools in Scotland are given in the table. Financial year 1996–97 is the latest year for which information is currently available. The figures, which are derived from local authority financial returns, do not include the cost of home to school transport, school meals, education authority central administration costs and loan charges.

Net current expenditure per pupil in Scotland

£

Year	Outturn prices		1998–99 prices	
	Primary	Secondary	Primary	Secondary
1978–79	409	698	1,328	2,267
1979–80	488	811	1,358	2,256
1980–81	636	1,021	1,496	2,401
1981–82	746	1,165	1,600	2,498
1982–83	816	1,266	1,633	2,534
1983–84	877	1,366	1,678	2,613
1984–85	913	1,466	1,663	2,670
1985–86	958	1,562	1,654	2,697
1986–87	1,036	1,764	1,736	2,957
1987–88	1,143	1,996	1,819	3,176
1988–89	1,247	2,263	1,860	3,375
1989–90	1,385	2,496	1,931	3,480
1990–91	1,508	2,683	1,947	3,463
1991–92	1,633	2,834	1,982	3,439
1992–93	1,766	2,914	2,057	3,393
1993–94	1,773	2,846	2,006	3,221
1994–95	1,797	2,874	2,003	3,204
1995–96	1,854	2,942	2,012	3,192
1996–97[1]	[1]1,846	[1]2,937	[1]1,949	[1]3,101

[1] Provisional figures

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was *(a)* the standard spending assessment and *(b)* actual spending per pupil in (1) primary and (2) secondary education in (i) 1978–79, (ii) 1979–80, (iii) 1986–87, (iv) 1987–88, (v) 1996–97 and (vi) 1997–98 for Scotland as a whole and each local authority. [43900]

Mr. Dewar: The term Standard Spending Assessment reflects arrangements in England. The equivalent in Scotland is the Grant Aided Expenditure Assessment. GAEs are available only from financial year 1986–87 but not all of the components of the Education GAE are in a form which identifies separately primary and secondary education. Information on each Scottish local authority's GAE assessment for all services, including all relevant Education sub-services, is published by The Scottish Office annually in "Grant-Aided Expenditure" (the Green Book).

Details of actual expenditure for the years requested (except for 1997–98 which is not yet available) are given in the tables. Table 1 reflects the former local authority structure in Scotland, and table 2 the unitary structure which came into effect in 1996–97. The figures, which are derived from local authority financial returns, do not include the cost of home to school transport, school meals, education authority central administration costs, and loan charges.

Table 1—net current expenditure per pupil

£

Region	1978–79		1979–80		1986–87		1987–88	
	Primary	Secondary	Primary	Secondary	Primary	Secondary	Primary	Secondary
Borders	448	601	542	726	1,091	1,601	1,170	1,777
Central	384	676	447	776	961	1,644	1,082	1,894
Dumfries and Galloway	365	682	456	798	946	1,712	1,071	1,971
Fife	412	675	486	782	1,017	1,705	1,136	1,992
Grampian	407	730	508	835	1,021	1,724	1,101	1,939
Highland	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	1,029	1,618	1,169	1,866
Lothian	421	722	507	880	1,030	1,844	1,109	2,044
Strathclyde	413	697	487	795	1,059	1,781	1,163	2,008
Tayside	374	677	450	812	981	1,766	1,100	2,029
Orkney	565	658	731	820	1,249	2,007	1,565	2,125
Shetland	407	901	543	1,151	1,391	2,503	1,551	2,874
Eilean Siar (Western Isles)	486	840	570	988	1,079	2,121	1,402	2,410
Scotland	409	698	488	811	1,036	1,764	1,143	1,996

Table 2—net current expenditure per pupil

£

Council	1996–97 (provisional)	
	Primary	Secondary
Aberdeen City	1,805	2,971
Aberdeenshire	1,857	2,759
Angus	1,799	2,835
Argyll and Bute	2,382	3,003
Clackmannanshire	1,761	2,932
Dumfries and Galloway	1,766	2,905
Dundee City	1,793	3,142
East Ayrshire	1,820	2,747
East Dunbartonshire	1,659	2,599
East Lothian	1,764	2,923
East Renfrewshire	1,571	2,611
Edinburgh City	1,774	3,011
Falkirk	1,755	2,751
Fife	1,754	2,674
Glasgow City	2,007	3,322
Highland	1,966	3,135
Inverclyde	1,780	2,844
Midlothian	1,882	2,880
Moray	1,513	2,799
North Ayrshire	1,750	2,776
North Lanarkshire	1,836	2,854
Perth and Kinross	1,750	2,751
Renfrewshire	1,785	2,909
Scottish Borders	1,896	3,039
South Ayrshire	1,723	2,780
South Lanarkshire	1,893	2,863
Stirling	1,947	2,987
West Dunbartonshire	1,912	2,833
West Lothian	1,830	2,945
Orkney	2,711	3,778
Shetland	2,497	5,777
Eilean Siar (Western Isles)	2,531	4,553
Scotland	1,846	2,937

NHS Trusts (Expenditure)

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the value of capital expenditure (i) in real terms, (ii) in cash terms and (iii) as a percentage of total NHS expenditure in Scotland undertaken by National Health Service trusts in *(a)* 1991–92, *(b)* 1992–93, *(c)* 1993–94, *(d)* 1994–95, *(e)* 1995–96, *(f)* 1996–97 and *(g)* 1997–98. [43905]

Mr. Galbraith: The information requested is set out in the table.

	Real terms £000	*Cash terms £000*	*Percentage of total NHS expenditure*
1991–92	0	0	0
1992–93	15,429	13,596	0.3
1993–94	85,611	77,632	1.9
1994–95	166,678	153,420	3.6
1995–96	223,358	211,296	4.8
1996–97	167,091	162,698	3.7
1997–98	123,948	123,948	3.1

Executive Search Agencies

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much his Department has spent in *(a)* real and *(b)* cash terms on executive search agencies for appointments to non-departmental bodies in each year since 1991–92, broken down by non-departmental body. [43914]

Mr. Dewar: The information is as follows:

£

Body	Expenditure Cash terms	Expenditure Real terms
1994–95		
Water Authorities	38,590	41,814
1995–96		
Scottish Homes	7,159	7,548
1996–97		
Crofters Commission	6,462	6,618
Scottish Homes	7,339	7,516
Royal Botanic Garden	6,462	6,618
Macaulay Land Use Research Institute / Scottish Crop Research Institute	12,995	13,309
Caledonian MacBrayne	6,462	6,618
1998–99		
Royal Botanic Garden	7,352	7,352

There was no significant expenditure in the other years covered by the Question.

Standard Grade Examinations

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many 16-year-olds gained five standard grades in each year since 1993. [43897]

Mr. Dewar: Information on presentations and awards at Standard Grade is held for school year cohorts and this does not always correspond with pupil age. The tables show how many pupils in S4 were presented for five or more Standard Grade examinations in each year since 1993 and how many S4 pupils gained five or more Standard Grade awards in each year since 1993 at levels 1–3.

S4 Pupils presented for five or more Standard Grades

1993 : 54,897

1994 : 55,698

1995 : 60,483

1996 : 62,097

1997 : 60,871

S4 Pupils who gained five or more Standard Grades at levels 1–3

1993 : 28,472

1994 : 30,665

1995 : 33,553

1996 : 34,884

1997 : 35,489.

NHS Administration Costs

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the total costs associated with administration in the NHS in Scotland (1) in real terms, (2) in cash terms and (3) as a percentage of total NHS expenditure in Scotland in *(a)* 1978–79, *(b)* 1979–80, *(c)* 1982–83, *(d)* 1983–84, *(e)* 1986–87, *(f)* 1987–88, *(g)* 1991–92, *(h)* 1992–93, *(i)* 1993–94, *(j)* 1994–95, *(k)* 1995–96, *(l)* 1996–97 and *(m)* 1997–98. [43906]

Mr. Galbraith: The information requested is set out in the table.

Year	Real terms (£000)	Cash terms (£000)	Percentage of total NHS expenditure
1978–79	240,722	78,266	9.7
1979–80	182,601	69,288	7.3
1982–83	243,025	128,191	7.4
1983–84	238,283	131,518	7.1
1986–87	293,124	184,639	8.9
1987–88	287,049	190,437	8.4
1991–92	390,592	339,839	9.3
1992–93	390,469	353,996	9.1
1993–94	429,121	400,344	9.7
1994–95	493,781	467,611	10.8
1995–96	500,471	486,964	11.1
1996–97	490,077	490,077	11.2
1997–98	n/a	n/a	n/a

n/a = not available

The introduction of capital charges in 1991–92, to reflect the costs of using capital resources, is reflected in that and subsequent years' expenditure.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much was paid (i) in real terms, (ii) in cash terms and (iii) as a percentage of total NHS expenditure in Scotland to NHS trust chairs and non-executive directors in each year since 1991–92. [43912]

Mr. Galbraith: The information is set out in the table.

Year	Real terms (£000)	Cash terms (£000)	Percentage of total NHS expenditure
1992–93			
Chairman	38	36	0.001
Non executive directors	77	70	0.002
1993–94			
Chairman	330	308	0.008
Non executive directors	799	745	0.018
1994–95			
Chairman	754	714	0.017
Non executive directors	1,778	1,684	0.039
1995–96			
Chairman	879	855	0.020
Non executive directors	2,047	1,992	0.045
1996–97			
Chairman	854	854	0.020
Non executive directors	1,982	1,982	0.045

Departmental Publicity

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total expenditure in *(a)* real and *(b)* cash terms of his Department and its agencies on publicity for (1) 1996–97 and (2) 1997–98; what estimate he has made of such expenditure for 1998–99; and if he will break these figures down to indicate expenditure on (i) advertising and (ii) press and public relations. [43931]

Mr. Dewar: The details are:

£ million

	Cash terms	Real terms
1996–97		
Advertising	4.8	5.0
Press and public relations[1]	1.8	1.9
Total	6.6	6.9
1997–98		
Advertising	3.7	3.8
Press and public relations[1]	1.8	1.9
Total	5.5	5.7

[1] These figures are the running costs of The Scottish Office Information Directorate, the Press Office of Historic Scotland and the Communications Branch of the Scottish Prison Service

Advertising budgets for 1998–99 have not been finalised. The total estimated running costs for The Scottish Office Information Directorate, Historic Scotland and the Scottish Prison Service for 1998–99 is £2m.

Nursery Education

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many four-year olds were in *(a)* private, *(b)* voluntary and *(c)* local authority pre-school provision in each (i) pilot area of the nursery voucher scheme and (ii) local authority area in each year since 1995–96; [43892]

(2) how many *(a)* parents and *(b)* eligible children in each (i) pilot nursery area of the nursery voucher scheme and (ii) local authority area have not taken up the entitlement to apply for a voucher in each year since 1995–96; [43893]

(3) what proportion of nursery vouchers have been redeemed in *(a)* the public, *(b)* the private and *(c)* the voluntary sector in each year since 1995–96. [43894]

Mr. Dewar: Pre-school education vouchers were piloted in the school year 1996–97 and are operating on a simplified basis across Scotland for school year 1997–98 only. The voucher information requested is set out in the tables. Information on nursery places in 1995–96 is given in the answer to questions 43895 and 43898.

Voucher redemption statistics for pilot year 1996–97

Local authority	No. of eligible children[1] for whom application for vouchers was not received	No. of eligible children attending LA centres[2]	No. of eligible children attending private sector centres[3]	No. of eligible children attending voluntary sector centres[3]	No. of eligible children attending other centres[4]	% share of voucher redemption within LA centres[5]	% share of voucher redemption within private sector centres	% share of voucher redemption within voluntary sector centres	% share of voucher redemption within other centres
Argyll & Bute	+32(2)	216	48	162	0	52	11	37	0
East Renfrewshire	86	650	142	207	22	64	14	20	2
Highland	23	319	0	121	0	73	0	27	0
North Ayrshire	28	986	198	504	0	58	12	30	0
Total	105	2,171	388	994	22	61	11	27	1

[1] Eligible children were those born between 1 March 1993 and 28 February 1994 and those born between 1 September 1992 and 28 February 1993 whose entry to primary school had been deferred

[2] The estimated number of children was derived from an estimate (particularly in the part local authority areas of Argyll & Bute) by the pilot authorities—more applications were received from Argyll and Bute than estimated

[3] The split between the private and voluntary sectors is based on information provided by the centres about the sector to which they belong

[4] Other centres in the pilot areas were represented by one independent school

[5] Some children attended more than one centre in more than one sector

[6] The percentage share of redemption is based on the number of voucher parts redeemed by each sector

Voucher redemption statistics for transitional year 1997–98[1]

Local authority	No. of eligible children[2] for whom application for vouchers was not received	No. of children attending LA centres[3]	No. of children attending private sector centres[3]	No. of children attending voluntary sector centres[3]	No. of children attending other centres[4]	% share of voucher redemption within LA centres[5]	% share of voucher redemption within private sector centres	% share of voucher redemption within voluntary sector centres	% share of voucher redemption within other centres
Aberdeen City	160	2,001	348	50	155	80	12	2	6
Aberdeenshire	151	2,395	696	843	54	70	14	15	1
Angus	65	1,211	95	24	0	92	7	1	0
Argyll and Bute	68	539	163	340	41	55	15	25	5
Clackmannanshire	17	563	50	11	0	91	7	2	0
Dumfries and Galloway	73	1,692	86	85	4	94	3	3	1
Dundee City	94	1,528	263	14	0	85	14	1	0
East Ayrshire	53	1,296	117	113	0	87	7	6	0
East Dunbartonshire	38	664	346	221	79	54	25	14	7
East Lothian	36	1,109	52	19	18	94	4	1	1
East Renfrewshire	26	776	148	212	20	69	12	17	2
Edinburgh City	242	3,994	652	103	367	79	12	2	7
Falkirk	36	1,640	61	4	0	97	3	1	0
Fife	168	4,023	91	0	29	97	2	0	1
Glasgow City	587	5,811	740	245	244	84	10	3	3
Highland	138	1,943	373	563	0	74	10	16	0
Inverclyde	42	729	165	153	20	72	12	14	2
Midlothian	36	952	41	25	0	94	4	2	0

Voucher redemption statistics for transitional year 1997–98[1]

Local authority	No. of eligible children[2] for whom application for vouchers was not received	No. of children attending LA centres[3]	No. of children attending private sector centres[3]	No. of children attending voluntary sector centres[3]	No. of children attending other centres[4]	% share of voucher redemption within LA centres[5]	% share of voucher redemption within private sector centres	% share of voucher redemption within voluntary sector centres	% share of voucher redemption within other centres
Moray	63	749	89	218	47	70	8	18	4
North Ayrshire	52	1,014	432	272	0	61	21	15	0
North Lanarkshire	221	2,830	828	250	3	75	20	5	1
Orkney Islands	11	235	48	41	0	82	11	7	0
Perth and Kinross	71	1,204	285	78	54	79	15	3	3
Renfrewshire	67	1,547	288	166	2	79	13	8	1
Scottish Borders	45	941	132	113	3	83	9	7	1
Shetland Islands	16	245	0	114	0	79	0	21	0
South Ayrshire	52	987	145	71	31	81	11	5	3
South Lanarkshire	250	2,032	1,204	671	28	58	29	13	1
Stirling	28	809	108	56	47	86	8	2	4
West Dumbartonshire	47	1,090	65	14	0	94	5	1	0
West Lothian	56	2,055	117	0	0	95	5	0	0
Western isles	16	24	76	200	0	10	24	66	0
Total	3,025	48,628	8,304	5,289	1,246	80	12	6	2

[1] Information based on take up of vouchers for the spring term as at 1 May 1998
[2] Eligible children are those born between 1 March 1994 and 28 February 1995 and those born between 1 September 1993 and 28 February 1994 whose entry to primary school had been deferred
[3] The split between the private and voluntary sectors is based on information provided by the centres about the sector to which they belong
[4] Other centres include independent, grant aided special and self governing schools
[5] Some children attend more than one centre in more than one sector
[6] The percentage share of redemption is based on the number of voucher parts redeemed by each sector
[7] Less than

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many nursery places have been made available to *(a)* three and *(b)* four-year olds in (i) public, (ii) private and (iii) voluntary sectors in each local authority area in each year since 1995–96. [43896]

Mr. Galbraith: The latest available information is for November 1996 and is set out in the table. Details are not available on the ages of children using the places, but a survey in 1994 showed that, of all children attending Day Nurseries, Private Nursery Schools, Nursery Centres and Community Nurseries, around 32 per cent. were aged 3 and 28 per cent. aged 4. At that time the average number of children attending was about 45 per cent. higher than the number of places, as some children attended part-time.

Nursery places by local authority and sector at November 1996

	Sector				
Local authority	Local authority Termtime places	Private Termtime places	Voluntary Termtime places	Other/not known Termtime places	Total Termtime places
Aberdeen, City	0	33	0	1,286	1,319
Aberdeenshire	0	495	0	15	510
Angus	0	386	44	0	430
Argyll and Bute	18	109	68	0	195
Clackmannanshire	110	112	0	0	222
Dumfries and Galloway	0	142	42	0	184
Dundee, City	0	590	104	0	694
East Ayrshire	134	200	0	0	334
East Dunbartonshire	0	259	0	0	259
East Lothian	0	206	69	0	275
East Renfrewshire	529	0	0	271	800
Edinburgh, City of	0	2,705	131	0	2,836
Eilean Siar	0	10	10	0	20
Falkirk	276	388	0	0	664
Fife	0	425	0	0	425
Glasgow, City of	1,080	2,185	365	13	3,643
Highland	0	452	40	0	492
Inverclyde	224	233	0	112	569
Midlothian	0	206	0	0	206
Moray	0	124	0	0	124
North Ayrshire	290	612	96	0	998
North Lanarkshire	363	838	133	0	1,334
Orkney Islands	0	38	0	0	38
Perth and Kinross	0	634	0	24	658
Renfrewshire	603	413	48	37	1,101
Scottish Borders	0	298	44	0	342

Nursery places by local authority and sector at November 1996

Local authority	Sector: Local authority Termtime places	Private Termtime places	Voluntary Termtime places	Other/not known Termtime places	Total Termtime places
Shetland Islands	0	24	0	0	24
South Ayrshire	63	378	0	0	441
South Lanarkshire	893	805	97	0	1,795
Stirling	588	303	0	0	891
West Dunbartonshire	269	235	0	0	504
West Lothian	0	433	49	0	482
Scotland	5,440	14,271	1,340	1,758	22,809

Note:
This table does not include places in Children and Family Centres and other centres where the focus of the work is normally the provision of special support to children and parents

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many *(a)* three and *(b)* four-year olds were in receipt of pre-school education in each year since 1995–96; and how many have registered in each year since August 1996, broken down by (i) type of provision and (ii) unitary authority; [43895]

(2) how many *(a)* three and *(b)* four-year olds there were in nursery schools and classes in each education authority in each year since 1991–92; what estimates he has made of the numbers in (i) 1998–99 and (ii) 1999–2000; and what percentage each of these figures represent of all children in the authority area. [43898]

Mr. Dewar: The Government's target is to provide a place for every child in the pre-school year whose parents want one by this winter with staged targets for children in the ante-pre-school year thereafter. The information requested about the number of three and four year old children in nursery schools and classes in each local authority area since 1991–92 is set out in the table. Information on the pre-school year children who have received education from registered non-school providers since 1996–97 has been provided in response to questions 43892–94 which I have answered today. Projected participation rates for 1998–99 and 1999–2000 cannot be confirmed until authorities have finalised plans for the expansion of places through partnership with centres in the voluntary and private sectors. Preliminary returns from local authorities for 1998–99 however indicate that they expect to educate approaching 90% of grant eligible pre-school year children in their own registered centres. Information on the number of children who have registered for a place is not held centrally.

Education authority and independent nursery schools and classes Total number of three and four year old pupils by EA[1]

	1991–92[2]				1992–93				1993–94			
	3 year olds	% of all 3 year olds	4 year olds	% of all 4 year olds	3 year olds	% of all 3 year olds	4 year olds	% of all 4 year olds	3 year olds	% of all 3 year olds	4 year olds	% of all 4 year olds
Scotland	12,921	20	33,117	50	12,886	20	34,783	53	13,822	21	34,738	54
Aberdeen City	—	—	—	—	653	26	1,832	72	644	25	1,826	73
Aberdeenshire	—	—	—	—	157	5	1,550	49	203	7	1,636	53
Angus	—	—	—	—	108	8	559	42	79	6	626	47
Argyll & Bute	—	—	—	—	83	8	108	10	83	8	146	14
Clackmannanshire	—	—	—	—	178	29	472	73	199	31	427	71
Dumfries & Galloway	—	—	—	—	172	10	1,070	59	175	10	1,061	60
Dundee City	—	—	—	—	720	39	1,382	72	744	39	1,431	78
East Ayrshire	—	—	—	—	517	31	1,128	66	493	30	1,104	66
East Dunbartonshire	—	—	—	—	91	6	186	13	83	6	162	11
East Lothian	—	—	—	—	317	29	868	79	360	32	829	74
East Renfrewshire	—	—	—	—	165	13	469	39	199	17	447	36
Edinburgh, City of	—	—	—	—	1,696	34	3,571	71	1,739	34	3,664	74
Eilean Siar[4]	—	—	—	—	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Falkirk	—	—	—	—	323	19	1,170	67	366	20	1,216	71
Fife	—	—	—	—	879	20	3,710	81	754	17	3,651	81
Glasgow City	—	—	—	—	3,299	42	5,430	68	3,526	45	5,496	71
Highland	—	—	—	—	129	5	762	29	114	4	720	27
Inverclyde	—	—	—	—	191	16	467	39	239	21	443	38
Midlothian	—	—	—	—	244	23	721	65	360	34	755	72
Moray	—	—	—	—	67	6	667	60	95	8	559	49
North Ayrshire	—	—	—	—	100	6	345	18	103	6	337	19
North Lanarkshire	—	—	—	—	538	13	1,649	38	657	15	1,558	37
Orkney Islands	—	—	—	—	49	18	143	51	37	14	172	61
Perth & Kinross	—	—	—	—	235	16	577	37	248	16	673	44
Renfrewshire	—	—	—	—	374	17	1,122	50	373	16	994	44
Scottish Borders	—	—	—	—	50	4	433	35	28	2	453	37
Shetland Islands	—	—	—	—	94	29	161	50	84	25	180	55
South Ayrshire	—	—	—	—	105	8	506	37	152	11	463	34
South Lanarkshire	—	—	—	—	258	7	820	21	287	7	752	19
Stirling	—	—	—	—	171	18	544	56	167	17	624	65
West Dunbartonshire	—	—	—	—	419	32	932	67	523	41	927	70
West Lothian	—	—	—	—	504	25	1,429	69	708	35	1,406	68

	1994–95				1995–96			
	3 year olds	% of all 3 year olds	4 year olds	% of all 4 year olds	3 year olds	% of all 3 year olds	4 year olds	% of all 4 year olds
Scotland	13,622	20	36,214	56	13,193	20	36,278	54
Aberdeen City	539	20	1,873	74	580	22	1,826	70
Aberdeenshire	155	5	1,667	54	144	5	1,763	56
Angus	86	6	747	55	109	8	835	59
Argyll & Bute	61	6	149	14	91	9	130	12
Clackmannanshire	209	32	495	79	171	25	495	76
Dumfries & Galloway	187	10	1,305	72	178	10	1,352	74
Dundee City	795	42	1,392	74	721	39	1,426	75
East Ayrshire	500	29	1,097	67	466	28	1,094	65
East Dunbartonshire	133	9	173	12	115	9	195	14
East Lothian	293	24	979	86	340	28	918	75
East Renfrewshire	177	15	440	37	189	16	408	35
Edinburgh, City of	1,711	33	3,711	73	1,727	33	3,642	70
Eilean Siar[4]	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Falkirk	342	18	1,292	70	344	18	1,324	69
Fife	766	17	3,749	83	793	18	3,539	79
Glasgow City	3,602	44	5,357	69	3,259	40	5,546	68
Highland	125	5	779	26	130	5	705	25
Inverclyde	206	18	471	41	183	16	445	38
Midlothian	311	28	866	82	321	31	845	76
Moray	91	8	642	55	53	4	687	58
North Ayrshire	134	7	316	18	150	8	325	17
North Lanarkshire	637	14	1,583	37	590	14	1,430	32
Orkney Islands	45	17	178	64	41	16	160	60
Perth & Kinross	278	17	845	54	279	17	915	56
Renfrewshire	422	18	1,106	47	392	16	1,072	44
Scottish Borders	31	2	450	35	39	3	530	40
Shetland Islands	67	19	173	50	91	26	197	55
South Ayrshire	112	8	465	34	152	11	483	36
South Lanarkshire	478	12	773	20	355	9	848	21
Stirling	157	16	629	64	212	21	661	65
West Dunbartonshire	445	34	914	72	428	33	887	69
West Lothian	527	25	1,598	79	550	26	1,595	76

	1996–97[5]				1997–98[5]			
	3 year olds	% of all 3 year olds	4 year olds	% of all 4 year olds	3 year olds	% of all 3 year olds	4 year olds	% of all 4 year olds
Scotland	13,243	21	37,182	57	14,316	23	39,351	62
Aberdeen City	553	22	1,948	75	628	25	1,822	72
Aberdeenshire	147	5	1,991	63	273	9	2,084	68
Angus	157	11	919	65	127	10	1,063	77
Argyll & Bute	77	8	192	19	134	14	269	27
Clackmannanshire	147	22	499	73	197	31	450	69
Dumfries & Galloway	221	12	1,362	75	253	15	1,422	79
Dundee City	757	42	1,424	78	691	40	1,312	73
East Ayrshire	428	27	985	60	455	30	1,054	67
East Dunbartonshire	92	7	168	13	344	27	615	48
East Lothian	345	30	983	81	445	40	923	80
East Renfrewshire	249	22	499	43	230	21	616	54
Edinburgh, City of	1,540	30	3,676	71	1,627	33	3,506	69
Eilean Siar[4]	0	0	0	0	0	0	25	8
Falkirk	266	15	1,246	66	201	11	1,364	75
Fife	781	18	3,555	81	782	19	3,520	81
Glasgow City	3,357	44	5,151	64	3,104	41	4,814	63
Highland	124	5	917	34	268	11	1,515	57
Inverclyde	188	18	405	36	225	21	433	41
Midlothian	281	28	842	80	287	29	783	78
Moray	68	6	671	56	89	8	683	59
North Ayrshire	151	8	685	37	172	10	798	45
North Lanarkshire	638	15	1,330	31	875	21	1,706	41
Orkney Islands	49	20	212	83	38	16	214	89
Perth & Kinross	356	23	1,058	66	348	24	1,067	69
Renfrewshire	376	16	1,115	47	319	15	1,079	47
Scottish Borders	36	3	535	41	127	10	794	63
Shetland Islands	85	25	208	58	63	19	197	58
South Ayrshire	190	14	756	55	200	16	831	63

	1996–97[1]				1997–98[2]			
	3 year olds	% of all 3 year olds	4 year olds	% of all 4 year olds	3 year olds	% of all 3 year olds	4 year olds	% of all 4 year olds
South Lanarkshire	339	9	846	20	523	14	1,250	31
Stirling	225	23	680	67	311	33	683	70
West Dunbartonshire	453	36	756	59	504	41	787	63
West Lothian	567	27	1,568	74	476	23	1,672	80

[1] Source—schools census
[2] Information collected in September with age as at 31 December. It is intended that the information will, in future, be collected on the basis of the ante pre-school and pre-school year
[3] New education authority breakdowns unavailable
[4] Formerly known as Western Isles
[5] Account should also be taken of the pre-school year children who were receiving pre-school education at registered non-school providers

Bees

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much money he received from the European Commission to support bee-keeping in Scotland in each of the last five years. [43399]

Mr. Macdonald: I refer the hon. Member to the reply by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food today, *Official Report*, column *247*.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much his Department plans to spend on research into the control of the varroa parasite in each of the next three years. [43397]

Mr. Macdonald: Research and development on the control of varroasis is dealt with by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on a UK basis.

Student Loans

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much his Department has received in repaid student loans from SED grant-awarded students in each year since the inception of student loans in *(a)* cash terms and *(b)* real terms based on 1998–99 prices. [43901]

Mr. Dewar: Receipts in respect of student loan repayments are aggregated on a UK-wide basis. The proportion representing repayments by Scottish domiciled students is set out in the table, on a financial year basis.

Student Loan Repayments

£000

Financial Year	Actual receipts	Receipts at 1998–99 prices
1991–92	104	127
1992–93	572	665
1993–94	1,464	1,661
1995–96	2,858	3,195
1996–97	5,435	5,912
1997–98	10,523	11,120

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many mandatory student awards were paid by his Department in each academic year since 1978–79; how many student loans were paid in each year since their inception; and what is the total value of those awards and loans in *(a)* cash terms and *(b)* real terms based on 1998–99 prices. [43899]

Mr. Dewar: It is not possible to provide the information in precisely the form requested. Statistics on student awards and loans offered are held on the basis of academic years, but aggregate information on actual payments is available only in financial years. Subject to that, the information requested is set out in the following table:

	Student awards			Student loans		
Year	Award holders (academic year) Awards	Grant (actual) (financial year) £000	Grant (1998–99 prices) (financial year) £000	Number (academic year) loans	Loan payments (actual) (financial year) £000	(1998–99 prices) (financial year) £000
1978–79	53,150	44,600	145,224	—	—	—
1979–80	53,600	54,500	152,053	—	—	—
1980–81	54,925	60,600	142,894	—	—	—
1981–82	56,986	64,900	139,537	—	—	—
1982–83	57,465	65,300	131,059	—	—	—
1983–84	58,460	68,300	131,004	—	—	—
1984–85	58,196	64,100	117,067	—	—	—
1985–86	58,555	61,000	105,617	—	—	—
1986–87	58,220	63,200	106,221	—	—	—
1987–88	59,041	64,800	103,404	—	—	—
1988–89	61,531	71,200	106,492	—	—	—
1989–90	65,872	79,700	111,422	—	—	—
1990–91	70,742	90,100	116,630	22,200	8,134	9,897
1991–92	80,535	117,300	142,728	29,300	13,861	16,866
1992–93	89,618	136,900	159,863	39,600	22,182	25,903
1993–94	99,181	162,700	184,626	50,100	34,787	39,475

Year	Student awards: Award holders (academic year) Awards	Grant (actual) (financial year) £000	Grant (1998–99 prices) (financial year) £000	Student loans: Number (academic year) loans	Loan payments (actual) (financial year) £000	(1998–99 prices) (financial year) £000
1994–95	105,621	170,900	191,052	58,600	55,231	61,744
1995–96	107,263	163,200	177,519	66,900	81,268	88,398
1996–97	110,587	152,300	160,948	73,000	93,302	98,600

Notes:
1. Student loan payments are aggregated on a UK-wide basis with the Scottish share representing a pre-determined proportion.
2. From academic year 1991–92 the award holder figures include the extension of the scheme to include full-time Higher National Certificate courses.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of the full loan per SED student in *(a)* 1998–99, *(b)* 1999–2000 and *(c)* 2000–2001, in (i) cash terms and (ii) real terms based on 1998–99 prices. [43903]

Mr. Dewar: The maximum rates at which student loans are payable are determined annually and are the same for all home students, regardless of their domicile within the United Kingdom. The rates for academic year 1998–99 are set out in the table, those for subsequent years have yet to be determined. There are two separate groups of rates—one for students who entered higher education in or before academic year 1997–98 or fall to be treated as having done so, and another for new entrants in academic year 1998–99.

Student loan rates for 1998–99

	£
Continuing students	
Full year students living:	
at home	1,325
elsewhere	1,735
elsewhere[1]	2,145
Final year students living:	
at home	970
elsewhere	1,265
elsewhere[1]	1,565
New students	
Full year students living:	
at home	2,325
elsewhere	2,735
elsewhere[1]	3,145
Final year students living:	
at home	1,970
elsewhere	2,265
elsewhere[1]	2,565

[1] London

Private Finance Initiative

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what private finance initiative schemes his Department has approved in each year since their inception; and on what date each of these schemes were approved. [43921]

Mr. Dewar: The information requested is set out in the table.

PFI projects approved by the Secretary of State for Scotland

Procuring agency	*Project description*	*Date approved*
The Scottish Office	The Skye Bridge	1992
Law Hospital NHS Trust	Hospital Information Support System	October 1995
Falkirk College	Stirling Further Education Centre	July 1996
Perth and Kinross Healthcare NHS Trust	Integrated Healthcare Information System	December 1996
Yorkhill NHS Trust	Hospital Information Support System	December 1996
The Scottish Office	M6 DBFO	December 1996
Grampian Health Board	Stonehaven Community Hospital	January 1997
West Lothian College	Livingston Further Education Centre	June 1997
Dundee City Council	Baldovie Waste to Energy Plant	July 1997
Scottish Prison Service	Bowhouse Prison	July 1997
Hairmyres and Stonehouse Hospitals NHS Trust	Hairmyres Hospital	August 1997
Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh NHS Trust	Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh	August 1997
Ayrshire and Arran Community Healthcare NHS Trust	Cumnock Community Hospital	August 1997
Law Hospital NHS Trust	Law Hospital	September 1997
Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd.	Inverness Airport	February 1998

Notes:
1. All Health Board projects with a capital value above £500,000, NHS Trust Information Management and Technology projects over £1 million and NHS Trust non-IM&T projects with a capital value above £4 million require to be approved by the Management Executive for the NHS in Scotland on behalf of the Secretary of State. This list does not include those projects which are within Trust and Health Board delegated limits
2. This list does not include water and sewerage projects which are not approved by the Secretary of State at project level

Legal Aid

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the 20 firms earning most from *(a)* civil and *(b)* criminal legal aid in (i) 1996–97 and (ii) 1997–98, the number of fee earners per firm and the fees per fee earner. [43909]

Mr. Dewar: The total earnings for the 20 solicitors' firms earning most from legal aid in 1996–97 is shown in the Scottish Legal Aid Board's Annual Report. The breakdown of these figures for 1996–97 and 1997–98 is not available in the form requested. However, the Scottish Legal Aid Board have provided figures on the basis of sums due to solicitors' firms in 1996–97. These vary from the total figures in the Annual Report which show sums actually paid and include Advice and Assistance. The figures are shown in the tables. The figures for 1997–98 are not yet available.

The Scottish Legal Aid Board does not hold information on the number of fee earners in a firm. This may well be larger than the number of practitioners registered with the Board for legal aid purposes. The figure shown for average fee per practitioner in the table is simply the total of fees earned by the firm divided by the number of practitioners listed with the Board. It is not a measure of the fees earned per practitioner in that firm.

Firm	*No. of practitioners[1] listed with board who undertook civil legal aid*	*Fees[2] payable £*	*Average fees per practitioner £*
Civil			
Drummond Miller	24	827,017	34,459
Ross Harper and Murphy	32	561,122	17,535
Balfour and Manson	15	474,333	31,622
Brodies	17	465,323	27,372
Caesar and Howie	22	317,607	14,437
Blair and Bryden	27	308,911	11,441
Unwin Rasmusen	7	258,407	36,915
Robert Carty	15	195,212	13,014
Livingstone Brown	6	176,281	29,380
Trainor Alston	13	154,722	11,902
Mckay and Norwell	8	133,027	16,628
Lockharts	5	126,372	25,274
Aberdein Considine	8	113,268	14,159
George Mathers and Co.	8	98,917	12,365
Ness Gallagher and Co.	9	88,947	9,883
The McKinstry Company	5	86,620	17,324
Hughes Dowdall	7	81,357	11,622
Fleming and Reid	2	80,252	40,126
W. G. Boyle	5	76,836	15,367
A. C. Miller and Mackay	5	72,913	14,583
Criminal			
Ross Harper and Murphy	36	2,101,828	58,384
More and Co.	17	1,513,436	89,026
Bruce Short and Co.	8	1,008,064	126,008
Gilfedder and McInnes	15	945,915	63,061
Adams	10	941,813	94,181
Ian McCarry	28	928,725	33,169
Sinclairs	7	831,764	118,823
Gallen and Co.	9	781,429	86,825
Robert Kerr	5	740,857	148,171
J. C. Hughes and Co.	8	733,353	91,669
McAfee	3	723,479	241,160
George Mathers and Co.	15	687,944	45,863
Milligan Telford and Morrow	6	676,217	112,703
Grady and Co.	3	661,300	220,433
Turnbull McCarron	2	617,749	308,875
McCourts	11	616,063	56,006
Blair and Bryden	23	596,633	25,941
Beltrami and Co.	6	591,594	98,599
Guarino and Kirk	4	579,119	144,780
Ness Gallagher and Co.	10	573,975	57,398

Notes:

[1] Where a firm wishes a qualified solicitor to act as a "nominated solicitor" for the firm, that solicitor must have his details recorded in the Board's Practitioner System, and payments to be made to that solicitor for legal aid work done can then be directed to the firm. The "number of practitioners" therefore represents the number of solicitors in the firm recorded in the Board's practitioner system. The Board is aware that not all solicitors who perform legal aid work are recorded with it as practitioners

[2] Including VAT and excluding outlays

Medical Negligence

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many outstanding medical negligence claims there are currently in each health board area; for what amount; and if he will make a statement. [43918]

Mr. Galbraith: The number of outstanding medical negligence claims for each health board area is set out in the table:

Health Boards	*Number of cases*
Argyll & Clyde	125
Ayrshire & Arran	76
Borders	12
Dumfries & Galloway	34
Fife	72
Forth Valley	70
Grampian	77
Greater Glasgow	404
Highland	62
Lanarkshire	136
Lothian	212
Orkney	3
Shetland	6
Tayside	129
Western Isles	7
State Hospital	1
Common Services Agency	15
Scottish Ambulance Service	2
Total	1,443

It is not possible to predict the actual amounts as the level of settlement is generally not known until an agreement between the parties has been reached. It is for individual health authorities to determine the annual provision for claims likely to be settled against them in any one year. Details of that provision will be provided in Trusts and Health Board annual accounts. The accounts for 1997–98 are currently in the process of being completed and have yet to be submitted to the Department.

Prisoners

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the average prison population of each Scottish

prison in *(a)* 1978–79, *(b)* 1979–80, *(c)* 1986–87, *(d)* 1987–88, *(e)* 1996–97 and *(f)* 1997–98; and what percentages of inmates were incarcerated for (i) violent and (ii) non-violent offences. [43910]

Mr. McLeish: Financial year information on prison population in the Scottish Prison Service estate is available only from 1983–84. Moreover, statistical information by offence was not collected historically in relation to the average daily prison population; details of main offence were previously recorded only in the reception information. However, an investigation of recent data suggests that an estimated 40–50% of sentenced prisoners have a main crime which would be defined as a 'violent' offence. For the purposes of this response 'violent' offences include, for example, homicide, serious assault, possession of an offensive weapon, robbery, threats and petty assault.

The tables provide details of the available information.

Table 1: Average daily prison population, Scotland, 1986–87, 1987–88, 1996–97 and 1997–98

Year	*Number*
1986–87	5,566
1987–88	5,421
1996–97	5,992
1997–98	[1]6,059

[1] Provisional

Table 2: Average daily prison population in Scottish penal establishments, 1986–87, 1987–88, 1996–97 and 1997–98, by establishment

Establishment	*1986–87*	*1987–88*	*1996–97*	*[1]1997–98*
Aberdeen	183	178	180	201
Barlinnie (incl. Unit)	1,195	1,036	1,213	1,208
Castle Huntly	103	126	105	107
Cornton Vale	187	177	173	166
Dungavel	136	137	93	100
Dumfries	149	130	144	147
Edinburgh	772	638	725	728
Friarton[2]	64	72	71	60
Glenochil[2]	506	566	563	585
Greenock	192	166	250	242
Inverness	105	102	126	140
Longriggend	278	259	166	151
Low Moss	351	350	357	362
Noranside	73	89	127	118
Penninghame	70	69	58	60
Perth	575	482	452	472
Peterhead (incl. Unit)	178	141	202	221
Polmont	384	415	478	473
Shotts (incl. Unit)	65	286	466	471
Shotts (National Induction Centre)	—	—	43	46
Legalised police cells	2	1	1	1
Total[3]	5,566	5,421	5,992	6,059

[1] Figures for 1997–98 are provisional

[2] Young offenders serving detention centre sentences are included in the figures for 1986–87 and 1987–88. Such sentences were abolished in Scotland on 1 November 1988

[3] Components may not add to totals due to rounding

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many women were committed to the Scottish prison system in *(a)* 1978–79, *(b)* 1979–80, *(c)* 1986–87, *(d)* 1987–88, *(e)* 1996–97 and *(f)* 1997–98; and what percentages were incarcerated for (i) violent and (ii) non-violent offences. [43911]

Mr. McLeish: The information provided in the table relates to female direct sentenced receptions to the Scottish prison system by category of main crime. For the purposes of this response 'violent' offences include, for example, homicide, serious assault, possession of an offensive weapon, robbery, threats and petty assault.

Direct sentenced female receptions to Scottish prison system, 1978–79, 1979–80, 1986–87, 1987–88, 1996–97 and 1997–98, by main crime category

Year	*Total number of direct sentenced female receptions*	*Percentage violent*	*Percentage non-violent*
1978–79	350	15	85
1979–80	364	13	87
1986–87	522	8	92
1987–88	593	7	93
1996–97	603	17	83
1997–98	566	16	84

Class Sizes

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many and what percentage of children were taught in classes of more than 31 pupils in *(a)* 1991–92, *(b)* 1992–93, *(c)* 1993–94, *(d)* 1994–95, *(e)* 1995–96, *(f)* 1996–97 and *(g)* 1997–98; and if he will estimate how many will be taught in such classes in 1998–99. [43904]

Mr. Dewar: Statistics on class size in primary schools are collected biennially. The available information is given in the table. Schools have been allocated to their current Education Authority. Information on individual class sizes in secondary schools is not collected centrally. There are no estimates held centrally of class sizes for 1998–99.

Education authority primary schools
Number and percentage of pupils in primary mainstream classes with more than 31 pupils[1]

Year	*Number of pupils in classes of more than 31 pupils*	*Percentage of pupils in classes of more than 31 pupils*
1991–92	44,617	10.1
1993–94	47,203	10.8
1995–96	51,204	11.7
1997–98[2]	58,141	13.2

[1] Includes a small number of classes with more than one teacher

[2] Provisional

Pupils

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list *(a)* the total number of pupils on school rolls and *(b)* the pupil-teacher ratio for (i) primary and (ii) secondary schools in each local authority area in Scotland for each academic year from 1978–79 to 1997–98. [43902]

Mr. Dewar: The available information for years in which the data were collected is set out in the tables.

Education authority secondary schools
Number of pupils and pupil/teacher ratios by education authority

	1997		1996		1995		1994		1993		1992	
	Total primary pupils	pupil/ teacher ratio	Total primary pupils	pupil/ teacher ratio	Total primary pupils	pupil/ teacher ratio	Total primary pupils	pupil/ teacher ratio	Total primary pupils	pupil/ teacher ratio	Total primary pupils	pupil/ teacher ratio
Scotland	314,223	13.2	315,912	13.1	316,253	12.9	314,779	12.9	311,176	12.8	302,986	12.6
Standard Code for Education Authority												
Aberdeen City	11,138	12.9	11,074	12.9	11,071	13.0	11,038	12.6	10,844	12.5	10,578	12.0
Aberdeenshire	15,114	13.6	15,231	13.8	15,341	14.0	15,148	13.5	15,031	13.7	14,650	13.4
Angus	7,262	12.8	7,287	13.0	7,208	12.8	7,127	12.6	7,089	12.8	6,925	13.0
Argyll and Bute	5,614	12.6	5,639	12.4	5,730	12.6	5,687	12.5	5,605	12.3	5,511	12.3
Clackmannanshire	2,951	13.4	2,927	13.4	2,944	13.3	2,934	13.3	2,904	13.1	2,979	12.6
Dumfries and Galloway	9,600	12.1	9,584	12.7	9,522	11.9	9,467	12.2	9,400	12.3	9,105	12.0
Dundee City	8,983	13.1	8,978	12.3	8,842	11.8	8,811	11.8	8,649	11.9	8,457	11.9
East Ayrshire	7,926	13.5	7,963	13.5	7,938	13.0	7,868	13.3	7,665	13.0	7,848	12.6
East Dunbartonshire	8,664	14.1	8,754	13.9	8,794	14.0	8,756	13.9	8,585	13.7	8,442	13.7
East Lothian	4,853	13.5	4,751	13.4	4,745	13.1	4,609	13.2	4,594	13.0	4,498	13.1
East Renfrewshire	6,789	14.0	6,758	14.1	6,687	13.9	6,652	14.0	6,498	13.8	6,261	13.7
Edinburgh, City of	18,714	13.5	18,706	13.4	18,350	12.8	18,209	12.9	18,031	12.7	17,528	12.7
Eilean Siar	2,030	9.3	2,113	9.5	2,145	9.5	2,242	9.8	2,225	9.6	2,249	9.9
Falkirk	8,619	13.4	8,667	13.5	8,701	13.6	8,736	13.7	8,635	13.7	8,409	13.7
Fife	22,938	13.4	23,095	13.4	23,149	13.4	22,699	13.4	22,413	13.5	21,652	13.3
Glasgow City	29,380	13.5	29,222	12.4	29,357	12.3	29,464	12.1	29,274	12.0	28,793	11.7
Highland	14,743	11.8	14,960	11.8	15,253	12.0	15,154	12.2	14,916	12.2	14,446	11.8
Inverclyde	5,906	13.5	5,948	13.6	6,018	13.1	6,032	12.9	6,045	13.0	5,956	12.8
Midlothian	5,368	13.2	5,403	13.6	5,361	13.3	5,357	13.3	5,256	13.2	5,163	12.7
Moray	5,700	12.5	5,664	12.2	5,659	11.8	5,635	12.1	5,511	12.1	5,382	11.5
North Ayrshire	9,155	13.6	9,183	13.4	9,283	13.4	9,331	13.2	9,156	13.3	8,494	13.0
North Lanarkshire	23,057	13.5	23,407	13.4	23,757	13.3	23,948	13.2	23,731	13.2	23,031	13.3
Orkney Islands	1,425	10.5	1,440	10.9	1,459	10.9	1,439	10.7	1,448	10.8	1,412	10.5
Perth and Kinross	7,507	12.6	7,627	12.5	7,497	12.2	7,405	12.1	7,248	12.2	6,998	11.9
Renfrewshire	11,641	13.9	11,824	13.7	11,764	13.3	11,767	13.2	11,673	13.4	11,148	13.0
Scottish Borders	6,494	12.3	6,454	12.1	6,436	12.2	6,296	12.3	6,182	12.5	5,989	12.0
Shetland Islands	1,594	7.6	1,626	8.1	1,681	8.5	1,764	8.6	1,761	9.0	1,757	9.2
South Ayrshire	7,875	13.6	7,994	13.6	7,983	13.4	7,829	13.3	7,801	13.4	7,513	13.2
South Lanarkshire	20,705	13.9	21,200	13.7	21,310	13.7	21,149	13.6	20,931	13.6	20,205	13.6
Stirling	5,598	13.1	5,623	13.3	5,688	13.1	5,615	12.9	5,673	13.0	5,629	13.0
West Dunbartonshire	6,871	14.4	6,813	13.9	6,760	13.3	6,766	13.0	6,642	12.8	6,520	12.9
West Lothian	10,009	13.6	9,997	13.5	9,920	13.0	9,845	13.3	9,760	12.9	9,458	12.6

	1991		1990		1989		1988		1987	
	Total primary pupils	pupil/ teacher ratio	Total primary pupils	pupil/ teacher ratio	Total primary pupils	pupil/ teacher ratio	Total primary pupils	pupil/ teacher ratio	Total primary pupils	pupil/ teacher ratio
Scotland	296,367	12.4	293,501	12.2	298,394	12.4	311,500	12.7	327,012	13.0
Standard Code for Education Authority										
Aberdeen City	10,522	12.6	10,365	12.6	10,599	12.4	11,313	12.6	11,883	12.8
Aberdeenshire	14,102	13.5	13,693	13.3	13,621	13.4	13,849	13.5	14,044	13.5
Angus	6,865	13.1	6,780	12.7	6,839	12.3	7,164	12.8	7,481	12.9
Argyll and Bute	5,487	12.1	5,379	11.8	5,530	12.3	5,778	13.0	5,974	13.2
Clackmannanshire	3,017	12.4	2,969	11.8	3,073	12.4	3,261	12.7	3,496	13.0
Dumfries and Galloway	8,922	11.7	8,889	11.4	9,015	11.6	9,345	11.5	9,802	12.0
Dundee City	8,393	11.7	8,439	11.5	8,683	11.2	8,901	11.4	9,233	11.4
East Ayrshire	7,826	12.4	7,945	12.1	8,191	12.4	8,742	13.2	9,298	13.5
East Dunbartonshire	8,141	13.4	8,093	13.4	8,188	13.6	8,242	14.2	8,203	14.3
East Lothian	4,303	12.7	4,275	12.7	4,454	12.9	4,672	13.4	4,816	13.4
East Renfrewshire	5,990	13.3	5,825	13.1	5,765	13.3	5,848	13.7	5,931	13.5
Edinburgh, City of	17,290	12.5	17,353	12.1	18,071	12.3	18,921	12.7	19,913	12.8
Eilean Siar	2,303	9.9	2,298	9.9	2,335	9.9	2,397	10.1	2,476	10.2
Falkirk	8,107	13.6	8,017	13.5	8,117	13.6	8,501	13.7	8,865	13.7
Fife	21,247	13.2	21,035	13.0	21,026	12.9	21,727	13.2	22,454	13.4
Glasgow City	28,401	11.2	28,368	11.0	29,016	11.2	31,194	11.2	34,313	11.9
Highland	13,937	11.7	13,572	11.9	13,604	12.0	13,980	11.2	14,304	12.6
Inverclyde	5,780	12.3	5,737	12.3	5,907	12.4	6,207	12.7	6,558	13.1
Midlothian	5,080	12.9	5,004	12.6	5,228	12.8	5,508	13.2	5,775	13.5
Moray	5,364	11.8	5,344	11.6	5,369	11.6	5,669	12.3	5,863	12.9
North Ayrshire	8,221	12.8	8,163	12.7	8,388	12.9	8,870	13.8	9,257	14.1
North Lanarkshire	22,608	13.0	22,385	12.7	22,849	13.0	24,155	13.7	25,673	14.0
Orkney Islands	1,386	10.6	1,329	10.1	1,332	10.3	1,281	10.2	1,338	11.1
Perth and Kinross	6,787	11.8	6,743	11.4	6,750	11.5	6,920	11.3	7,287	11.7
Renfrewshire	10,855	12.5	10,743	12.3	10,963	12.2	11,347	12.4	12,301	13.0
Scottish Borders	5,905	12.2	5,814	11.8	5,846	11.8	5,990	12.1	6,326	12.6
Shetland Islands	1,651	9.2	1,635	9.2	1,623	9.2	1,643	9.5	1,663	9.9

	1991		1990		1989		1988		1987	
	Total primary pupils	pupil/ teacher ratio	Total primary pupils	pupil/ teacher ratio	Total primary pupils	pupil/ teacher ratio	Total primary pupils	pupil/ teacher ratio	Total primary pupils	pupil/ teacher ratio
South Ayrshire	7,283	13.0	7,223	12.8	7,236	13.2	7,392	13.6	7,627	13.6
South Lanarkshire	19,548	13.3	19,182	13.1	19,412	13.3	20,257	13.9	21,296	14.2
Stirling	5,575	12.9	5,551	12.9	5,627	13.1	5,879	13.4	6,018	13.4
West Dunbartonshire	6,053	12.5	5,977	12.1	6,129	12.2	6,516	13.0	6,861	13.0
West Lothian	9,418	12.2	9,356	12.0	9,608	12.2	10,031	12.4	10,683	12.8

	1986		1985		1984		1983		1982	
	Total primary pupils	pupil/ teacher ratio	Total primary pupils	pupil/ teacher ratio	Total primary pupils	pupil/ teacher ratio	Total primary pupils	pupil/ teacher ratio	Total primary pupils	pupil/ teacher ratio
Scotland	344,369	13.2	360,645	13.5	376,071	13.7	390,368	14.0	399,075	14.3
Borders	6,684	13.3	6,907	13.3	7,140	14	7,417	14.0	7,501	14.4
Central	19,300	13.8	20,120	13.8	20,866	14	21,479	14.3	21,910	14.3
Dumfries/Galloway	10,204	12.9	10,747	13.1	11,181	13	11,569	13.4	11,814	14.0
Fife	23,606	13.6	24,371	14.0	25,208	14	26,194	14.4	26,665	14.7
Grampian	33,247	13.5	34,216	13.6	34,635	14	35,366	13.8	34,866	13.8
Highland	14,853	12.7	15,183	12.9	15,629	13	15,958	13.6	16,021	13.7
Lothian	43,328	13.0	45,415	13.4	47,685	14	48,981	13.8	50,240	13.7
Strathclyde	162,258	13.5	171,505	13.7	180,499	14	189,219	14.3	195,428	14.7
Tayside	25,221	12.5	26,388	12.9	27,293	13	28,131	13.5	28,667	13.8
Orkney	1,376	11.7	1,414	11.7	1,443	12	1,464	12.0	1,496	12.5
Shetland	1,709	10.0	1,740	10.5	1,760	11	1,797	11.5	1,715	11.5
Western Isles	2,583	10.4	2,639	10.7	2,732	11	2,793	11.3	2,752	11.6

	1981		1980		1979		1978	
	Total primary pupils	pupil/ teacher ratio	Total primary pupils	pupil/ teacher ratio	Total primary pupils	pupil/ teacher ratio	Total primary pupils	pupil/ teacher ratio
Scotland	404,575	14.4	407,844	14.4	410,242	14.4	410,378	14.6
Borders	7,423	14.1	7,411	14.2	7,351	14.2	7,203	14.1
Central	22,209	14.4	22,283	14.4	22,236	14.2	21,955	14.5
Dumfries/Galloway	11,838	14.1	11,611	14.3	11,403	14.2	11,234	14.2
Fife	26,847	14.9	26,792	14.7	26,624	14.7	26,622	14.6
Grampian	34,603	13.8	34,444	13.4	34,471	13.4	34,183	13.6
Highland	16,119	13.7	16,128	13.9	16,113	14.0	15,981	14.5
Lothian	51,515	13.4	52,316	13.3	52,720	13.5	52,949	13.9
Strathclyde	198,957	15.0	201,712	15.0	203,995	15.0	204,974	15.1
Tayside	29,064	13.9	29,248	14.0	29,666	14.0	29,720	14.0
Orkney	1,521	12.9	1,541	13.2	1,496	13.0	1,506	12.8
Shetland	1,702	12.5	1,631	12.5	1,618	13.2	1,547	12.9
Western Isles	2,777	12.2	2,727	12.4	2,549	12.1	2,504	12.3

Education authority primary schools

Number of pupils and pupil/teacher ratios by education authority

	1997		1996		1995		1994		1993		1992	
	Total primary pupils	pupil/ teacher ratio	Total primary pupils	pupil/ teacher ratio	Total primary pupils	pupil/ teacher ratio	Total primary pupils	pupil/ teacher ratio	Total primary pupils	pupil/ teacher ratio	Total primary pupils	pupil/ teacher ratio
Scotland	440,089	19.9	441,215	19.6	440,112	19.5	437,964	19.5	438,345	19.5	438,914	19.3
Standard Code for Education Authority												
Aberdeen City	15,921	20.0	16,069	19.9	15,892	19.7	15,688	20.2	15,729	20.2	15,598	20.0
Aberdeenshire	21,526	19.1	21,500	18.6	21,444	18.7	21,382	18.7	21,218	18.6	21,191	18.3
Angus	9,381	19.1	9,433	19.0	9,446	18.5	9,468	18.7	9,476	19.7	9,389	20.1
Argyll and Bute	7,792	17.5	7,809	17.3	7,780	17.3	7,734	17.5	7,754	17.4	7,756	16.7
Clackmannanshire	4,542	21.0	4,498	21.2	4,402	21.0	4,377	20.6	4,437	20.1	4,406	20.2
Dumfries and Galloway	12,944	19.1	12,880	18.9	12,977	18.8	12,820	18.6	12,882	18.6	12,936	18.6
Dundee City	12,360	19.0	12,573	18.0	12,697	18.8	12,824	19.2	12,794	19.8	12,962	20.3
East Ayrshire	11,449	21.3	11,487	21.0	11,428	20.8	11,425	20.6	11,400	20.5	11,371	20.0
East Dunbartonshire	10,653	22.2	10,505	22.2	10,374	22.2	10,271	22.1	10,168	21.5	10,184	21.6
East Lothian	7,942	19.9	7,765	20.6	7,494	20.0	7,229	19.9	7,078	20.4	6,671	19.6
East Renfrewshire	8,596	22.4	8,560	22.3	8,475	22.4	8,424	23.1	8,271	22.3	8,072	22.4
Edinburgh, City of	30,590	20.5	30,642	20.7	30,288	20.4	29,479	19.8	29,148	20.2	28,510	20.2

Education authority primary schools
Number of pupils and pupil/teacher ratios by education authority

	1997		1996		1995		1994		1993		1992	
	Total primary pupils	pupil/ teacher ratio	Total primary pupils	pupil/ teacher ratio	Total primary pupils	pupil/ teacher ratio	Total primary pupils	pupil/ teacher ratio	Total primary pupils	pupil/ teacher ratio	Total primary pupils	pupil/ teacher ratio
Eilean Siar	2,556	13.0	2,588	13.0	2,619	13.3	2,684	13.4	2,641	14.2	2,633	13.8
Falkirk	12,334	21.0	12,287	21.3	12,219	21.8	12,078	21.4	12,219	21.2	12,306	20.9
Fife	30,870	19.0	31,070	19.1	31,145	19.0	30,965	19.3	31,082	19.3	31,140	19.3
Glasgow City	48,980	20.1	49,993	19.2	50,398	19.0	51,019	18.8	51,422	18.8	51,788	18.6
Highland	19,149	17.8	19,194	17.3	19,111	17.3	19,001	17.1	19,152	17.4	19,369	17.0
Inverclyde	7,826	21.5	7,945	21.4	8,004	20.8	8,071	21.0	8,038	20.6	8,130	20.3
Midlothian	7,433	19.7	7,393	19.9	7,281	19.8	7,164	19.7	7,215	19.4	7,110	19.4
Moray	8,078	19.3	8,036	18.9	7,970	18.7	7,936	18.4	7,848	18.5	7,777	18.3
North Ayrshire	12,614	21.2	12,627	21.1	12,631	21.0	12,644	20.8	12,809	20.6	12,931	20.0
North Lanarkshire	29,831	20.3	29,990	20.2	29,942	20.2	29,984	20.3	30,187	20.4	30,752	20.0
Orkney Islands	1,846	14.9	1,848	15.1	1,879	15.1	1,841	14.7	1,821	14.8	1,832	14.5
Perth and Kinross	10,776	18.9	10,668	18.7	10,554	18.2	10,554	18.4	10,414	18.8	10,307	18.6
Renfrewshire	15,796	22.1	15,693	22.0	15,784	21.7	15,594	21.9	15,542	21.6	15,539	21.4
Scottish Borders	8,969	18.5	8,963	18.5	8,838	18.5	8,610	18.3	8,613	18.4	8,551	18.0
Shetland Islands	8,335	12.7	2,304	12.6	2,286	12.8	2,231	12.7	2,206	12.4	2,189	12.3
South Ayrshire	9,490	21.1	9,530	21.0	9,611	20.5	90,598	20.6	9,562	20.4	9,711	20.0
South Lanarkshire	26,846	20.9	26,922	20.7	27,026	20.7	27,057	20.6	27,236	20.7	27,487	20.4
Stirling	6,851	19.7	6,697	19.6	6,613	19.9	6,599	19.8	6,537	19.2	6,616	18.6
West Dunbartonshire	8,890	20.9	9,016	20.3	9,065	20.5	9,159	20.2	9,373	20.1	9,431	20.2
West Lothian	14,923	20.4	14,730	20.4	14,439	19.9	14,134	19.7	14,073	19.5	14,069	19.4

	1991		1990		1989		1988		1987	
	Total primary pupils	pupil/ teacher ratio	Total primary pupils	pupil/ teacher ratio	Total primary pupils	pupil/ teacher ratio	Total primary pupils	pupil/ teacher ratio	Total primary pupils	pupil/ teacher ratio
Scotland	440,752	19.5	440,534	19.5	437,018	19.7	432,707	20.3	430,865	20.4
Standard Code for Education Authority										
Aberdeen City	15,484	20.0	15,299	20.2	15,029	19.9	14,922	20.0	14,907	20.2
Aberdeenshire	21,062	18.4	21,019	18.8	20,852	18.6	20,550	18.6	20,528	18.8
Angus	9,353	19.7	9,288	19.4	9,075	19.5	9,108	19.8	9,023	19.6
Argyll and Bute	8,116	17.5	8,280	17.4	8,233	17.7	8,201	19.6	8,224	19.8
Clackmannanshire	4,374	20.9	4,379	20.0	4,379	19.9	4,276	20.3	4,304	20.5
Dumfries and Galloway	12,772	18.5	12,848	18.6	12,733	19.2	12,405	19.3	12,302	19.1
Dundee City	12,923	20.4	12,807	20.4	12,584	20.4	12,391	20.4	12,382	20.2
East Ayrshire	11,365	20.3	11,225	20.1	11,196	20.3	11,043	21.3	10,976	21.6
East Dunbartonshire	10,383	21.7	10,511	22.0	10,503	21.9	10,533	23.1	10,554	23.1
East Lothian	6,814	19.6	6,802	19.1	6,682	20.1	6,468	19.8	6,477	20.0
East Renfrewshire	8,096	21.8	7,973	22.0	7,918	21.9	7,779	22.9	7,484	23.0
Edinburgh, City of	28,172	20.3	27,851	19.9	27,300	20.2	26,940	20.3	26,767	20.3
Eilean Siar	2,648	14.0	2,756	14.6	2,799	15.0	2,796	15.4	2,928	15.6
Falkirk	12,394	21.2	12,546	21.1	12,474	20.9	12,499	20.9	12,383	21.0
Fife	31,188	19.3	31,208	19.3	30,988	19.6	30,555	20.0	30,554	20.3
Glasgow City	51,901	18.7	51,440	18.6	50,723	19.2	50,219	20.7	49,673	20.5
Highland	19,653	17.4	19,549	17.6	19,527	18.2	19,331	18.6	19,278	18.5
Inverclyde	8,262	20.2	8,332	20.1	8,308	20.3	8,285	21.7	8,314	21.8
Midlothian	7,154	19.5	7,204	19.3	7,247	19.6	7,214	19.9	7,262	19.9
Moray	7,857	18.7	7,580	18.7	7,493	19.1	7,513	18.8	7,606	19.0
North Ayrshire	13,150	20.7	13,220	20.3	13,213	20.9	13,013	21.5	12,974	21.8
North Lanarkshire	31,482	20.2	31,909	20.6	31,936	20.7	31,742	21.5	31,727	21.7
Orkney Islands	1,801	14.1	1,787	14.4	1,783	15.4	1,827	16.3	1,787	15.9
Perth and Kinross	10,191	18.5	10,217	18.5	10,110	18.1	9,876	18.8	9,703	18.6
Renfrewshire	15,628	21.3	15,588	21.2	15,451	21.0	15,389	22.4	15,331	22.2
Scottish Borders	6,520	18.2	8,525	18.1	8,411	18.1	8,327	18.1	8,164	18.6
Shetland Islands	2,244	12.7	2,230	12.8	2,257	12.9	2,338	13.6	2,370	13.7
South Ayrshire	9,748	20.4	9,726	20.0	9,684	20.5	9,577	21.6	9,491	21.5
South Lanarkshire	27,977	20.4	28,254	20.4	28,198	20.9	27,788	21.8	27,646	22.0
Stirling	6,604	18.8	6,727	19.3	6,775	19.3	6,692	19.7	6,775	19.6
West Dunbartonshire	9,506	20.4	9,415	20.5	9,265	20.6	9,144	21.4	9,114	21.5
West Lothian	14,130	19.7	14,041	19.3	13,972	19.5	13,966	19.6	13,857	19.7

	1986		1985		1984		1983		1982	
	Total primary pupils	pupil/ teacher ratio	Total primary pupils	pupil/ teacher ratio	Total primary pupils	pupil/ teacher ratio	Total primary pupils	pupil/ teacher ratio	Total primary pupils	pupil/ teacher ratio
Scotland	433,459	20.4	435,454	20.4	437,538	20.4	448,009	20.3	467,971	20.4
Borders	8,213	18.2	8,246	17.7	8,219	18.2	8,353	17.9	8,686	18.2
Central	23,754	20.4	24,158	19.3	24,287	18.9	24,897	18.7	25,850	18.6
Dumfries/Galloway	12,321	19.1	12,313	19.3	12,285	19.1	12,480	19.1	12,799	19.4
Fife	30,602	20.2	31,105	20.2	31,005	20.1	31,388	19.9	32,257	20.4
Grampian	42,941	19.4	43,156	19.3	43,274	19.4	43,827	18.8	45,767	19.0
Highland	19,394	18.8	19,290	18.7	19,168	18.8	19,460	18.9	19,822	19.0
Lothian	54,386	20.1	54,964	20.2	55,745	20.1	58,327	19.9	61,461	19.8
Strathclyde	203,337	21.6	203,521	21.6	204,311	21.6	208,934	21.6	219,231	21.6
Tayside	31,298	20.0	31,335	20.2	31,871	20.3	32,757	20.5	34,278	20.6
Orkney	1,826	15.8	1,825	15.9	1,866	16.0	1,910	16.7	1,910	17.2
Shetland	2,387	13.7	2,386	14.4	2,388	14.0	2,478	14.4	2,564	14.3
Western Isles	3,000	16.8	3,155	17.3	3,119	16.7	3,198	16.2	3,346	16.4

	1981		1980		1979		1978	
	Total primary pupils	pupil/ teacher ratio	Total primary pupils	pupil/ teacher ratio	Total primary pupils	pupil/ teacher ratio	Total primary pupils	pupil/ teacher ratio
Scotland	492,645	20.3	518,492	20.3	545,161	20.3	569,124	21.4
Borders	9,156	18.2	9,643	18.4	10,135	18.3	10,460	19.1
Central	27,258	19.1	28,559	19.5	29,737	19.7	30,843	20.0
Dumfries/Galloway	13,457	19.2	14,223	19.1	15,069	19.2	15,831	20.2
Fife	33,733	20.6	35,103	20.7	36,766	21.0	37,715	21.7
Grampian	47,128	18.9	48,352	18.9	49,831	19.0	50,852	19.7
Highland	20,568	19.1	21,275	19.1	22,000	19.1	22,673	19.7
Lothian	64,688	18.6	68,112	18.5	71,816	18.9	74,798	19.7
Strathclyde	232,691	21.6	247,143	21.6	261,721	21.4	276,110	22.9
Tayside	35,164	20.6	37,925	20.8	39,694	20.3	41,408	21.1
Orkney	1,886	16.9	1,923	17.2	2,000	17.3	2,026	18.0
Shetland	2,681	15.0	2,705	15.7	2,711	16.8	2,646	17.3
Western Isles	3,435	16.7	3,529	16.5	3,681	17.1	3,762	17.7

Knee and Hip Replacements

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of the current average waiting time for each Scottish health board for *(a)* knee and *(b)* hip joint replacement operations; and if he will list the five hospitals which have the longest waiting times. [43913]

Mr. Galbraith: The mean waiting time for knee and hip joint replacement operations at 31 March 1998 for each Health Board in Scotland is provided in Table 1. The five hospitals in Scotland with the longest mean waiting time for knee and hip joint replacement operations at 31 March 1998 is provided in Table 2.

Table 1: Knee and hip joint replacement operations carried out by the NHS in Scotland

Mean waiting times by area of residence at 31 March 1998[1]

Area of residence	Knee replacement days	Hip joint replacement days
Argyll & Clyde	189	144
Ayrshire & Arran	108	113
Borders	90	86
Dumfries & Galloway	204	137
Fife	131	115
Forth Valley	237	175
Grampian	94	82
Greater Glasgow	217	181
Highland	182	182
Lanarkshire	125	116
Lothian	145	133

Table 1: Knee and hip joint replacement operations carried out by the NHS in Scotland

Mean waiting times by area of residence at 31 March 1998[1]

Area of residence	Knee replacement days	Hip joint replacement days
Orkney	74	55
Shetland	109	92
Tayside	141	123
Western Isles	75	59
Other/Not Known	106	96
Scotland	155	131

[1] Provisional

Source:

ISD Scotland

Table 2: Knee and hip joint replacement operations carried out by the NHS in Scotland

Hospitals with the longest mean waiting times at 31 March 1998[1]

	Knee operations days	Hip joint operations days
Victoria Infirmary, Glasgow	307	253
Stirling Royal Infirmary	256	193
Royal Alexandra Hospital	215	186
Falkirk & District Royal Infirmary	215	180
Dumfries & Galloway Royal Infirmary	213	168

[1] Provisional

Source:

ISD Scotland.

Mortgage Repossession Orders

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many mortgage repossession orders there were to each court district in each quarter since the first quarter of 1995 to the first quarter of 1998. [43930]

Mr. Dewar: Figures in relation to repossession of property by mortgage lenders have been collected by the courts since a revised system of collected Civil Judicial Statistics was instituted on 1 January 1994. The figures since the first quarter of 1995 to the first quarter of 1998 are shown in the tables. Not all lenders who are granted decree actually enforce them.

Court	*1Q 1995*	*2Q 1995*	*3Q 1995*	*4Q 1995*	*Total*
Aberdeen	5	5	24	56	90
Airdrie	23	26	29	28	106
Alloa	8	9	9	11	37
Arbroath	0	3	4	0	7
Ayr	37	26	26	17	106
Banff	1	5	5	6	17
Campeltown	1	3	2	6	12
Cupar	11	7	8	6	32
Dingwall	4	4	5	13	26
Dornoch	1	1	1	1	4
Dumbarton	36	26	36	27	125
Dumfries	16	16	10	16	58
Dundee	28	14	17	35	94
Dunfermline	24	26	40	34	124
Dunoon	5	8	1	0	14
Duns	2	1	5	2	10
Edinburgh	111	73	126	109	419
Elgin	7	9	5	9	30
Falkirk	30	32	25	25	112
Forfar	2	1	0	5	8
Fort William	4	0	0	0	4
Glasgow	155	179	179	176	689
Greenock	0	1	1	6	8
Haddington	13	6	27	18	64
Hamilton	45	60	64	67	236
Inverness	14	17	14	17	62
Jedburgh	5	6	7	3	21
Kilmarnock	44	43	50	57	194
Kirkcaldy	28	45	28	31	132
Kirkcudbright	1	2	5	3	11
Kirkwall	0	1	3	0	4
Lanark	9	14	10	16	49
Lerwick	1	0	2	1	4
Linlithgow	45	43	52	40	180
Lochmaddy	0	2	0	0	2
Oban	2	2	3	1	8
Paisley	22	37	65	79	203
Peebles	2	2	1	4	9
Perth	8	24	25	19	76
Peterhead	4	11	9	11	35
Portree	0	0	2	0	2
Rothesay	0	2	0	3	5
Selkirk	2	5	6	3	16
Stirling	8	11	11	9	39
Stonehaven	9	5	8	10	32
Stornoway	0	0	0	1	1
Stranraer	3	6	7	4	20
Tain	2	0	3	2	7
Wick	0	4	6	0	10
Grand Total	778	823	966	987	3,554

Court	*1Q 1996*	*2Q 1996*	*3Q 1996*	*4Q 1996*	*Total*
Aberdeen	54	55	47	46	202
Airdrie	36	26	38	38	138
Alloa	13	5	7	6	31
Arbroath	0	0	4	10	14
Ayr	27	17	25	29	98
Banff	5	5	4	2	16
Campeltown	1	2	1	3	7
Cupar	18	12	14	8	52
Dingwall	3	10	1	0	14
Dornoch	0	1	0	0	1
Dumbarton	32	33	24	16	105
Dumfries	13	23	7	11	54
Dundee	33	47	42	33	165
Dunfermline	39	31	32	30	132
Dunoon	0	0	8	5	13
Duns	4	5	5	2	16
Edinburgh	136	125	139	101	501
Elgin	14	17	16	11	58
Falkirk	40	27	38	37	142
Forfar	8	10	5	6	29
Fort William	0	2	2	2	6
Glasgow	245	215	234	178	872
Greenock	16	15	14	5	50
Haddington	23	24	18	17	82
Hamilton	54	81	76	42	253
Inverness	21	18	15	10	64
Jedburgh	3	9	2	7	21
Kilmarnock	68	60	50	38	216
Kirkcaldy	42	38	36	39	155
Kirkcudbright	7	5	5	2	19
Kirkwall	6	3	4	0	13
Lanark	24	10	16	8	58
Lerwick	2	0	0	1	3
Linlithgow	72	54	39	44	209
Lochmaddy	1	2	1	3	7
Oban	8	2	2	0	12
Paisley	89	46	2	39	176
Peebles	3	1	4	2	10
Perth	34	23	29	23	109
Peterhead	17	22	15	11	65
Portree	3	2	1	2	8
Rothesay	0	0	0	2	2
Selkirk	3	5	5	4	17
Stirling	12	10	8	4	34
Stonehaven	15	13	9	5	42
Stornoway	9	2	1	1	13
Stranraer	2	8	5	5	20
Tain	4	4	4	1	13
Wick	0	0	2	0	2
Grand Total	1,269	1,125	1,056	889	4,339

Court	*1Q 1997*	*2Q 1997*	*3Q 1997*	*4Q 1997*	*Total*
Aberdeen	62	37	39	48	186
Airdrie	49	46	47	58	200
Alloa	6	11	12	7	36
Arbroath	16	11	5	5	37
Ayr	36	31	40	35	142
Banff	5	1	6	3	15
Campeltown	1	2	1	3	7

Court	1Q 1997	2Q 1997	3Q 1997	4Q 1997	Total
Cupar	10	11	13	10	44
Dingwall	5	1	9	2	17
Dornoch	0	1	0	0	1
Dumbarton	32	32	26	16	106
Dumfries	10	6	14	12	42
Dundee	38	41	43	27	149
Dunfermline	51	32	31	43	157
Dunoon	2	5	6	5	18
Duns	3	2	3	3	11
Edinburgh	112	140	155	129	536
Elgin	12	6	8	9	35
Falkirk	14	27	35	42	118
Forfar	5	6	3	5	19
Fort William	0	0	3	1	4
Glasgow	184	252	204	229	869
Greenock	9	7	8	22	46
Haddington	20	16	28	24	88
Hamilton	72	52	35	12	171
Inverness	10	28	14	28	80
Jedburgh	8	0	7	7	22
Kilmarnock	55	20	77	69	221
Kirkcaldy	47	54	35	40	176
Kirkcudbright	6	3	6	1	16
Kirkwall	2	0	1	1	4
Lanark	15	15	12	10	52
Lerwick	0	0	2	0	2
Linlithgow	32	42	32	54	160
Lochmaddy	1	0	0	0	1
Oban	5	3	2	2	12
Paisley	3	49	81	65	198
Peebles	2	2	1	2	7
Perth	23	19	25	17	84
Peterhead	13	15	12	13	53
Portree	0	0	1	3	4
Rothesay	2	2	1	2	7
Selkirk	5	10	5	4	24
Stirling	13	14	12	8	47
Stonehaven	10	12	13	5	40
Stornoway	0	4	0	1	5
Stranraer	6	5	7	3	21
Tain	0	4	8	3	15
Wick	0	0	0	0	0
Grand Total	1,012	1,077	1,128	1,088	4,305

Court	1Q 1998
Aberdeen	56
Airdrie	50
Alloa	11
Arbroath	14
Ayr	31
Banff	2
Campeltown	4
Cupar	8
Dingwall	4
Dornoch	1
Dumbarton	53
Dumfries	10
Dundee	32
Dunfermline	45
Dunoon	8
Duns	4
Edinburgh	142
Elgin	9
Falkirk	26
Forfar	7
Fort William	1
Glasgow	208
Greenock	17
Haddington	17
Hamilton	10
Inverness	27
Jedburgh	4
Kilmarnock	66
Kirkcaldy	41
Kirkcudbright	0
Kirkwall	1
Lanark	12
Lerwick	4
Linlithgow	49
Lochmaddy	2
Oban	2
Paisley	101
Peebles	2
Perth	29
Peterhead	22
Portree	1
Rothesay	3
Selkirk	11
Stirling	13
Stonehaven	6
Stornoway	4
Stranraer	4
Tain	3
Wick	0
Grand Total	1,177

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 4 June 1998

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Investments

Mr. Baker: To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, for what reasons the format of investment holdings in the 1997 Annual report and Accounts has been changed from that in the 1996 edition in respect of information concerning overseas trusts. [44231]

Mr. Stuart Bell: The list of larger investments in the 1997 Annual Report and Accounts adopted a higher threshold (£6 million) than that in the 1996 Report (which applied a threshold of £3 million for UK equities and £1 million for overseas investments with overseas trusts listed as a separate category under the list of overseas investments). This focuses clearly on the largest holdings, which contribute the greater part of the fund's performance, and also reflects the overall increase in the Commissioners' investments since the threshold was last reviewed. No overseas investments over £6 million were held.

In view of the Commissioners' decision to increase its overseas equities in 1997 and to outsource the management of the overseas portfolio to three separate external fund managers during 1997, with a consequent large increase in the number of individual overseas equity holdings, it was considered opportune to align the disclosure threshold for overseas holdings with that for UK equities.

The overseas investment trusts held at 31 December 1996 represented the Commissioners' only exposure to the markets of the Far East. As a result of the appointment of external overseas equity managers during 1997, many of the overseas investment trust holdings were disposed of by the end of 1997.

Mr. Baker: To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, if he will list in tabular form *(a)* the investment holdings in pounds at 31 December (1) 1996 and (2) 1997 and *(b)* the sums realised in pounds from the disposal of holdings between 1 January 1997 and 31 December 1997 in (i) Edinburgh Dragon Trust, (ii) Fidelity Japanese Values, (iii) Fleming Japanese Investment Trust, (iv) Fleming Select Japanese Fund, (v) Fleming Select Pacific Fund, (vi) Foreign and Colonial Pacific Investment Trust, (vii) Govett Oriental Investment Trust, (viii) JF Fledgeling Japan, (ix) Mercury European Privatisation Trust, (x) Old Mutual South Africa Trust, (xi) Pacific Assets Trust, (xii) Schroder Asia Pacific Fund, (xiii) Schroder Emerging Countries, (xiv) Schroder Japan Growth Fund, (xv) Schroder Pacific Growth Fund, (xvi) Schroder Tokyo Fund, (xvii) TR European Growth Trust and (xix) Templeton Emerging Markets. [44230]

Mr. Stuart Bell: The relevant information to the question is as follows. The information given provides market valuation at specific dates only, and does not indicate gains or losses.

£

Company	*Date*	*Market value*	*Total proceeds*
i. Edinburgh Dragon Trust	31 December 1996	4,225,000.00	
	31 December 1997	0.00	2,723,789.75
ii. Fidelity Japanese Values	31 December 1996	1,299,375.00	
	31 December 1997	0.00	768,459.75
iii. Fleming Japanese Investment Trust	31 December 1996	6,514,324.00	
	31 December 1997	4,749,684.00	
iv. Fleming Select Japanese Fund	31 December 1996	3,354,565.00	
	31 December 1997	0.00	2,721,183.92
v. Fleming Select Pacific Fund	31 December 1996	2,775,689.00	
	31 December 1997	0.00	1,881,573.14
vi. Foreign and Colonial Pacific Investment Trust	31 December 1996	3,460,063.00	
	31 December 1997	2,370,688.00	
vii. Govett Oriental Investment Trust	31 December 1996	4,074,000.00	
	31 December 1997	0.00	2,488,137.50
viii. JF Fledgling Japan	31 December 1996	2,239,050.00	
	31 December 1997	1,228,200.00	
ix. Mercury European Privatisation Trust	31 December 1996	1,080,000.00	
	31 December 1997	1,914,000.00	includes purchases
x. Old Mutual South Africa Trust	31 December 1996	1,207,500.00	
	31 December 1997	1,361,500.00	
xi. Pacific Assets Trust	31 December 1996	2,552,000.00	
	31 December 1997	0.00	1,235,024.75

£

Company	*Date*	*Market value*	*Total proceeds*
xii. Schroder Asia Pacific Fund	31 December 1996	2,572,075.00	
	31 December 1997	[1]1,382.975.00	
xiii. Schroder Emerging Countries	31 December 1996	1,625,000.00	
	31 December 1997	[1]1,439,000.00	
xiv. Schroder Japan Growth Fund	31 December 1996	1,170,000.00	
	31 December 1997	[1]1,040,000.00	
xv. Schroder Pacific Growth Fund	31 December 1996	4,968,164.00	
	31 December 1997	0.00	2,904,068.53
xvi. Schroder Tokyo Fund	31 December 1996	5,540,129.00	
	31 December 1997	0.00	4,861,229.78
xvii. TR European Growth "C" Conversion to Ordinary	31 December 1996	1,485,000.00	
	31 December 1997	0.00	1,782,973.65
xix. Templeton Emerging Markets	31 December 1996	1,869,146.00	
	31 December 1997	1,672,763.00	

[1] Indicates a transfer to an Overseas Fund Manager

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Dorchester Road Relief Road

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when a decision will be made on the financing of the Dorchester Road Relief Road in Weymouth. [43341]

Ms Glenda Jackson *[holding answer 1 June 1998]:* The Dorchester Road Relief Road scheme was submitted by Dorset County Council for consideration as a PFI scheme for the February 1998 list of local authority PFI projects. Announcing decisions on the list, the Government made it clear that decisions on support for a number of local road schemes (including the Weymouth road scheme) had been deferred until the approach to the appraisal and prioritisation of road schemes had been clarified in the national Roads Review.

Fire Safety

Kate Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) if he will introduce measures to limit the generation of smoke from building products; [44025]

(2) if he will make a statement on the timetable for implementing individual member state's new European Union standards relating to test methods used to determine the fire resistance of construction products; [44023]

(3) if the test method in British Standard 476 Part 33 permits the evaluation of the generation of smoke from building products; and what assessment he has made of the suitability of this as a performance standard for regulatory purposes. [44024]

Mr. Raynsford: The Building Regulations 1991 are intended to secure the health and safety in and around buildings, and paragraph B of Schedule 1 to the Regulations makes functional requirements to cover fire safety. Guidance on how these requirements may be met are given in Approved Document B, and, as far as materials used in construction are concerned, performance standards are set based on recognised test methods.

With regard to the generation of smoke from building products, the only recognised method of test available that measures smoke production is BS 476: Part 33 which relates to a full scale room test for surface products. This test gives an indication of the toxic hazard by the measurement of certain toxic gases and also the hazard of reduced visibility can be estimated by the measurement of the production of light-obscuring smoke. Because of the size of this test, it is not considered practicable to introduce it as a performance standard for regulatory purposes.

Approved Document B (Fire Safety) makes reference to a number of BS 476 parts that are considered to give acceptable methods of test and the key parameters usually considered in fire tests are the heat release rate and flame spread. These in themselves will also have an effect on smoke production. I therefore have no proposals at present to introduce the large-scale test given in BS 476 Part 33 as part of the performance standard for regulatory purpose. However, the use of a fire engineering approach is recognised in Approved Document B and the BS 476: Part 33 method of test could be used as part of the justification for a particular fire engineering solution.

The Single Burning Item (SBI) test being developed in support of the Construction Products Directive, does also address smoke production and we will need to take account of this when revising Approved Document B in the light of any future harmonised European Standards.

The European standards for resistance to fire have been passed to National Standards bodies (in the United Kingdom, the British Standards Institution) by CEN, the European Standards Organisation, for a formal vote, expected to be completed by the end of this month. If there is a positive vote, the test will be ratified and published towards the end of this year by the national standards bodies. Decisions have yet to be taken on the

period for which European and national standards will co-exist but a reasonable period will be allowed for industry to adjust before the latter are withdrawn.

Environmental Standards (Prosecution)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many businesses have been prosecuted successfully since 1990 for violating environmental standards in *(a)* the West Midlands and *(b)* the United Kingdom. [43223]

Angela Eagle: This information is not held centrally. The Environment Agency took on responsibility for managing and regulating the water environment and controlling industrial pollution and wastes in England and Wales on 1 April 1996. Between then and 31 March 1998, it undertook 1,233 successful prosecutions, of which 229 were in its Midlands region. Local authorities and other bodies also have responsibility for enforcing some environmental controls.

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what progress has been made in devising a regulatory framework for the carbon dioxide emissions trading regime outlined in the Kyoto agreement. [43303]

Angela Eagle: Negotiations began on 2 June, at the 8th session of the Subsidiary Bodies of the Framework Convention on Climate Change, on a framework for the international emissions trading regime outlined in the Kyoto Protocol, with a view to developing the necessary principles, modalities and guidelines at the Fourth Conference of the Parties to the Convention in November this year.

Litter Offences

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many on-the-spot litter fines have been issued by Chelmsford Borough Council in each of the last three years; and how many warnings for litter offences were issued in each of the last three years. [44176]

Angela Eagle: Chelmsford Borough Council litter wardens warned 302 people for litter offences in 1995–96 and 347 people in 1996–97. Figures for warnings given in 1997–98 are not yet available. No fixed penalty fines have been issued by Chelmsford Borough Council over the last three years.

Private Landlords

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions which local authorities operate voluntary accreditation schemes for private landlords. [44302]

Mr. Raynsford: My Department does not collect information on this. However, we encourage local authorities, through the Housing Investment Programme guidance, to consider initiatives such as accreditation schemes for private landlords as part of their enabling role in securing an effective private rented sector in their areas. We are aware that a growing number of local authorities are operating such schemes.

"Policy Guidance on Policy Appraisal and the Environment"

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what procedures have been put in place in the Government Office for the Eastern Region to ensure that Policy Guidance on Policy Appraisal and the Environment is implemented. [42660]

Mr. Meacher: The document "Policy Appraisal and the Environment" was sent last month to the Government Office for Eastern Region, as to all Government Offices for the Regions. They are currently establishing the mechanisms to ensure that these criteria are systematically applied in all their investment and programme evaluations.

PRIME MINISTER

Technique LLC

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Prime Minister (1) what information is held by Government departments on Technique LLC; [38551]

(2) what was the nature of any relationship between Her Majesty's Government and Technique LLC in the period 1995 to 1998; [38549]

(3) on what date Her Majesty's Government were informed of the commission payments made by Astra and related companies to Technique LLC; [38548]

(4) on what date Her Majesty's Government were informed of commission payments made to Technique LLC in relation to contracts to supply goods by Astra. [38544]

The Prime Minister: Technique LLC has been the agent in Oman for several UK companies for a number of years. In view of this, HMG officials have had some contact with company staff, primarily through the British Embassy in Muscat. From information readily available within Government, I am not aware of any evidence that HMG was informed of any commission payments to Technique LLC by Astra. Any commission payment made by a non-state company such as Astra, or companies related to it, to a foreign company such as Technique LLC, would have been a matter solely for the companies concerned.

Correspondence

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Prime Minister if he will instruct Ministers to sign their letters to hon. Members. [43421]

The Prime Minister: It is the responsibility of individual Ministers to determine how correspondence is dealt with in their departments. However, I am not aware of any Minister adopting a policy of deliberately not signing their correspondence.

Sierra Leone

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Prime Minister on what date he first became aware of the HM Customs and Excise investigation of allegations against Sandline. [43622]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 2 June 1998]:* As has already been made public, I was briefed by the Cabinet Secretary on this matter on 30 April.

Telephone Tapping

Mr. Baker: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) of 30 October 1997, *Official Report*, column *861*, what action is taken in circumstances where a member of the public who is subject to telephone interception makes a telephone call to an hon. Member; and if he will make a statement. [43604]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 3 June 1998]:* The Secretary of State may issue a warrant only if he is satisfied that it is necessary for one of the purposes in the Interception of Communications Act 1985; namely, in the interests of national security, for the purpose of preventing or detecting serious crime or for the purpose of safeguarding the economic well-being of the United Kingdom. It is then for the responsible Service to decide how to respond to any communications lawfully intercepted under the warrant, having regard to the safeguards provided in section 6 of the Act.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Legal Aid

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many of the responses received to the Consultation on Legal Aid Reform were from *(a)* lawyers or lawyers' organisations, *(b)* members of the public or consumers' organisations and *(c)* hon. or right hon. Members; and if he will make a statement. [43291]

Mr. Hoon: We have now received 238 responses to the consultation paper *Access to Justice with Conditional Fees;* 145 from lawyers and lawyers' associations, 28 from members of the public or consumers' organisations and one from an hon. Member, although many hon. and right hon. Members have passed on responses which have been sent to them by constituents.

Community Legal Service

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has for pilots for the Community Legal Service; and if he will make a statement. [43292]

Mr. Hoon: The Lord Chancellor has announced that proposals for a Community Legal Service will be finalised by the beginning of next year. A consultation paper will be issued in January 1999. Until the Lord Chancellor and I reach our final decisions based on the responses to that consultation paper, I cannot predict whether any pilot projects will be appropriate.

Stephen Lawrence Case

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what amount of legal aid was given to those charged with the murder of Stephen Lawrence. [44177]

Mr. Hoon: The total amount of legal aid paid in respect of proceedings in the magistrates' court was £76,962. A further £129,007 was paid in respect of proceedings in the Crown Court.

Court Payments

Maria Eagle: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what steps he is taking to ensure that courts pay out within a reasonable time scale moneys they hold on behalf of parties. [42750]

Mr. Hoon: The Charter for Court Users states that court staff are expected to instruct the Court Funds Office (where moneys are held on interest-bearing accounts) within 10 working days of the court order, to arrange payments to the parties. Management information systems are in place to identify any work not dealt with within 5 working days. Once the requests are received, the Court Funds Office aims to process them within 5 working days.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Youth Clubs

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations he has received on the proportion of Lottery funding awarded to youth clubs. [43607]

Mr. Banks: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State receives many representation on Lottery funding, but he has received none specifically relating to youth clubs. However, over 1,300 awards worth in excess of £170 million have been made to projects which are specifically designed to benefit young people and youth groups.

S4C

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what was the level of subsidy provided to S4C Welsh Television Channel, for the 1997–98 financial year. [44109]

Mr. Fisher: S4C is funded on a calendar year basis, under a statutory formula, and the level of funding from 1998 is linked to the Retail Prices Index (RPI). The grant in 1997 was £72.223 million; the grant for 1998 is £74.895 million.

Elgin Marbles

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations he has received from the Government of Greece since 1 May 1997 requesting the return of the Elgin Marbles. [44332]

Mr. Fisher: There have been no formal representations from the Government of the Hellenic Republic requesting the return of the Elgin Marbles.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Drivers (Mobile Telephones)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions of motorists for driving a motor vehicle while using a mobile telephone there were in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [43632]

Mr. Michael: The information requested is not available.

There is no separate offence of driving a vehicle while using a mobile telephone, and any prosecution is likely to be driving without due care and attention, for which there were 66,858 prosecutions in England and Wales in 1996 (73,015 in 1995, 76,251 in 1994 and 79,415 in 1993). Figures for 1997 are not yet available.

It is also possible for such drivers to be prosecuted or issued with a fixed penalty for not being in proper control of a vehicle (Regulation 104 of the Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1986), but such cases cannot be separately identified in the statistics collected centrally.

Curfew Orders

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many curfew orders backed by electronic tagging have been made by the courts in the pilot areas of *(a)* Norfolk and East Anglia, *(b)* Greater Manchester and *(c)* Reading and Berkshire since the trial commenced in July 1995; how many have been (i) completed satisfactorily and (ii) breached; and how many are still current. [43880]

Ms Quin: The following table shows the position in relation to curfew orders made in the seven pilot areas as of 26 May 1998.

Trial area	*Total offenders sentenced*	*Sentences completed*	*Total sentences revoked*	*Revoked through breach* [1]	*Revoked for other reasons*	*Currently being monitored*
Berkshire	96	68	14	6	1	15
Greater Manchester	843	542	105	36	8	192
Norfolk	354	231	31	23	8	92
Cambridgeshire[2]	20	2	1	1	0	17
Middlesex	29	3	3	3	0	22
Suffolk	13	1	1	1	0	11
West Yorkshire	22	5	1	1	0	15
Total	1,377	852	156	71	17	364

[1] Separate figures on the reasons for breaches were only collected in all trial areas from August 1997
[2] The trials in Cambridgeshire, Middlesex, Suffolk and West Yorkshire began in January 1998

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when it is planned to extend curfew orders on a national basis; and which companies will be competing for the contract. [43878]

Ms Quin: Further to my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Mr. Coaker), of 17 March 1998, *Official Report*, columns *559–60*, four bidders have been short-listed for the electronic monitoring services contracts. They are General Security Services Corporation, Securicor Custodial Services, Premier Prisons Limited and Group 4 Prison and Court Services Limited. National roll-out of court-ordered curfews is unlikely to be before late 1999.

Sex Offenders

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what categorisation his Department has made of sex offenders to indicate the estimated degree of risk each one poses to the public; and if he will make a statement. [43711]

Mr. Michael: Agencies are increasingly co-operating to pool the information they hold so that they can asses the risk presented by any individual sex offender and devise plans to monitor the offender's behaviour and reduce risk to the public. The Government are encouraging this multi-agency approach to both assessment and management in the community.

Sex offenders are subject to a risk assessment by the agency (or agencies) responsible for them on release from prison and/or whilst under supervision in the community. In the case of offenders subject to restrictions under the Mental Health Act, this assessment takes place before consent is given to their being granted leave of absence or transferred or discharged from hospital.

Because most of these assessments are made on a case-by-case basis, there are no all-inclusive central statistics or categorisations of them.

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he is taking to prevent sex offenders from being employed in occupations with access to children and to prevent children being abused by people who are in a position of trust over them. [44827]

Mr. Michael: There are a number of statutory safeguards already in place. Criminal record checks are available on people working in the statutory sector where they have substantial unsupervised access to children. They are also available on teachers in the private and voluntary sectors. The Police Act 1997 contains provisions which will widen access to criminal record checks when they are implemented. The Sex Offenders Act 1997 imposes a requirement on those convicted or cautioned for sex offences against children and other serious sex offences to notify the police of their name and address and any changes to these. This allows the police to monitor sex offenders in the community and to take action where appropriate to warn potential employers of

any risk they might present. The Government have made it clear that such information must not just sit on a computer or gather dust on a file and the police and probation services have responded positively and responsibly using this information for the protection of children and vulnerable adults, as intended. The Government are also introducing sex offender orders in the Crime and Disorder Bill [*Lords*] which will apply to sex offenders if their behaviour indicates a possible threat to the public. The courts will be able to make an order to impose prohibitions necessary to protect the community. There are also a number of other measures in place to prevent those considered unsuitable to work with children from gaining employment with them. The Department for Education and Employment maintains "List 99" which contains information about people whom the Secretary of State has barred from working in schools; the Department of Health operates a Consultancy Service Index which enables local authorities and private and voluntary childcare organisations in England and Wales to check on suitability of those they propose to employ; and many professional bodies have codes of conduct which set out members' responsibilities in this area and provide for disciplinary action to be taken when these codes are breached.

We are concerned that these safeguards are not fully integrated and that there is a need for a more streamlined approached to ensure that there are no loopholes. For this reason, the Government are setting up an inter-departmental working group of officials to consider additional safeguards to prevent those who are unsuitable from working with children, including the possibility of a central register backed up by a new criminal offence to prevent those on the register applying for work with children. In looking at this subject, the group will draw upon the consultation exercise "Sex Offenders: A Ban on Working with Children"; and on recommendations made in the report of Sir William Utting's review of safeguards for children living away from home (particularly those recommendations dealing with choosing the right staff) and the Government's response to this review which is expected to be published by the Ministerial Task Force on the Children's Safeguards Review in the summer. The group will also consider whether further measures are necessary to protect 16 and 17 years olds who may be vulnerable to abuse by those in a position of trust, such as carers, teachers and leaders of organised residential activities. It is expected that the group will make its final recommendations to Ministers by the end of the year.

Metropolitan Police Force (Ethnic Minorities)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women from ethnic minorities were serving in the Metropolitan Police Force on 1 May. [43657]

Mr. Michael: The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis tells me that the closest date for which it is possible to provide these figures is 5 May, as figures are collated on the first Monday of each month. The numbers of ethnic minorities serving in the Metropolitan Police on 5 May were *(a)* 665 men and *(b)* 190 women. The current percentage of ethnic minority officers is 3.2 per cent. During the 1996–97 financial year, 694 new officers were recruited, of whom 6.7 per cent. came from ethnic minority backgrounds. The following table shows how the percentage of ethnic minority officers has increased steadily from 1.98 per cent. in 1991–92.

Financial year	*Ethnic minorities strength*	*Percentage of force*
1991–92	563	1.98
1992–93	614	2.2
1993–94	671	2.4
1994–95	730	2.6
1995–96	797	2.9
1996–97	822	3.0
1997–98	856	3.2

Note:
Figures from Commissioner's annual reports

Prison Suicides

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women committed suicide in prisons in England and Wales in each of the last three years. [43664]

Ms Quin: The term used by Prison Service to refer to an apparent suicide is "self-inflicted death". This is a broader definition and includes all those deaths where it is clear that the person has acted specifically to take his or her own life. It is not restricted to the official verdict from the Coroner's inquest, where verdicts of "suicide", "open" or "misadventure" may be recorded in cases where there was doubt about a person's intent to end their life.

The information requested is shown in the table.

Self-inflicted deaths in prisons in England and Wales 1995–97

Year	*Women*	*Men*	*Total*
1995	2	57	59
1996	2	62	64
1997	3	67	70

UK Visa Applications (Nigeria)

Mr. Godsiff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Nigerian nationals applied for entry clearance to come to the United Kingdom as visitors; how many visitor visas were issued; and how many recipients of those visas returned to Nigeria before their visas expired in (i) 1994, (ii) 1995, (iii) 1996 and (iv) 1997. [43336]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Information on the number of Nigerian nationals applying for entry clearance to come to the United Kingdom as visitors, and the number of recipients of such visas who return to Nigeria before their visas expire, is not collected centrally.

The total number of entry clearance applications to the United Kingdom for temporary purposes made in Nigeria in 1994 to 1997, and the total numbers granted, initially or on appeal, are shown in the table. Visitor applications

are not separately identified, but they form the main part of applications for temporary purposes: also included are applications from students.

Applications received in Nigeria for entry clearance to the United Kingdom for temporary purposes, and applications granted, 1994 to 1997

	1994	1995	1996	1997
Applications received	53,362	41,580	49,438	49,471
Applications granted	36,089	28,466	38,680	33,365

Prison Service Property, Freckleton

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the prices received by the Prison Service for each of its properties sold in the Mede, Freckleton, this year to date and in each of the last five years, identifying the house concerned by number and indicating if it was bricked or unbricked. [43870]

Ms Quin: The Prison Service has sold only one property on the Mede estate within the last five years; the property concerned was 6, The Mede. The District Valuer placed a value of £38,000 on the property as at 6 April 1993. It was purchased under the discount sale scheme and the applicant was entitled to 59 per cent. discount; the purchase price therefore was £15,580.

The property was of Cornish type construction or "unbricked".

Road Traffic Offences

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in what percentage of road accidents involving one or more *(a)* fatal, *(b)* serious and *(c)* slight injuries at least one driver or rider was convicted of a road traffic offence, in the latest year for which figures are available. [44000]

Mr. Michael: The information requested is not available. The Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions collects statistics of road accidents, but its records do not show whether persons involved are subsequently convicted of a road traffic offence.

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of convictions for road traffic offences heard in *(a)* magistrates courts and *(b)* Crown courts related to incidents involving one or more fatal, serious or slight injuries, in the latest year for which figures are available. [44001]

Mr. Michael: The available information relates to convictions for offences of causing death by dangerous or careless driving, by aggravated vehicle taking and causing bodily harm in England and Wales in 1996.

Convictions for offences of causing death numbered ten at magistrates' courts and offences of causing bodily harm three. The total number of convictions for motoring offences at magistrates' courts was 1,476,991. The Crown Court figures were 329 and 28 respectively, and the total convictions for motoring offences 15,397.

The information held centrally does not enable other offences involving injury to be identified.

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* male and *(b)* female motorists aged (i) 17 to 24, (ii) 25 to 59 and (iii) 60 years and over were convicted in relation to motoring of (1) causing death or bodily harm, (2) dangerous driving, (3) alcohol or drug-related offences, (4) careless driving, (5) speed limit offences and (6) offences related to neglect of traffic directions, in the latest year for which figures are available. [43997]

Mr. Michael: The following table gives the information in relation to offences of causing death or bodily harm, dangerous driving and driving etc. after consuming alcohol or taking drugs. The figures relate to the number of offences for which persons of the relevant age and sex were convicted, not the number of persons involved.

Findings of guilt at all courts for selected offence groups, by age and sex of offender, England and Wales—1996

	Male				Female			
	All ages[1]	17–24	25–59	60+	All ages[1]	17–24	25–59	60+
Causing death or bodily harm	348	157	169	14	22	2	20	—
Dangerous driving	5,584	2,801	2,454	42	166	63	92	6
Driving etc. after consuming alcohol or taking drugs	87,956	22,018	63,119	2,373	7,749	1,565	6,014	147

[1] Includes offences committed by persons under 17

The exact age of persons over 20 is not collected centrally for offences of careless driving, speed limit offences or offences of neglect of traffic directions, but the following table gives the nearest information to that requested.

Findings of guilt at all courts for selected offence groups, by age and sex of offender, England and Wales—1996

	Male			Female		
	All ages[1]	Under 21	21 and over	All ages	Under 21	21 and over
Careless driving	48,790	7,796	40,994	8,632	992	7,640
Speed limit offences	115,388	6,854	108,535	14,651	666	13,985
Neglect of traffic directions	30,223	2,549	27,674	5,083	264	4,819

[1] Includes offences committed by persons under 17

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many random roadside checks on motorists were carried out by police; and how many of these motorists were driving while disqualified, in the latest year for which figures are available. [43996]

Mr. Michael: Information is not available on the number of random roadside checks carried out by the police on motorists. There were 42,508 convictions for driving while disqualified in England and Wales in 1996.

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many fines were issued for motoring offences; and of these how many *(a)* were paid without a reminder, *(b)* were paid after a reminder and *(c)* remained unpaid after 12 months in 1996. [43994]

Mr. Michael: 1,032,897 fines were issued in England and Wales during 1996, but it is not known how many were paid or unpaid.

Fines are collected from the courts by the Lord Chancellor's Department for passing to the Treasury, and it is not possible to distinguish the offences for which the fines were given.

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) on how many occasions motorists were found guilty of a motoring offence for which they had *(a)* already received a written warning during the previous three years and *(b)* already been convicted in the previous three years, in the latest year for which figures are available; [43999]

(2) on how many occasions motorists were issued with a written warning for a motoring offence for which they had already received a written warning during the latest year for which figures are available and the previous three years. [43998]

Mr. Michael: The information held centrally does not enable the previous records of motorists to be compared with the latest offence committed or dealt with. The Home Office Offenders' Index covers the criminal history of offenders, but this is limited to convictions for standard list offences and covers very few motoring offences.

Alcohol (Young Persons)

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what steps he has taken to clarify the law on the use of children in test purchases of alcohol; [44032]

(2) what steps he has taken to introduce legislation to prevent adults from buying alcohol on behalf of unsupervised children. [44033]

Mr. George Howarth: The Government's statement of 17 July 1997 on alcopops and alcohol misuse by those under age included commitments to legislate on both these subjects. We shall do so as soon as there is a suitable opportunity.

Firearms

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish on the same date, in the Welsh and English languages, the firearms and shotgun application forms and certificates that are currently under revision. [44097]

Mr. Michael: The Government's priority in revising the Firearms Rules is to implement the changes to firearms licensing provided for in the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997 and as recommended by Lord Cullen in his report on the Dunblane tragedy. Because of the pressing need to introduce the new Rules, the prescribed firearms licensing forms will be published in English in the first instance but we have discussed with the Welsh Language Board our wish to produce these complex forms in Welsh as well as English. We will publish Welsh language versions of the forms as soon as possible.

Prisoners (Drugs)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the total numbers of prisoners who have been found in random tests to have taken *(a)* cocaine, *(b)* methadone, *(c)* amphetamines, *(d)* benzodiazepines, *(e)* barbiturates and *(f)* LSD, since the tests were introduced; what percentage of prisoners had taken the drugs in each case; and what changes have taken place in the proportions of these six categories of drugs. [44345]

Mr. George Howarth: Table A shows how many samples tested positive for each drug since all prisons began testing in April 1996, and the percentage of all samples tested that represents, calculated to one decimal place. It is not possible to say how many different prisoners tested positive because the data are anonymised when collated centrally.

Tables B and C show the percentage of random samples positive for all drug types tested for in each month of the last two financial years. There has been no significant change in the percentages of samples testing positive for the drug types named in this question.

Random mandatory drug test samples testing positive by drug type, 1 April 1996 to 31 March 1998

Table A

Drug type	*Number of tests positive*	*Percentage of samples tested positive*
Cocaine	311	0.3
Methadone	211	0.2
Amphetamines	298	0.3
Benzodiazepines	1,664	1.4
Barbiturates	45	0
LSD	0	0

Monthly percentage of random samples taken testing positive: April 1996—March 1997

Table B

Drug group	*April*	*May*	*June*	*July*	*August*	*September*	*October*	*November*	*December*	*January*	*February*	*March*
Cannabis	20.9	19.7	18.5	19.3	19.6	19.7	20.2	20.4	20.5	20.8	19.6	19.2
Opiates	5.1	5.1	4.6	6.0	5.9	6.0	5.4	5.6	6.4	5.3	4.4	4.6
Cocaine	0.2	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.3	0.2	0.3	0.2	0.2
Benzodiazepines	1.5	2.1	1.9	1.3	1.3	1.4	1.2	1.2	1.1	1.5	1.2	1.4
Methadone	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.4	0.2	0.2	0.2
Amphetamines	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.4	0.4	0.4
Barbiturates	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
LSD	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

Monthly percentage of random samples taken testing positive: April 1997—March 1998

Table C

Drug group	*April*	*May*	*June*	*July*	*August*	*September*	*October*	*November*	*December*	*January*	*February*	*March*
Cannabis	20.3	19.8	17.8	16.6	15.4	15.9	15.8	15.3	16.7	15.8	13.8	15.1
Opiates	4.3	3.8	3.8	4.2	3.7	4.0	4.2	4.1	4.6	4.3	4.3	4.6
Cocaine	0.2	0.4	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.3
Benzodiazepines	1.2	1.1	1.4	1.3	1.3	0.8	1.0	1.6	1.5	1.4	1.5	1.3
Methadone	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.1
Amphetamines	0.3	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.3	0.4
Barbiturates	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0
LSD	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

Human Rights

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which body will monitor the United Kingdom's adherence to the European Convention on Human Rights. [44564]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: A person claiming to be a victim of a violation of the Convention rights may petition the European Commission of Human Rights in Strasbourg. A case may then go from the Commission to the European Court of Human Rights, whose decision is binding. The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe supervises the execution of the Court's judgment.

The Human Rights Bill does not change this position, but it will additionally enable people in the United Kingdom to assert their Convention rights in domestic legal proceedings.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the effect of the incorporation into United Kingdom law of the European Convention on Human Rights on individuals' privacy. [44565]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The United Kingdom is already under an international obligation, as a party to the European Convention on Human Rights, not to violate Article 8 of the Convention which guarantees the right to respect for private and family life.

The Human Rights Bill will make it possible for this and the other Convention rights to be invoked in domestic proceedings in the United Kingdom. Decisions will be for the courts.

DEFENCE

Armed Service Personnel

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many women are currently serving in each of the three armed services. [44117]

Dr. Reid: As at 1 April 1998, the number of women serving in the Armed Forces was:

	Officers	*Other ranks*	*Total*
Naval Service	453 (7.3%)	2,809 (7.7%)	3,262 (7.3%)
Army	1,172 (8.4%)	6,260 (6.5%)	7,432 (6.8%)
Royal Air Force	939 (9.4%)	4,067 (9.1%)	5,006 (9.0%)
All Services	2,564 (7.9%)	13,136 (7.4%)	15,700 (7.5%)

National Data Centre

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) when the contract to run the United Kingdom National Data Centre was put out to tender; [44340]

(2) the contract to run the United Kingdom National Data Centre was advertised; [44342]

(3) if the United Kingdom National Data Centre has responsibility for monitoring data provided by the United Nations on nuclear testing. [44341]

Mr. Spellar: Invitations to tender for the contract to establish the UK National Data Centre were issued in June 1997, the project having been advertised in the MOD Contracts Bulletin on 15 January 1997. Tenders were received from the British Geological Survey, BGS, and a consortium comprising AWE, Serco and Assessment Services. The contract was subsequently awarded to the BGS and took effect in January 1998. When operational, the National Data Centre will be responsible for evaluating technical data supplied by the International Data Centre, IDC, which is being established in Vienna

under the provisions of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. The technical data will be provided by the IDC from monitoring stations established throughout the world as part of the International Monitoring System, IMS.

Procurement Contracts

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of defence manufacturing contracts in the United Kingdom in terms of the *(a)* number and *(b)* value of contracts were undertaken for (i) the United Kingdom Government, (ii) other EU states and (iii) states outside the EU in the years 1991–92 to 1997–98. [43412]

Mr. Spellar: The information is not available in the form requested, but:

UK Defence Statistics 1997—Table 1.5 gives net expenditure for equipment procurement for production and repair and spares for 1997–98 of £7,173 million as an estimate of the value of manufacturing contracts placed by UK Government in total.

Statement on the Defence Estimates 1996—Figure 8 shows that the proportion of equipment expenditure over the previous five years in the UK and on collaborative projects was 91 per cent. of the total equipment expenditure.

UK Defence Statistics 1997—Table 1.13 shows exports of defence equipment (deliveries) for 1996 to NATO and other Western European countries at £1,055 million and to other countries at £2,347 million.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what EU rules and regulations govern the competitive tendering of defence procurement contracts by his Department; [43414]

(2) what EU rules and regulations govern the competitive tendering of defence procurement contracts by member state Governments of the EU; [43413]

(3) if defence procurement contracts in all EU member states are open to competitive tendering to manufacturing companies in other EU member states. [43415]

Mr. Spellar: Procurement contracts for Defence goods and services in all EU member states are open to competitive tendering by companies in other EU member states, in accordance with the four EC Directives:

Supplies Directive: 93/36/EEC

Works Directive: 93/37/EEC

Services Directive: 92/50/EEC

Compliance Directive: 89/665/EEC.

The Directives have been implemented in UK law by Regulations made by the Treasury under Section 2(2) of the European Communities Act 1972, as follows:

The Public Supply Contracts Regulations 1995 (SI 1995/201)

The Public Works Contracts Regulations 1991 (SI 1991/2680)

The Public Services Contracts Regulations 1993 (SI 1993/3228).

The fundamental principles of the Directives are that there should be an equal opportunity to bid for work without discrimination on grounds of nationality, that the award criteria should be stated clearly at the outset, and that there should be transparency in the award decision.

There is an exemption under the Directive for those goods and services to which the provision of Article 223 of the Treaty of Rome apply.

Sierra Leone

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 1 June 1998, *Official Report*, column *103*, on awards of the Military Cross, how many United Kingdom forces were serving in Sierra Leone in the two weeks either side of the occasion in which a service man was awarded the Military Cross in 1997; and which units they served in. [44232]

Dr. Reid: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) on 18 May 1998, *Official Report*, column *255–57*, and to my subsequent letter of 1 June 1998, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Widow's Pension

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many women were widowed aged under 45 years in each of the last three years; what percentage of these received *(a)* the widowed mother's allowance and *(b)* widow's pension and in each case at what cost; and if she will make a statement. [41630]

Mr. Denham: Information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the table.

The number of new widows under 45 years receiving Widowed Mother's Allowance and associated cost

£ million

Year widowed	*Number*	*Overall cost*
October 1994-September 1995	4,640	18
October 1995-September 1996	4,480	19
October 1996-September 1997	3,920	17

Notes:

1. The table is based on the Pension Strategy Computer System and only includes cases in Great Britain. The percentage figures are based on information from the Family Resources Survey 1995–96
2. Women widowed aged under 45 since 1988 are not entitled to a Widows Pension
3. Monetary amounts are rounded to the nearest £1 million and are in cash prices
4. Percentages are rounded to the nearest one per cent.

The percentage of all widows aged under 45 who received Widowed Mothers Allowance in 1994–95 was 62 per cent.

The percentage of all widows aged under 45 who received Widowed Mothers Allowance in 1995–96 was 65 per cent.

Lone Parents

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assumptions about the rate of response to initial letters to lone parents underlay the budgeting for the Parent Plus pilots; and what has been the actual response rate to initial letters under the New Deal for lone parents. [40209]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Budgeting for the Parent Plus pilots was based on the assumption that 35 per cent. of lone parents sent a letter would attend an initial interview and, of those, 50 per cent. would agree to participate,

giving a take-up rate of 17.5 per cent. The same assumptions were made in the initial plans for the New Deal for Lone Parents.

Lone parents have attended interviews in response to various contacts: directly in response to letters of invitation, and indirectly in response to publicity, and word of mouth. As of 24 April 1998, there were 25,805 contacts with lone parents, which includes 22,402 lone parents who had been sent letters. 5,508 lone parents have attended an interview in response to a letter or other publicity; and 4,901 have agreed to participate in the New Deal for Lone Parents, following an interview. This means that approximately 90 per cent. of those attending an interview have agreed to participate; and produces a take-up rate of 19 per cent., higher than the original assumption.

A full independent evaluation of the New Deal for Lone Parents is being undertaken, to report in Autumn 1999. This will assess the overall effectiveness of the programme.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will estimate the average income of an unemployed lone mother with three dependent children in *(a)* London, *(b)* Birmingham, *(c)* Manchester, *(d)* Glasgow and *(e)* Edinburgh in each year between 1993–94 and 1998–99 broken down by benefit. [43915]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the tables.

Data on the average incomes of unemployed lone mothers in each of the cities named in the question are not available.

There may be unemployed lone mothers with income (from other sources, for example child maintenance) of a level which will affect their entitlement to Income Support or JSA, Free School Meals and Welfare Food. Child Benefit is payable in full irrespective of income.

Social Security (SS) benefit entitlement—1993–94 to 1997–98 and (existing claimants only) 1998–99 for an unemployed lone mother with three dependent children

£

Year	IS/JSA	Child benefit	Free school meals and welfare foods	SS benefit entitlement
1993–94	78.55	32.25	10.49	121.29
1994–95	82.30	32.85	10.84	125.99
1995–96	83.65	33.60	11.40	128.65
1996–97	85.95	34.70	10.76	131.41
1997–98	88.35	35.10	10.90	134.35
from April 1998	90.35	35.70	10.96	137.01
from November 1998	95.35	35.70	10.96	142.01

Note:

From 6 April 1998, new claimants receive different rates.

Social Security (SS) benefit entitlement—1998–99 for an unemployed lone mother with three dependent children

£

	IS/JSA	Child benefit	Free school meals and welfare foods	SS benefit entitlement
from April 1998	85.65	35.70	10.96	132.31
from July 1998	91.30	30.05	10.96	132.31
from November 1998	96.30	30.05	10.96	137.31

Notes:

1. These tables show lone parents' Social Security benefit entitlements (excluding Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit)
2. An unemployed lone mother's Social Security benefit entitlement (excluding Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit) is made up of *(a)* Income Support (IS) or, for some lone mothers, JSA; *(b)* Child Benefit (ChB); and *(c)* Free School Meals and Welfare Foods (FSM & WF). There is no regional variation in the rates of these benefits
3. Lone mothers who are unemployed and in receipt of Income Support (IS) or JSA may receive help with their housing costs—through Housing Benefit (HB) or Income Support Mortgage Interest (ISMI)—and with their council tax—through Council Tax Benefit (CTB)
4. Gross benefit entitlement figures for lone mothers (ie before housing costs) would show a variation by city, since rents and Council Tax (and therefore Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit) vary by city
5. IS claimants are entitled to welfare foods (free milk tokens and vitamins) for any children they have under 5 years old and free school meals for children they have aged 5 and over. The value of free school meals is based on the January 1991 figure uprated by the RPI food component each year. The value of welfare foods is an estimate based on the average cost of a pint of milk
6. The figures assume:

(a) take up of full benefit entitlement, and

(b) the family has no capital or disregarded income

7. The figures shown assume one child to be under 5, another between 5 and 10 years old and the third between 11 and 15 years old
8. The removal of the lone parent rate of Child Benefit, which is reflected in table 2, is subject to Parliamentary approval of the necessary regulations

Concessionary Television Licences

Mr. Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people qualify for concessionary television licences under the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Acts; and how many are currently claiming their entitlement. [43803]

Mr. Boateng: I have been asked to reply.

Concessionary television licences are not provided under the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970, but under the Wireless Telegraphy (Television Licence Fees) Regulations 1997 (made under the Wireless Telegraphy Act 1947) which is the responsibility of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. Under these Regulations, a concessionary television licence costing £5 is available to people living in residential homes and certain types of sheltered accommodation. There are currently 651,000 beneficiaries under this scheme. It is not known how many people qualify for the concession and fail to claim, but the number is likely to be low, since applications for the concession have to be submitted by housing managers, who are generally well aware of the existence of the concessionary scheme.

Registered blind people are also eligible for a reduction of £1.25 in the television licence fee. Approximately 34,400 people are currently claiming this reduction. At 31 March 1997, there were 158,590 registered blind people in England.

The Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970 (Section 2(1)(b)) places a duty upon local authorities to make arrangements to provide a disabled person with, or to assist that person in obtaining, wireless, television, library or similar recreational facilities, where the authority is satisfied that this is necessary in order to meet that person's needs. The number of persons receiving such provision is not known.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Ministerial Papers

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what instructions she has given on the information which she wishes to be drawn to her attention *(a)* in red boxes and *(b)* otherwise; and if she will indicate when and how these instructions have been modified. [42587]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 18 May 1998]:* I expect information to be drawn to my attention by my Private Office, according to its urgency and importance. The only instructions I have given on handling such information are that I prefer to deal with papers as and when possible throughout the day, rather than having them put aside to go in red boxes if this is unnecessary. These instructions are unchanged.

Sierra Leone

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the President of the Board of Trade at what time and on what date she first saw a copy of the letter addressed to the Foreign Secretary from S J Berwin & Co. on behalf of Sandline International dated 24 April. [42130]

Mrs. Beckett: My Department provided advice to Ministers on this letter on Wednesday 6 May 1998, when I was overseas. Following my return I saw the text of the letter on Tuesday 12 May.

Mr. Blunt: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) on what dates since 1 May 1997 the Restricted Enforcement Unit has met; and on how many occasions the Unit has invited Her Majesty's Customs and Excise to commence an investigation into illegal arms exports in breach on UN Security Council resolutions; [42693]

(2) if she will list the officials who attended the Cross-departmental Restricted Enforcement Unit on 18 February. [42695]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 19 May 1998]:* I refer the hon. Member to the statement by the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in the House during the debate on 18 May 1998, *Official Report*, columns 606–08, in which he announced the investigation by Sir Thomas Legg KCB QC into allegations about Government involvement with the supply of arms to Sierra Leone by UK citizens and firms, and said that the Terms of Reference would be placed in the Library of the House. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary intends to publish the report of the investigation.

Restricted Enforcement Unit

Mr. Blunt: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which departments are represented on the Restricted Enforcement Unit. [42692]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 19 May 1998]:* The following Departments are represented at the Restricted Enforcement Unit:

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office
The Department of Trade and Industry
The Ministry of Defence
HM Customs and Excise
The Security Service
The Secret Intelligence Service
Government Communications Headquarters.

Printing, Packaging and Graphics Industry

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what fiscal steps her Department has taken to encourage entrepreneurial investment in the United Kingdom printing, packaging and graphic communications industry. [43693]

Mr. Battle: The Government have taken a number of steps to encourage long-term investment and enterprise in all our industries. These include measures to promote economic stability, cuts in corporation tax, increased first-year capital allowances for SMEs, and the reform of capital gains tax and the Enterprise Investment Scheme. The Government have also published a document, "Innovating for the Future: Investing in R&D" as the basis for a wide-ranging consultation to see how we can improve our record on investment in research and development. Furthermore, the Chancellor recently announced three new venture capital funds totalling £240 million to support small and medium businesses.

Straw Burning

Mr. Oaten: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans she has to develop straw burning as an alternative form of energy in the United Kingdom. [43551]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 1 June 1998]:* A 31 MW straw-powered project at Ely, Cambridgeshire, was contracted under the third non-fossil fuel obligation, NFFO-3, and is now at an advanced stage of development. I shall monitor the progress of this project in order to inform decisions resulting from my review of new and renewable energy policy on the prospects for straw as a fuel, and on the eligibility of this energy source in any future NFFO arrangements.

County Courts

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans she has for the re-division of county courts between official receivers' officers; if she will list which courts are to be moved to which official receivers' offices; and when these changes will be implemented. [43848]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: This is an operational matter for the Inspector General and Chief Executive of the Insolvency Service. I have asked him to reply direct to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Joyce to Mr. David Chidgey, dated 4 June 1998:

Mr. Nigel Griffiths MP, Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs, has asked me as Inspector General and Chief Executive of The Insolvency Service Executive Agency to reply to your question about the re-division of county courts between official receivers' offices.

The Insolvency Service is implementing a new grading and pay system to come into effect on 1 August 1998. As part of that, it is looking at some adjustments to the case loads of some official receivers' offices, which will be achieved by the re-allocation of the work of some county courts between those offices. Consideration of those re-allocations has yet to be concluded, and I am therefore not yet in a position to provide a full list of the changes. I have however given an undertaking to supply the list to the Trade Union Side of the Agency National Whitley Committee by 2 July, and a copy will be made available to relevant staff: that timetable is expected to be met. The changes will take place over a period of time. The timing will be dependent on a number of factors, including current staffing levels in offices, but I do not see them involving any redundancies, compulsory transfers or office closures.

Post Office Review

Mr. Boswell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many contacts she has had with private sector carriers in the context of the Post Office review. [43807]

Mr. Ian McCartney: I met several leading private sector carriers, and a representative organisation (AICES), during the first phase of the review last year. I am also aware of the evidence presented to the Trade and Industry Select Committee last Autumn by certain private sector carriers. Since the announcement of the second phase of the review, my officials have had contact with a number of carriers and have met some of them.

Population Statistics

Ms Atherton: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will list the populations of South Yorkshire, Merseyside, Wales, Northern Ireland, NUTS II regions and Cornwall NUTS III region. [43627]

Mrs. Roche: The latest published regional population estimates for these NUTS areas are for 1995:

	Population
South Yorkshire	1,303,900
Merseyside	1,427,200
Glwyd, Dyfed, Gwynedd, and Powys	1,132,700
Gwent, and Mid, South, and West Glamorgan	1,784,100
Northern Ireland	1,649,000
Cornwall	482,700

Note:
The boundaries and names of the two Welsh NUTS level II areas are based on the former counties
Source:
Regional Trends

Objective 1 Funding

Ms Atherton: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will list the populations of those regions currently receiving Objective 1 structural funds from the European Union. [43626]

Mrs. Roche: The population in regions covered by current Objective 1 programmes in each EU Member State is:

	million
Austria	0.269
Belgium	1.279
Germany	16.447
Greece	10.209
Spain	23.269
France	2.546
Ireland	3.500
Italy	21.133
Netherlands	0.217
Portugal	9.868
United Kingdom	3.414

Source:
European Commission, *Structural Funds and Cohesion Fund 1994–99 Regulations and Commentary*

ACPO Ltd.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the President of the Board of Trade whether the Directors of ACPO Ltd. are being considered for prosecution for non-compliance with the Companies Acts in respect of *(a)* their appointments as directors of ACPO Ltd. and *(b)* the contents of their Memorandum and Articles of Association. [44104]

Mr. Ian McCartney: No. As far as Companies House is aware, the requirements of the Companies Act in respect of appointment of directors and Memorandum and Articles have now been met. In this situation Companies House would not consider prosecution. This is on the basis of advice applicable to such situations that it would not be in the public interest to prosecute.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps Companies House have taken to ensure that the directors of ACPO Ltd. comply fully with the disclosure requirements of Companies Act Form 288a. [44103]

Mr. Ian McCartney: Companies House has no information which leads it to the view that the directors of ACPO Ltd. have not now complied fully with the disclosure requirements of Companies Act form 288a. Companies House accepts documents in good faith. If, however, it is brought to notice that information disclosed under section 288 of the Companies Act is in any way inaccurate or incomplete, the directors concerned would be asked to provide corrected information. Failure to do so could lead to consideration of prosecution.

EZ Test

Mr. Clappison: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what communication her Department has had with the UK distributors of the ecstasy kit, EZ Test. [44171]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: As far as I am aware, there have been no communications between this Department and the UK distributors of this product.

Agenda 2000

Mr. Casale: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment she has made of the impact on rural communities of the Commission's Agenda 2000 proposals for reform of the structural funds. [42724]

Mrs. Roche: It will not be possible to make such an assessment until the Commission publishes its detailed financial plans for individual Member States. The Commission's Agenda 2000 proposals are complex; we will also need further details from the Commission on the new Structural Fund framework, the related rural development measures, and proposed rural Community Initiative before we are able to make an assessment. One of the Government's objectives is to see that there is a sensible balance between rural and urban areas, which will be helped if Member States have flexibility in administering the funds.

Genetic Engineering

Miss Melanie Johnson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps the Government have taken to act on the recommendation of the Review of the Inter-Relationships between the Science, Engineering and Technology Expenditure of Government Departments that they should review their mechanisms for inter-departmental co-ordination in respect of genetic modification. [44792]

Mr. Battle: The Government have recently completed a review of the role, membership, and operation of the Interdepartmental Group on Genetic Modification Technology (IGGMOT), the official level committee for the co-ordination of policy on genetic modification. Copies of the outcome of the review, which found that IGGMOT remains the best way to co-ordinate policy on genetic modification at official level across Government and should continue to exist with no change to its terms of reference, are available in the Library.

Export Credits

Helen Jones: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the response to the ECGD's consultation paper, Finance for UK Capital Goods and Project Exports; and what action the Government propose. [44791]

Mrs. Beckett: ECGD has received an excellent response from the UK exporting and financial community to its Consultation Paper. The Minister for Trade will be leading discussions which ECGD will be having with banks and exporters to consider the various suggestions made. The focus will be on ways of enhancing exporter competitiveness and improving the cost-effectiveness of ECGD interest rate support. This work will inevitably take several months and extend beyond the scheduled 30 June expiry date of ECGD's current support facility, the Fixed Rate Export Finance scheme. Therefore, to ensure continuity of service to exporters and banks while this work is being undertaken, the Government have decided to extend the validity of the current scheme for six months until 31 December 1998.

International Market Council

Mr. Derek Twigg: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what topics were discussed at the EU Ministerial Council on the Internal Market on 18 May; and what matters were voted upon. [44790]

Mrs. Beckett: My noble Friend the Minister for European Trade and Competitiveness chaired the Internal Market Council in Brussels on 18 May 1998.

The Council considered three elements of the Single Market Action Plan, which aim to improve the operation of the Single Market. Council adopted conclusions on standardisation, which open the way to making the production of European standards quicker and more efficient; the Presidency drew conclusions following a discussion on how to improve transposition and enforcement of the Single Market legislation; and the Commission presented the latest Single Market Scoreboard, which showed that Member States are improving their performance on the transposition of Single Market directives into their national laws: at 1 May 1998 over 80% of Single Market Directives had been adopted in all 15 Member States compared with only 65% in June 1997.

The Council reached political agreement on a Regulation for a Commission intervention mechanism for the elimination of certain obstacles to the free movement of goods, and an associated Council Resolution which reaffirmed Member States' political commitment to preserving the free movement of goods. This includes notifying their economic operators, each other, and the Commission, of such obstacles and steps being taken to overcome them, and respecting tight deadlines imposed by the Commission in dealing with related infraction proceedings.

The Council discussed a new Regulation on the labelling of genetically modified soya and maize, which aims to provide information to consumers. It reached political agreement on much of the substance of the company law Regulation, which forms part of the European Company Statute. It reached political agreement on three common positions. It agreed (by a qualified majority with Sweden and Portugal voting against and Ireland abstaining) on a Directive on mutual recognition of qualifications, which consolidates the existing legislation providing for certain professionals to work in Member States other than their own. It agreed common positions by unanimity on draft Directives on the legal protection of conditional access services, ie, that is, services where access is conditional upon prior authorisation and payment, such as pay-per-view TV; and on the classification, packaging and labelling of dangerous preparations, which consolidates existing health and safety legislation in this field, extending its scope slightly and promoting environmental protection.

The Council adopted four other sets of formal conclusions. These were on the Single Market for pharmaceutical products, asking the Commission to develop proposals to tackle Single Market problems; on public procurement, taking forward Commission proposals for modernisation of the rules; on Commercial Communications, endorsing a new Commission-chaired committee furthering the Single Market in advertising services; and on the improvement of the EU preferential tariff regime for certain developing countries.

Council also discussed the draft Directive on chocolate; and the Commission reported on the progress of the negotiations of a draft Directive extending product liability to primary agricultural products.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Methadone Deaths

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the number of deaths in Northern Ireland from methadone in each of the last four years; and if she will make a statement. [44012]

Mr. Worthington: None.

Smoking

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what percentage of teenage *(a)* boys and *(b)* girls in Northern Ireland was smoking tobacco (i) in 1988 and (ii) at the most recent date for which figures are available. [44014]

Mr. Worthington: The information is not available in the format requested. Available data are shown in the following table:

	Year	*Age*	*% Smokers*
Boys	1986	11–15	17
	1988	16–19	25
	1994	11, 13 and 15	12
	1996–97	16–19	23
Girls	1986	11–15	13
	1988	16–19	20
	1994	11, 13 and 15	14
	1996–97	16–19	23

Occupational Health

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps are being taken to make occupational health services available to staff working in primary care in the National Health Service. [43600]

Mr. Worthington: Primary care staff who are employed by HSS Trusts receive an appropriate occupational health service as defined in guidance issued by the Department of Health and Social Services. General medical and dental practitioners and their staff are not covered by such arrangements but any general practice may contract with a HSS Trust for the provision of an occupational health service.

WALES

Smoking

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of teenage *(a)* boys and *(b)* girls in Wales was smoking tobacco (i) in 1988 and (ii) at the most recent date for which figures are available. [44017]

Mr. Win Griffiths: Details of the percentage of teenagers (11–16 year old) who regularly (weekly) smoke tobacco in 1998 and 1996, the most recent date for which figures are available, are set out as follows:

Percentage

Year	*Boys*	*Girls*
1988	8.00	11.30
1996	11.90	16.20

Source:
Health Promotion Authority for Wales

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what the estimated gross cost of anti-smoking campaigns in Wales aimed at children and young people has been since 1988; and what assessment he has made of the impact of the campaigns on teenage *(a)* boys and *(b)* girls. [44016]

Mr. Win Griffiths: The main body in Wales responsible for undertaking anti-smoking campaigns is the Health Promotion Authority for Wales (HPAW), whose role is to work with others to promote good health in Wales.

The cost of anti-smoking campaigns since 1990–91 undertaken by HPAW aimed at children and young people is set out in the table. Detailed information is not available prior to 1990–91.

£000

Year	*Expenditure*
1990–91	86
1991–92	350
1992–93	343
1993–94	345
1994–95	281
1995–96	240
1996–97	369
1997–98	219
1998–99	(estimated) 227

Source:
Health Promotion Authority for Wales

The information relates to initiatives directed solely at smoking. Smoking cessation advice also features strongly in other general health promotion initiatives funded by HPAW.

Research by HPAW indicates that there has been some success in delaying the age at which young people begin to experiment with tobacco.

Dairies

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what criteria the Welsh Office uses to decide which individual dairies in Wales receive grant aid; to what extent such grant aid relates to *(a)* the provision of new jobs and *(b)* the securing of existing jobs; and what consideration is given to the possible distortion of competition by such grants. [44052]

Mr. Win Griffiths: Assistance to dairies is available through a number of Welsh Office grant schemes such as Regional Selective Assistance, Processing and Marketing Grant and the Marketing Development Scheme.

The criteria used depend on the grant scheme in question. I have arranged for copies of the literature relating to the schemes to be sent to the right hon. Gentleman.

Creating and safeguarding jobs is an important factor in deciding which grant applications to support but the Marketing Development Scheme and the Processing and Marketing Grant are specifically geared to improving the marketing and processing infrastructure of companies. Such projects will not necessarily lead to job creation but will assist in the expansion of business. However, for grants such as Regional Selective Assistance, the level of employment generated or retained is a crucial factor and due weight is given to this element when assessing applications.

Applications for grant aid are considered from any eligible business and all applications are considered on their individual merits.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Sierra Leone

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much money was provided by her Department to President Kabbah's Government in exile. [42691]

Clare Short: The Department for International Development provided £50,000 to support the basic services of President Kabbah's Government in exile. This was in addition to £250,000 for a workshop and seminar in the United Kingdom to plan for the restoration of Government and for communications equipment.

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assistance her Department is currently providing in Sierra Leone. [41751]

Clare Short: The Department for International Development is currently supporting the work of NGOs in the provision of emergency seeds and tools, community healthcare, and reconstruction in Sierra Leone. We are also funding two Sierra Leoneans in key advisory posts.

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what support and advice, other than financial assistance, was rendered to President Kabbah of Sierra Leone between 25 May 1997 and 10 March 1998 by her Department. [42690]

Clare Short: The Department for International Development assisted President Kabbah's planning for a return to government by supporting basic services in exile, providing communications equipment, and through a workshop and seminar in the United Kingdom in October 1997.

North Korea

Mr. Donald Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the current humanitarian situation in North Korea. [43712]

Clare Short: The report of the UK-led European Union Technical Mission to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and discussions at the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Round Table on DPRK in May indicate that nutrition has improved and the immediate emergency has abated. However there are selective humanitarian needs, especially in health, and the population remains at risk from possible future disasters. My Department is discussing with relevant authorities in DPRK, UN agencies and partners in the European Union how targeted support can help to promote sustainable recovery and reduce future vulnerability. I will place a copy of the report on this mission in the Library.

Mr. Donald Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what revision of her current policies towards North Korea will result from the recent visit to that country by officials from her Department leading an EU team. [43713]

Clare Short: I have considered the report of the UK-led Technical Mission and the conclusions of the United Nations Development Programme Round Table on Agricultural Recovery and Environmental Protection (AREP). The emphasis for future assistance to North Korea is to support a transition from food aid dependency to food security and rehabilitation of the rural sector within the context of promoting peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula. We will support a common European Union approach to target assistance to help poor households, reduce vulnerability to future disasters, promote confidence and trust between North Korea and the outside world and gain greater access for international agencies to implement their humanitarian activities more effectively. We support the implementation of the European Commission's 1998 programme. In addition we will consider proposals for support from NGOs and UN agencies, within the above framework. I will place a copy of the report on this mission in the Library.

TREASURY

Brewing Industry (Duty Changes)

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what assessment his Department has made of the duty lost to the Inland Revenue as predicted by the model used by Oxford Economic Forecasts to assess changes in duty on the brewing industry; [42969]

(2) what assessment his Department has made of the impact of reducing duty on the *(a)* brewing industry, *(b)* gross domestic product, *(c)* the retail prices index, *(d)* the total duty collected and *(e)* levels of employment. [44119]

Dawn Primarolo: There would be no tax lost to the Inland Revenue. Moreover, we do not believe that any cut in duty on beer would provide a sustainable benefit to the economy.

Staff Car Mileage Allowance

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total real terms value of *(a)* staff car mileage claims paid and *(b)* staff rail fares paid; and what was the total amount of staff car mileage for which reimbursement was made and the percentage change year on year, for each year since 1989–90. [44083]

Mrs. Liddell: The real terms value of Treasury staff travel is:

	Staff car mileage costs £000	*Staff UK rail/air fares £000*	*Staff car mileage*
1995–96	8	153	n/a
1996–97	6	135	n/a
1997–98	6	89	7,841

Figures for years prior to 1995 are in summary form and a breakdown at the level required could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Israeli Exports

Mr. Faber: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the current status of Her Majesty's Customs and Excise investigation into the origin of certain Israeli exports to the United Kingdom; and if he will publish the results. [43863]

Dawn Primarolo: The outcome of investigations co-ordinated by the European Commission into the origin of orange juice exported from Israel is being analysed by the Member States. In line with normal procedure, the detailed results are notified to the individual importers, who are liable under Community law for any customs duty liability. They are not published generally. Investigations by HM Customs and Excise into the origin of other products have so far revealed duty liabilities in excess of £100,000.

Tobacco

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much revenue was raised from each of the taxes payable on each category of tobacco product in the last year for which figures are available. [44006]

Dawn Primarolo: The table shows receipts in 1997 and 1997–98:

Duty receipts

£ million

Year	*Cigarette*	*Cigar*	*Hand rolling tobacco*	*Other smoking and chewing tobacco*	*[1]VAT*
1997	8,035	139	166	50	1,915
1997–98	8,009	140	158	48	n/a

[1] Value added tax has been estimated using non-seasonally adjusted figures for consumers' expenditure at current prices on tobacco (from ONS publication Consumer Trends-Quarter 4 1997, Table 4.1). It is not possible to calculate the VAT for 1997–98 because the ONS estimate for consumers' expenditure on tobacco in Quarter 1 1998 is not yet available.

EU Debt

Mr. Gill: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the statistics produced by the International Monetary Fund for the purposes of measuring the ratio of debt to Gross Domestic Product are on the same basis for each EU country. [43871]

Mrs. Liddell: The International Monetary Fund published the ratio of government debt to GDP for EU countries in their May 1998 World Economic Outlook. The outturn data were from national sources and the IMF noted they were not in all cases based on the same definition.

Housing (VAT)

Mr. Tom King: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much revenue would be lost by reducing the rate of VAT on refurbishment and conversions of existing dwellings from 17.5 per cent. to 5 per cent. [43860]

Dawn Primarolo: The cost of reducing VAT on all house repair and maintenance to 5 per cent. is estimated to be £1.1 billion. From the source data, it is not possible to separate refurbishment from repairs and maintenance.

Mr. Tom King: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much revenue would be generated by introducing value-added tax on *(a)* new construction and *(b)* new housing at a rate of 5 per cent. [43859]

Dawn Primarolo: The additional revenue yield from introducing VAT at 5 per cent. on the construction of new dwellings is estimated to be £550 million. There is no official estimate of the expected yield from introducing VAT on the construction of other new buildings currently qualifying for zero-rating.

Duty Free

Dr. Ladyman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will draw up plans to support the ferry industry and the ports of Ramsgate and Dover if duty-free sales are abolished in the European Union. [43795]

Dawn Primarolo: Responsibility for the transport industry lies with my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister. However, the impact on the ferry industry and on the ports of Ramsgate and Dover of the abolition of duty free will depend on the nature of the successor regimes which are being discussed at official level in Brussels.

Mail

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the liability to customs checks is of *(a)* mail sent by national postal administrations to the United Kingdom and *(b)* mail carried by express couriers to the United Kingdom. [43800]

Dawn Primarolo: The liability to customs checks for anti-smuggling purposes is the same for mail sent by a National Postal Administration and that carried by express couriers. Provision for such checks is contained in the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979. Checks on both types of traffic are also undertaken for fiscal and regulatory purposes under the Community Customs Code, which is European legislation. However, some differences apply to the treatment of postal packets, which is subject to national provisions under the Post Office Act 1953 and the Postal Packets (C&E) (Amendment) Regulation 1992.

Lloyd's of London

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 7 April 1998,

Official Report, column *151*, regarding discussions between officials of the British Embassy in Washington and the United States authorities concerning Lloyd's of London, who initiated those discussions; what matters were discussed; who was present on each occasion; what requests were made to the United States authorities by the British representatives present; and what requests were made to the British representatives present by the United States authorities. [44339]

Mrs. Liddell: The discussions were initiated by the British Embassy and concerned the case of Richards *et al v* Lloyd's of London then before the US Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit. Only one such meeting took place at which a First Secretary from the Embassy met four Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) attorneys. The Embassy asked the SEC to recognise that any intervention by them in the Richards case should take account both of the British Government's interest in protecting policyholders by insurers continuing to meet their insurance obligations and the regulatory role of Lloyd's in protecting the interests of policyholders. The SEC made no requests to the British Government.

Monetary Policy Committee

Mr. Timms: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the remit of the Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee. [44793]

Mr. Gordon Brown: In accordance with Section 12 of the Bank of England Act 1998, I have written to the Governor re-stating the Monetary Policy Committee's remit and how it will be held accountable for meeting the remit.

My letter has been laid before Parliament today and a copy has been sent to the Chairman of the Treasury Committee. Copies are also being deposited in the Libraries of both Houses.

Economic and Monetary Union

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how banking regulations and supervision of participant members of the euro will be brought into line; and who is responsible for ensuring this occurs. [44457]

Mrs. Liddell: The supervision of European Union credit institutions is already subject to a series of harmonising Directives, which impose minimum standards in a wide range of areas and help facilitate the Single Market. The Commission is responsible for ensuring that they remain up to date, and take account of developments in financial markets. The advent of Stage 3 of EMU does not change this responsibility.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his Department's responsibility to protect bank deposits in circumstances when banks lend transnationally under Economic and Monetary Union. [44448]

Mrs. Liddell: Deposits in UK banks, along with those in banks of other EU members, are covered by arrangements drawn up under the Deposit Guarantee Directive, which sets out minimum standards that apply throughout the Union. Stage 3 of Economic and Monetary Union has no effect on those arrangements.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer who will supervise and regulate transnational banks under Stage 3 of Economic and Monetary Union. [44458]

Mrs. Liddell: The European Banking Directives, which harmonise standards of supervision of credit institutions within the EU, are based on the principle of Home State supervision. Although they may operate or offer services anywhere in the Union, credit institutions are required to have their registered office and head office in the same Member State, and the supervisory authorities there are responsible for its supervision throughout the EU. Stage 3 of Economic and Monetary Union will not change these arrangements.

SCOTLAND

Housing

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of homes in Scotland were (i) council owned and (ii) owned by publicly financed bodies in each year since 1978–79. [43393]

Mr. Macdonald *[holding answer 2 June 1998]:* The information available is set out in the table.

Financial year	*Council stock as at 31 March (thousands)*	*Stock owned by other publicly financed bodies[1,4] as at 31 March (thousands)*	*Estimated total stock[2] as at 31 December (thousands)*	*Council stock as percent of all stock (col 2/col 4) (%)*	*Stock owned by other publicly financed bodies as percent of all stock (col 3/col 4) (%)*
1978–79	901	144	1,964	45.9	7.3
1979–80	904	147	1,982	45.6	7.4
1980–81	902	146	1,997	45.2	7.3
1981–82	896	145	1,970	45.5	7.4
1982–83	886	143	1,983	44.7	7.2
1983–84	871	139	1,998	43.6	7.0
1984–85	862	135	2,015	42.8	6.7
1985–86	853	132	2,032	42.0	6.5
1986–87	842	128	2,050	41.1	6.2
1987–88	824	124	2,067	39.9	6.0
1988–89	795	114	2,084	38.1	5.5
1989–90	764	105	2,104	36.3	5.0
1990–91	738	100	2,124	34.7	4.7
1991–92	711	94	2.160	32.9	4.4
1992–93	675	90	2.175	31.0	4.1

Financial year	Council stock as at 31 March (thousands)	Stock owned by other publicly financed bodies[1,4] as at 31 March (thousands)	Estimated total stock[2] as at 31 December (thousands)	Council stock as percent of all stock (col 2/col 4) (%)	Stock owned by other publicly financed bodies as percent of all stock (col 3/col 4) (%)
1993–94	649	82	2.193	29.6	3.7
1994–95	596	73	2.210	27.0	3.3
1995–96	632	43	2.229	28.4	1.9
1996–97	622	29	2.246	27.7	1.3
1997–98[3]	613	19	[5]—	[5]—	[5]—

[1] Figures for the years up to and including 1988–89 are for the Scottish Special Housing Association (SSHA) and New Towns. From 1989–90 to 1995–96, figures are for stock owned by Scottish Homes and New Towns. For 1996–97, figures are for Scottish Homes stock only—New Town stock was transferred to councils, Scottish Homes and Housing Associations during the course of 1995–96 and 1996–97
[2] Estimates from December 1991 onwards are based on the 1991 Population Census. Estimates for earlier years are based on the 1981 Census and are not strictly comparable
[3] The council stock figure for 1997–98 is as at September 1997
[4] Housing associations, although not public bodies, receive public subsidy from Scottish Homes. At 31 March 1997, the latest date for which information is available, housing associations owned around 105,000 dwellings, 4.7 per cent. of the total estimated housing stock at December 1996
[5] Not yet available

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to introduce a full system of licensing for houses in multiple occupation. [44654]

Mr. Macdonald: We are committed to protecting the rights of tenants, and those in shared accommodation are no exception. We have issued a consultation paper today proposing the introduction of a full system of licensing for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs), in line with our Manifesto commitment.

We value the contribution of the private rented sector, and HMOs play their part by accommodating a wide range of households including mobile workers and other single people. However, while many HMO landlords are providing perfectly acceptable accommodation, there is concern about both the physical condition and management of some HMOs.

Licensing would allow authorities to refuse a licence where an applicant is not a fit and proper person to hold an HMO licence. This will provide a powerful mechanism for preventing exploitation of tenants. For example, licences could be refused for those with relevant criminal convictions. Depending on the circumstances of the particular case, this could include Housing Benefit fraud.

Licensing would also enable local authorities to take a co-ordinated approach to regulating HMOs across departments. This should be a benefit for landlords.

We therefore propose to make it mandatory for all local authorities in Scotland to introduce HMO licensing. Councils were given discretionary powers to licence in 1991, but so far only seven have used them.

A consultation paper setting out our proposals has been sent today to a wide range of bodies with an interest in HMOs, with a request for comments by 30 October 1998. Copies of the consultation paper have been placed in the House Libraries.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish the criteria under which the New Housing Partnership schemes were assessed. [44044]

Mr. Dewar: The criteria were set out in a letter issued by the Scottish Office Development Department to Chief Executives of local authorities on 5 December 1997 inviting local authorities to submit bids and also in a summary report issued on 5 May 1998 explaining how the bids were assessed. Copies of both documents have been placed in the House of Commons Library.

Unemployment

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the percentage change in the number of registered unemployed amongst 18 to 25-year-olds in *(a)* Dundee, *(b)* Perth and Kinross and *(c)* Angus in (i) January, (ii) February, (iii) March and (iv) April in each year since 1986. [43409]

Mr. Dewar: A full analysis of the claimant count statistics by age (and duration) is available quarterly for the months of January, April, July and October. An analysis excluding clerical claims (which currently represent about 1 per cent. of all claims) is available monthly. Information is not readily available for those aged 18 to 25. Information for those aged 18 to 24 is available through the Nomis database in the House of Commons Library. Library staff are ready to assist in accessing the information.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the percentage change in the number of registered unemployed in *(a)* Dundee, *(b)* Perth and Kinross and *(c)* Angus in (i) January, (ii) February, (iii) March and (iv) April in each year since 1986. [43410]

Mr. Dewar: Information is available through the Nomis database in the House of Commons Library. Library staff are ready to assist in accessing the information.

Moray College

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what representations he has had from BARMAC Fabrication Yard concerning the training in welding and fabrication at Moray College; [43416]

(2) what representations he has had from trade union representatives at Moray College concerning the plans to discontinue the welding and fabrication course. [43417]

Mr. Dewar: I have received no such representations from either source.

Each further education college in Scotland has a Board of Management which is responsible for ensuring the provision of suitable and efficient further education. I understand that Moray College decided not to offer welding provision in 1997–98 in view of the small number of students who had presented for enrolment. After reviewing the demands and costs, the College has since decided to withdraw welding provision.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what meetings has he had with the principal or members of the Board of Directors of Moray College concerning its involvement in the University of the Highlands and Islands project. [43418]

Mr. Dewar: My Ministerial colleagues and I have not had any such meetings but officials of the Scottish Office have twice met the Principal and members of the Board of Management concerning Moray College's involvement in the University of the Highlands and Islands Project.

Housing Rents

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what weekly rental levels he proposes for the rented housing elements of each of the successful New Housing Partnership bids. [44042]

Mr. Dewar: It is for each New Housing Partnership landlord to determine appropriate, affordable rental levels for the rented housing element of successful New Housing Partnership bids. I would expect these levels to be in line with existing rental levels for comparable types of housing in the local area.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what weekly rental levels he proposes for the rented housing elements of the New Housing Partnership bid from Glasgow City Council. [44043]

Mr. Dewar: The rental levels of the rented housing elements of the New Housing Partnership bids in Glasgow are a matter for each New Housing Partnership landlord to determine. However, I would expect these to be in line with rents for comparable types of housing in the city.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information in a systematic form is held in respect of each of the New Housing Partnership in relation to *(a)* rental levels for all the rented housing elements of the New Housing Partnership bids, *(b)* tenancy agreements for all the rented housing elements of the New Housing Partnership bids and *(c)* allocation priorities of non-local authority housing providers for the rented housing elements of the New Housing Partnership bids; and if he will make such information available. [44045]

Mr. Dewar: Matters relating to rental levels, tenancy agreements and allocation arrangements will be settled locally as New Housing Partnerships are developed. The Scottish Office will be commissioning research to assess the impact of partnership projects, and this will include information on the characteristics of each project. The results of the research will be published.

HEALTH

Consultation Papers

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the consultation papers published since 1 May 1997 giving the date of publication, closing date for submissions and the number of respondents. [42244]

Ms Jowell: Copies of a table containing the information requested have been placed in the Library.

Wheelchairs

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on the provision of wheelchairs to those who become long-term or permanently disabled; [43159]

(2) if he will list for each health authority the average waiting time for provision of a wheelchair to those who become long-term or permanently disabled. [43158]

Mr. Boateng: Wheelchairs are provided free on loan by the National Health Service to anyone who has a clinical need for one due to limited mobility. People who require a wheelchair are usually referred by their general practitioner or other local health care professional to their local wheelchair service centre for assessment of their needs.

Information on the provision of wheelchairs specifically to those who become long-term or permanently disabled and any waiting time is not collected centrally. However, information on the total provision of wheelchairs is reported to the NHS Executive by providers and health authorities. The number of wheelchairs issued by providers covers all wheelchairs supplied through consultant clinics and through physiotherapy departments. The figures for England are in the table.

Year	*Number of wheelchairs issued by providers*
1994–95	203,160
1995–96	200,073
1996–97	195,606

Note:
1996–97 figures include estimates for Richmond, Twickenham and Roehampton NHS Trust who failed to submit a return

Copies of the information that health authorities report on wheelchairs have been placed in the Library.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the office responsible for the performance of wheelchair services in *(a)* each health authority, *(b)* each NHS region, *(c)* the NHS Executive and *(d)* central Government. [43208]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 1 June 1998]:* The information requested for health authorities is not held centrally. All communications with the National Health Service are conducted through the chief executives concerned. Responsibility for wheelchair policy in the NHS Executive rests with the Continuing Health Services branch of the Health Services Directorate. Performance is measured through the regional offices of the NHS Executive.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the budget for the voucher scheme for manual wheelchairs is ring-fenced. [43569]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 1 June 1998]:* Additional funding has been made available to health authorities specifically to meet the cost of the introduction of the National Health Service wheelchair voucher scheme since it began in 1996. The additional funding has been allocated in phased amounts each year as services have built up over time.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures have been taken to monitor spending on *(a)* indoor/outdoor powered wheelchair funding schemes and *(b)* the voucher funding schemes for manual wheelchairs. [43568]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 1 June 1998]:* Spending on the indoor/outdoor powered wheelchair funding schemes and the voucher funding scheme for manual wheelchairs is monitored centrally through the routine quarterly return process.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to extend the voucher scheme for manual wheelchairs to the provision of indoor outdoor powered wheelchairs. [43567]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 1 June 1998]:* When the voucher scheme was introduced, guidance made it clear that it was not intended that vouchers should be issued for powered indoor/outdoor wheelchairs in the short term. Any decision to extend the scheme will be reviewed locally once the scheme for manually operated chairs has been fully established.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what discussions Ministers and officials have had with user organisations on their concerns about performance management of the wheelchair service; [43216]

(2) what action he has taken to address the concerns of user organisations about the management performance of the separate funding schemes for indoor and outdoor powered wheelchairs and vouchers. [43215]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 1 June 1998]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State held a meeting with representatives of the Limbless Association on 2 December 1997 at which they expressed their concerns about the wheelchair service. I will shortly be holding a meeting with representatives of the users consortium emPOWER at which they are expected to raise similar concerns. Officials regularly exchange information and views with representatives of user organisations.

Progress on implementation of the wheelchair initiatives is performance managed through National Health Service Executive regional offices. Regional directors of performance management have been reminded of the importance of ensuring implementation of these changes for service users.

An evaluation study of the operation of the powered indoor/outdoor wheelchair and voucher schemes will be conducted later in the year. We have set up a steering group, whose membership includes representatives of user organisations, to oversee the evaluation.

Mr. Healey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consultations were held with user groups in advance of communication of the Health Service Circular, Wheelchair Voucher Scheme: funding in 1997–98 and 1998–99 (HSC 1998/004). [43867]

Mr. Boateng: The circular authorised health authorities to use surplus funds from the National Health Service wheelchair voucher scheme for powered indoor/outdoor and other wheelchair provision. It was a short-term initiative which ensured that available funds were kept within wheelchair services in 1997–98. It did not affect the funding available for the NHS wheelchair voucher scheme and powered indoor/outdoor wheelchair provision in subsequent years and did not involve any change in policy towards the two schemes.

No consultations with user groups were therefore held in advance of the issue of the circular.

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action his Department is taking to implement the recommendations of the Department of Health-funded paper, "National Prosthetic and Wheelchair Services Report 1993–96", with particular reference to those for *(a)* a mechanism to provide a national focus on wheelchair services and *(b)* an auditing procedure by which wheelchair services can measure their effectiveness. [43370]

Mr. Boateng: The Department funded the national prosthetic and wheelchair services project to give continued support to wheelchair services for a three-year period following their devolution to the National Health Service. A number of professional groups (including a Wheelchair Managers Committee) continue to provide a national focus, and the Department supports this work. For example, the Department is funding work on a national training framework for wheelchair services.

The audit of service effectiveness is a matter for individual health authorities and their providers. Standards were recommended in the national prosthetic and wheelchair services project. These may form the basis for local audit.

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action his Department is taking to *(a)* monitor and *(b)* address disparities between health authorities in the provision of (i) indoor/outdoor powered wheelchairs and (ii) vouchers by wheelchair services. [43441]

Mr. Boateng: Health authorities routinely report to the National Health Service Executive on the provision of indoor/outdoor wheelchairs and vouchers for wheelchair services as part of the quarterly monitoring process. Regional directors of performance have recently been reminded of the importance of ensuring that the wheelchair voucher scheme is implemented. An evaluation study of the operation of the powered indoor/outdoor wheelchair and voucher schemes will be conducted later in the year.

Drug Treatment Services

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what sums the Government have allocated to drug treatment services specialising in *(a)* alcohol and *(b)* illegal drugs in each of the last five years. [43670]

Ms Jowell: The Department has given £555,000 in 1998/99, £1,055,000 in 1997/98, £1,055,000 in 1996/97, £555,000 in 1995/96 and £968,000 in 1994/95 to Alcohol Concern to run a grants programme specifically for alcohol treatment services.

The Department provides a cash contribution to health authorities to purchase drug services under a special allocation. In each of the last five years, the special allocation for drug services was £41.3 million in 1998/99, £37.19 million in 1997/98, £33.39 million in 1996/97, £26.75 million in 1995/96 and £25.50 million in 1994/95.

The Department also administers the specific grant for making payments to voluntary organisations providing services for drug and alcohol misusers, which will distribute £2.5 million in 1998/99, and has previously distributed £2.5 million in 1997/98, 1996/97 and 1995/96, and £2.4 million in 1994/95.

Paediatric Cardiac Services

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will order an immediate public inquiry into the paediatric cardiac surgery services at the United Bristol Healthcare NHS Trust. [44293]

Mr. Milburn: We have made clear our commitment to holding an inquiry into the paediatric cardiac surgery services at the United Bristol Healthcare National Health Service Trust prior to 1996. The exact form, timing and scope of the inquiry and the membership of the inquiry team are currently under consideration. A final decision will be made after the General Medical Council have completed their proceedings later this month.

Nurses

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had about protecting the use of the title, nurse; and if he will make a statement. [44207]

Mr. Milburn: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave on 21 May 1998, *Official Report*, column *503*.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Crown Prosecution Service

31. **Mr. Beard:** To ask the Attorney-General what progress is being made in associating the work of the Crown Prosecution Service more closely with local police forces and magistrates courts. [42755]

34. **Mr. Laurence Robertson:** To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement on the progress of his plans to reorganise the Crown Prosecution Service. [42758]

The Attorney-General: I announced in May last year the decision to divide the CPS into 42 areas coterminous with police areas. The report of the Review of the Crown Prosecution Service which I published on Monday endorses that decision and makes detailed proposals as to how that should be effected, and they are being considered. A first major step will be the selection of the 42 chief crown prosecutors and the new DPP will proceed with that once in post.

32. **Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Attorney-General how many prosecutions initiated by the Crown Prosecution Service in 1996 and 1997 were discontinued subsequently; and if he will make a statement. [42756]

The Attorney-General: In 1996, proceedings were discontinued in respect of 153,274 defendants, or 12 per cent. of completed cases. In 1997, proceedings were discontinued in respect of 161,461 defendants, or 12.2 per cent. of completed cases.

35. **Mr. Lock:** To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement on the use of information technology in the Crown Prosecution Service. [42759]

The Attorney-General: The CPS is using information technology to increase the speed and efficiency of its internal communications, facilitate its case tracking and performance management and, through a Private/Public Partnerships Initiative, is examining a possible solution for its future IT needs in close collaboration with CJS partners.

Company Collapses (Phoenix Operations)

33. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Attorney-General what is his Department's policy in relation to the prosecution of individuals who mount phoenix operations following the collapse of companies in which they have been previously involved. [42757]

The Attorney-General: A so called "Phoenix Operation" does not, in itself, constitute a criminal offence. However, where there is evidence that a "Phoenix Operation" may have involved an offence or offences—for example there has been fraudulent trading—then the prosecuting authorities adopt the same policy as with other suspected offences, namely, to assess whether there is enough evidence to provide a realistic prospect of conviction; and if so, to assess whether it is in the public interest that there should be a prosecution.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Set-aside

14. **Mr. Leigh:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on reform of the set-aside scheme. [42735]

Mr. Morley: In the current discussions on CAP reform, the Government have said that they would like to see compulsory set-aside abolished and the rules on voluntary set-aside made more flexible.

Egg Production

15. **Mr. Baldry:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received on the EU Commission's proposals on egg production. [42736]

Mr. Rooker: I have received a number of representations and my officials have met industry representatives, at their request, to hear their views on the proposals.

County Council Small Holdings

16. **Mr. Drew:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the Government's policy on county council small holdings. [42737]

Mr. Morley: The Government recognise the important role of county council smallholdings as a first rung on the farming ladder. I congratulate those local authorities which pursue policies to develop their estates, but emphasise that such decisions are properly taken at local level.

Unpasteurised Milk

17. **Mr. Spring:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on his Department's proposals for unpasteurised milk products. [42738]

Mr. Rooker: I have no proposals relating to unpasteurised milk products.

Gang Masters

18. **Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what measures his Department is taking to control the activities of gang masters in the horticulture and agriculture industries. [42739]

Mr. Morley: We have a number of measures in hand and will be making a detailed announcement shortly.

Food Standards Agency

19. **Mr. Prior:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the implementation of his policy in respect of the Food Standards Agency. [42740]

Mr. Rooker: We are making excellent progress with fulfilling our manifesto commitment to establish a Food Standards Agency. More than 1,000 responses were received to our consultation on the White Paper "The Food Standards Agency: A Force for Change" and a summary has been placed in the Library. It is our intention to publish a draft Bill before the Summer Recess for further consultation and pre-legislative scrutiny by this House.

Beef Export Ban

20. **Mrs. Lait:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress has been made in lifting the EU ban on exports of British beef; [42741]

24. **Ms Ward:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on progress towards lifting the ban on British beef. [42745]

Mr. Rooker: We expect the Commission to set a date next week for the resumption of exports from Northern Ireland under the Export Certified Herds Scheme.

Following constructive discussions with Commission officials the Commission are now preparing their proposal for a Date Based Export Scheme, which would permit the export of beef and beef products from animals born after 1 August 1996. I hope that the proposal will be discussed in the Standing Veterinary Committee in June.

Consumer Information

21. **Miss Geraldine Smith:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proposals his Department has to improve the information on food made available to consumers. [42742]

Mr. Rooker: The Food Labelling Regulations 1996 will be amended on 1 July this year to introduce new EC requirements for quantitative ingredient declarations. They will also require starch and modified starch used as ingredients of foods to indicate their specific vegetable origin if they are likely to contain gluten. These changes will become compulsory with effect from 14 February 2000. The UK has taken the lead in the EC on guidelines to explain the new rules on quantitative ingredient declarations so that consumers are given consistent and uniform information on food labels.

Organic Farming

22. **Mr. Gareth Thomas:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to promote organic farming, with particular reference to less-favoured areas. [42743]

Mr. Morley: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to him by my right hon. Friend the Minister on 2 April 1998, *Official Report*, columns *655–56*.

Whaling

23. **Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the role of the consultative forum on whaling. [42744]

Mr. Morley: We have had very positive and supportive feedback about the first meeting of the Consultative Forum held in April. We look forward to building on this encouraging beginning.

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about the latest meeting of the International Whaling Commission. [42748]

Mr. Morley: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Lock) on 2 June 1998, *Official Report*, columns *199–201*.

Farm Incomes

25. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the change in farm income levels since 1 May 1997. [42746]

Mr. Morley: Government statistics published in "Farm Incomes in the United Kingdom" show that, in 1997 as a whole, farm incomes fell by an average of 37 per cent. in real terms. The fall in total income from farming in 1997 is largely due to lower prices received by farmers for all major commodities. The relative strength of sterling compared with 1996 has been a major factor underlying the fall in prices.

Milk Quotas

26. **Mr. Evans:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received concerning milk quotas and the current levels of income of dairy farmers. [42747]

Mr. Rooker: I receive regular representations on a range of milk quota issues and on current levels of farm income, including that of dairy farmers, from farming organisations and individual milk producers. Milk quota still has a considerable positive value which demonstrates that the market believes that there is still sufficient profitability to justify this expenditure. The incomes of dairy farmers in 1998–99 are expected to be lower than in 1997–98, mainly as a result of lower milk prices.

Sea Levels (South-East)

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food pursuant to his oral answer of 22 January 1998, *Official Report*, column 1132, on sea levels in the Thames Estuary and River Medway, what progress the Environment Agency has made in respect of its surveys into projected sea level rises. [42749]

Mr. Morley: I regret that my reply of 22 January 1998, *Official Report*, column 1132, may have been misleading. The Environment Agency undertakes surveys of areas at risk of flooding and as preliminary studies for proposed defences. The interpretation of such surveys and studies take into account Ministry guidance on sea level rise. However the Agency is not carrying out surveys relating solely to projected sea level rise.

International Horticultural Event, China

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on his recent visit to China; and what United Kingdom participation there will be in the 1998 International Horticultural Event in Kunming, Yunnan. [42349]

Dr. John Cunningham: During April, I led a UK agricultural trade mission to China and our participation in the agricultural trade exposition AGRO EXPO China '98. I also had bilateral meetings with senior representatives of the Chinese government including Vice Premier Li Lanqing and Minister of Agriculture Chen Yaobang and representatives from the Hong Kong administration. I was highly impressed by the wide range of UK technical expertise on the mission and understand that new commercial business was agreed during the visit.

The Government hope that the International Horticultural Exposition due to be held in Kunming in 1999 will include a United Kingdom exhibit. A proposal for an exhibit is currently the subject of discussion between the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh.

Abattoirs

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) in how many cases reports of bullying, intimidation and threats by staff or employees of abattoirs against veterinarians and Meat Hygiene Service staff have been referred to officers of the Crown Prosecution Service with a view to prosecution; and in how many cases prosecutions have taken place in the last year; [43379]

(2) how many incidents of intimidation, threats and bullying by owners or employees of abattoirs of Meat Hygiene Service staff and veterinarians have been referred to the police in the last year. [43378]

Mr. Rooker: Cases of intimidation against Meat Hygiene Service (MHS) staff are referred to the Investigations Branch of MAFF Legal for investigation with a view to prosecution for obstruction or assault under the Fresh Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) Regulations 1995. Two successful prosecutions have been taken for obstruction.

The first successful prosecution for assault has been taken. I referred to this case when winding up the Common Agricultural Policy debate on 21 May 1998, *Official Report*, column 1174.

One case of alleged assault against a former MHS employee has been referred to the police by MAFF Investigation Officers. This case is now being investigated with a view to consideration of prosecution by the Crown Prosecution Service in the criminal courts.

Other allegations of intimidation are currently under consideration by MAFF Investigation Officers.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to close down abattoirs where Meat Hygiene Service staff or veterinarians have been subject to intimidation, bullying, or threats from abattoir owners or employees. [43377]

Mr. Rooker: Any form of intimidation of Meat Hygiene Service (MHS) staff, and in particular that which prevents staff from carrying out their duties to protect public health, is totally unacceptable and will not be tolerated. All available measures are used against those responsible, and, in all possible cases, the MHS refers incidents for investigation with a view to prosecution. Obstruction of MHS staff in the performance of their duties is an offence under section 33 (1) of the Food Safety Act 1990. Various cases of assault are referred to the police.

In accordance with EU rules, current GB meat hygiene legislation provides for the mandatory licensing (by the GB Agriculture Departments) of all abattoirs, cutting plants and cold stores producing meat which is intended for sale for human consumption. Although this legislation provides powers for Ministers to revoke such licences in certain specified circumstances, notably in respect of hygiene failures, these circumstances do not include intimidation, bullying or threats to MHS staff from the owners or operators of licensed premises or from their employees.

Nevertheless, the assault of MHS staff in the course of carrying out their duties at licensed premises would probably amount to the hampering of adequate health inspection for the purposes of the GB meat hygiene legislation. In such circumstances MHS staff have powers to serve a notice on the operator of the premises prohibiting the use of the part or parts of the premises concerned until such time as it is clear that the safety of MHS staff is secured. The effect of such

action could result in the stopping of some or all of the production of the premises involved. Because the Government will not tolerate assaults on MHS staff, I have instructed the MHS to remind the industry of the powers available, and that where the MHS exercises those powers, it will do so with the full support of Ministers.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) how many incidents of intimidation, threats and bullying against representatives of the Meat Hygiene Service veterinarians by employees or owners of abattoirs have occurred in the last year; [43375]

(2) if he will establish an inquiry into the scale of bullying, threats and intimidation by abattoir owners or staff against Meat Hygiene Service staff or veterinarians. [43380]

Mr. Rooker: No information is available on the number of instances of intimidation, threats and bullying against Meat Hygiene Service (MHS) staff which have occurred in the last year.

However, to get a better understanding of the true extent of instances of intimidation of its staff, the Meat Hygiene Service, together with UNISON, has sent out a Violence/Intimidation at Work Questionnaire to all its operational staff. The survey sought information on the number of instances of threats, verbal abuse and harassment as well as physical attack or injury that MHS staff had been subject to since 1 April 1995.

The questionnaire was sent to the 1,500 operational staff of the MHS. The provisional results of the survey indicate that staff have reported 403 instances of some form of intimidation and violence since 1 April 1995, the date the Agency was launched. This comprises 273 instances relating to verbal threat or abuse and 130 to more serious instances of injury to MHS staff, physical threat with a weapon, racial and sexual harassment and damage to personal property.

The results of the survey will inform future policy on the issue of intimidation/violence in the workplace.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received from staff of the Meat Hygiene Service and veterinarians concerning bullying by owners and staff of abattoirs. [43381]

Mr. Rooker: The Meat Hygiene Service (MHS) Chief Executive has expressed his concern to me about these unacceptable instances of intimidation and threats against MHS staff. The MHS takes the health and safety and welfare of its staff very seriously and will take any and all necessary action to prevent intimidation in the workplace.

At my request, the MHS keeps me fully aware of all instances of intimidation, abuse and assault against MHS staff by abattoir owners and staff.

As my hon. Friend will note from other answers I have given him today, we are taking the issue seriously and support and encourage the MHS to take a robust line on behalf of MHS staff carrying out their vital duties on behalf of the public.

Tobacco

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much was paid by the EU to subsidise the growing of tobacco in the last year for which figures are available. [44034]

Mr. Rooker: In 1997 the EU spent 998 million ecu (£725 million)[1] on subsidies under the EU tobacco regime. None of this was spent in the United Kingdom.

[1] 1997 exchange rate used: £1 = 1.3758 ecu

Flood and Coastal Defences

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to remove coast protection functions from coastal local authorities. [43939]

Mr. Morley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) on 6 April 1998, *Official Report*, column *85*.

Bees

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will introduce a compensation scheme for professional bee keepers whose hives have been subject to attack from the varroa mite. [44089]

Mr. Rooker: The Government take the threat to beekeeping from varroa very seriously and this year are spending around £1.5 million on a range of measures to tackle this problem. The emphasis is on training and education to help bee keepers become more self-reliant. We consider this to be the best use of the available resources.

Drift Nets

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the annual number of non-target species that would avoid death through trapping if an EU ban on drift nets were introduced. [43221]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 2 June 1998]:* Observers on the UK drift net boats in 1995 recorded 46 dolphin casualties over 9 fishing trips. This implies that 165 dolphins were killed by the UK fleet in that season. A number of other species including sharks are also caught.

France, Ireland and Italy also have active drift net fleets.

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress is being made on phasing out the use of those drift nets which are dangerous to dolphins. [42726]

Dr. John Cunningham: Preparations have been made for a decision at the Fisheries Council on 8 June.

Milk Producers (Italy)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much the Italian Government have failed to collect by way of super-levy from over-quota milk producers in each of the last five years; when the Commission initiated infraction proceedings;

how much they are for and over what period; and how many Commission officials are currently employed in enforcing milk quotas. [43166]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 3 June 1998]:* In 1995–96 of a total superlevy bill of 316 billion lire, 42 billion lire was paid by the Italian Authorities and the remainder was withheld by the Commission from FEOGA payments to Italy; in 1996–97 the total superlevy bill of 155 billion lire was withheld from FEOGA payments. No superlevy was payable by Italy with respect to the previous three years. The Commission initiated infraction proceedings against Italy on 12 January 1998 for their failure to definitively close the periods 1995–96 and 1996–97 by obliging purchasers to pay over superlevy due to the competent authority. The number of Commission officials dealing with enforcement fluctuates according to the requirements at a given time.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Sierra Leone

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the occasions on which he and the Minister of State, the hon. Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd), have met President Kabbah of Sierra Leone since 1 May 1997; and if he will publish the minutes of such meetings. [42094]

Mr. Robin Cook *[holding answer 14 May 1998]:* Officials from the High Commission had numerous meetings with President Kabbah in Conakry. Officials also met him when he visited the UK in October 1997.

My hon. Friend the Minister of State met President Kabbah on 20 October, when he addressed the seminar "Restoring Sierra Leone to Democracy"; on 25 October, with the Under-Secretary of State for International Development; and on 31 March 1998, when he visited Sierra Leone as a member of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group mission.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister met him informally during the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Edinburgh in October 1997. I met the Foreign Minister of Sierra Leone in the margins of the UN General Assembly meeting in September 1997.

It is not normal practice to release the records of discussion with foreign governments, but all relevant documents will be available to Sir Thomas Legg for his investigation.

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the application of Security Council Resolution 1132 to the Nigerian-led military observers group of the Economic Community of West African States at the time it was seeking to restore democracy in Sierra Leone. [42560]

Mr. Robin Cook *[holding answer 18 May 1998]:* Operative paragraph 6 of Security Council Resolution 1132 provides that the Security Council

"Decides that all States shall prevent the sale or supply to Sierra Leone, by their nationals or from their flag vessels or aircraft, of petroleum and petroleum products and arms and related material of all types, including weapons and ammunition, military vehicles and equipment, paramilitary equipment and spare parts for the aforementioned, whether or not originating in their territory".

No exceptions were made to the embargo.

Now that the conditions set out in SCR 1132 for the lifting of the embargo have been met United Nations Security Council Members have agreed that a new resolution is required. This should lift the arms embargo on the Sierra Leone Government and ECOMOG but maintain it on non-governmental forces. Urgent discussions on the precise terms of the resolution are underway in New York.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the role of his Department was in drafting United Nations Security Resolution 1132; what representations his Department made to ensure clarity of definition in determining the target of the embargo; and when the possibility of misinterpretation was first brought to his attention. [42712]

Mr. Robin Cook *[holding answer 20 May 1998]:* The UK took a leading role in negotiating the text of Resolution 1132, in September and October 1997. We were satisfied that there were no exceptions to the arms embargo. Differences in interpretation did not emerge until May 1998.

Mr. Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 21 May 1998, *Official Report*, column *525*, on what dates the telegram of 6 February was copied to *(a)* his private office and *(b)* the Minister of State, the hon. Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd); and if it was drawn to (i) his and (ii) the Minister of State's attention. [43976]

Mr. Robin Cook *[holding answer 1 June 1998]:* From 6 February onwards, a number of telegrams referring to the ECOMOG intervention in Sierra Leone were received within the FCO. These telegrams were seen in my Private Office and the Private Office of the Minister of State, and, as is standard practice, the key ones were drawn to my, and his, attention. None made any reference to Sandline.

Visas

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the African countries in which there are no local facilities for applicants for United Kingdom visas to be interviewed, indicating in each case the country to which applicants must travel for interview. [43690]

Mr. Fatchett: Those African countries in which there are no local facilities for applicants for United Kingdom visas to be interviewed are listed. Applicants for visit visas may apply at any designated British diplomatic or consular Post offering a full entry clearance service. Applicants for other categories of visa should apply at the designated Post as stipulated.

Country	*Designated Country/(Post)*
Rwanda[1]	Kenya (Nairobi) or Tanzania (Dar Es Salam)
Algeria[2]	Tunisia (Tunis) or France (Paris)
Libya[3]	Malta (Valletta)
Benin	Nigeria (Lagos)
Burkina Faso	Cote d'Ivoire (Abidjan)
Burundi	Most accessible Post
Cape Verde	Senegal (Dakar)

Country	*Designated Country/(Post)*
Central Africa Republic	Cameroon (Yaounde)
Chad	Nigeria (Lagos or Abuja)
Congo	Democratic Republic of Congo (Kinshasa)
Djibouti	Ethiopia (Addis Ababa)
Equatorial Guinea	Cameroon (Yaounde) or most accessible Post
Eritrea	Ethiopia (Addis Ababa)
Equatorial Guinea	Cameroon (Yaounde) or most accessible Post
Eritrea	Ethiopia (Addis Ababa)
Gabon	Cameroon (Yaounde) or most accessible Post
Guinea	Senegal (Dakar)
Guinea-Bassau	Senegal (Dakar)
Liberia	Cote d'Ivoire (Abidjan)
Mali	Senegal (Dakar)
Mauritania	Morocco (Casablanca)
Niger	Cote d'Ivoire (Abidjan)
Sao Tome and Principe	Angola (Luanda)
Togo	Ghana (Accra)
Somalia	Kenya (Nairobi) or Ethiopia (Addis Ababa)
Sierra Leone[4]	Senegal (Dakar), The Gambia (Banjul), Cote d'Ivoire (Abidjan)

[1] Rwanda is designated to offer a limited visa service to members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps (including international Organisations) there and officials of the host country

[2] Algeria is designated to offer a limited visa service to diplomats, government officials and representatives of major companies travelling on official business

[3] Libya is designated to offer a limited service to Libyan diplomats and officials, travelling on official business only; certain business applications sponsored by UK companies, urgent medical cases and compassionate family applications, including family reunion cases where the applicant can demonstrate that it is not possible to leave Libya in order to apply in a third country

[4] Sierra Leone has been temporarily closed

Israel

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement during the United Kingdom presidency of the EU on the European Union's position on the export by Israel to Europe of goods originating in Jerusalem. [43834]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 1 June 1998]:* The Commission issued a Communication to the Council on 13 May on the implementation of the EC/Israel agreement, including the export to the EU of goods originating in Jerusalem. The UK Presidency is discussing the issues raised in the communication at technical level with other member states and the Commission. The Commission is also in consultation with Israeli officials, and will report back to the Council in due course. The EU position on the status of Jerusalem remains unchanged.

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made during the United Kingdom presidency of the EU to the Governments of *(a)* France and *(b)* Belgium concerning domestic ratification of the EU-Israel Association Agreement. [43832]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 1 June 1998]:* Parliamentary ratification procedures are a matter for individual member states. The United Kingdom has not made any representations to the French or Belgian governments on this issue, though our officials remain in close contact on the progress of the ratification procedure.

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to review the operation of the EU-Israel association agreement during the United Kingdom presidency of the EU. [43828]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 1 June 1998]:* The EU/Israel Association Agreement has not been ratified by all EU member states, and is therefore not yet in force. Its trade provisions are in operation under a separate EC/Israel Interim Agreement. The EU is now studying questions raised by the Commission in its Communication of 13 May about the implementations of the Interim Agreement.

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made during the UK presidency of the EU to the European Commission concerning Israeli implementation of the EU-Israel association agreement. [43829]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 1 June 1998]:* The EU/Israel Association Agreement is not yet in force. As EU Presidency, the UK is in close contact with the Commission and other member states about the implementation of the EC/Israel Interim Agreement, on which the Commission issued a Communication on 13 May.

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made during the United Kingdom presidency of the EU to Israel concerning the EU-Israel Association Agreement. [43830]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 1 June 1998]:* The EU/Israel Association Agreement is not yet in force, pending ratification by individual Member States. The United Kingdom has therefore made no formal representation to the Israeli government on this issue. We remain in close contact with Israel on the implementation of the EC/Israel Interim Agreement.

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has held with other EU Governments during the United Kingdom presidency concerning the EU-Israel Association Agreement; and if he will make a statement. [43831]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 1 June 1998]:* The EU/Israel Association Agreement is not yet in force. As Presidency of the EU, the UK holds regular discussions with EU governments on the EC/Israel Interim Agreement, including on the Commission Communication on implementation of that agreement.

Dependent Territories

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list each visit made to the Turks and Caicos Islands by *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials of his Department since 1990. [43425]

Mr. Fatchett: Records are unavailable for the period dating back to 1990. However, since 1992 there have been six Ministerial visits to the TCI:

Date	
July 1992	Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd, PUSS, FCO
September 1993	Mr. Anthony Nelson, Economic Secretary to the Treasury
October 1994	Mr. Tony Baldry, PUSS, FCO
April 1995	Sir Derek Spencer, Solicitor-General
April 1996	Sir Nicholas Bonsor, FCO Minister
May 1997	Lord Hardie, Lord Advocate

Since 1994 there have been at least eight visits by officials from the relevant political Department of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. There have also been numerous visits by officials from the Dependent Territories Regional Secretariat in Bridgetown and from DFID/ODA.

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much grant support was given to the Turks and Caicos Islands in each year since 1994–95. [43426]

Mr. Fatchett: The figures, including Good Government Fund disbursements, are as follows:

1994–95: £4.618 million

1995–96: £3.045 million

1996–97: £4.110 million.

Figures for 1997–98 are not yet available.

Afghanistan

Mr. Pollard: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the United Kingdom continues to impose an arms embargo on Afghanistan in line with the EU's Common Position of 17 December 1996. [44655]

Mr. Fatchett: We remain committed to the EU arms embargo against Afghanistan.

Following discussions with this Department and the Ministry of Defence, the Department of Trade and Industry recently approved a licence for the export of mine-clearance suits for use by the United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Assistance to Afghanistan in its demining operations. The grant of this licence is for humanitarian purposes, and is consistent with the purpose of the embargo.

Arms Sales

Mr. Pollard: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what restrictions in addition to the overall criteria governing arms exports announced on 28 July 1997, *Official Report*, columns *26–29*, apply to sales to Taiwan. [44656]

Mr. Fatchett: We restrict the export to Taiwan of licensable defence-related equipment. Applications for export licences to supply defence-related equipment and technology are considered case by case. All decisions are made in the light of the criteria announced by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary on 28 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns *26–29*. In scrutinising applications for Taiwan, we also give particular weight to the implications for regional stability.

Regional and Minority Languages

Mr. McWalter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the United Kingdom will sign the Council of Europe Charter for Regional and Minority Languages. [44657]

Mr. Fatchett: We have given thorough consideration to the merits of the United Kingdom becoming a signatory to the Charter, which entered into force on 1 March 1998. We have concluded that it would be appropriate to do so. Part II of the Charter sets out general principles of recognition and support for indigenous minority languages and removal of discrimination against them. We readily subscribe to these principles. We also intend to specify the Welsh Language in Wales and, when the necessary procedural arrangements are in place, the Gaelic language in Scotland under the provisions of Part III which require adherence to a number of specific measures taken to promote the use of these languages in public life. It is also intended to specify the Irish language in Northern Ireland at an early date. Part II of the Charter will apply to the Scots language. We will be considering which, if any, other languages should be bound by the general principles in Part II and might be specified under Part III in due course.

European Union Council

Mr. McWalter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the forthcoming business in the Council of the European Union for June; and if he will list the major European Union events for the next six months. [44658]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The following Councils are scheduled:

Date	*Venue*	*Event*
June 1998		
3–4	Luxembourg	Education and Social Affairs Council
5	Luxembourg	ECOFIN Council
8	Luxembourg	Fisheries Council
8–9	Luxembourg	General Affairs Council
15–16	Cardiff	European Council
16–17	Luxembourg	Environment Council
17	Luxembourg	Joint Environment and Transport Council
18	Luxembourg	Transport Council
22	Luxembourg	Research Council
22–23	Luxembourg	Agriculture Council
29–30	Luxembourg	General Affairs Council

3–4 June 1998: Joint Education and Social Affairs Council

Adoption of the Agenda.

A points—Draft Directive extending the Burden of Proof Directive to the UK—Draft Regulation amending 1408/71 (various amendments 1997).

Preparation of the Cardiff European Council: Debate.

Commission proposals for draft decisions for the new generation of education, training and youth programmes: Presentation by the Commission and debate.

Draft decision on European Pathways including Apprenticeship.

Presidency information on a pilot project on European Teacher Mobility.

Draft Directive on the Transferability of Supplementary Pension Rights of migrant workers.

Draft Regulation amending Regulation 1408/71 and 574/72 on social security rights of migrant workers.

Draft Directive amending the Directive safeguarding the rights of workers in the event of the transfer of undertakings.

Draft Directive on employee involvement in the European Company Statute: Political agreement.

Communication on the future of the Social Dialogue: Commission presentation.

Social Policy Action programme: Commission presentation.

5 June 1998: ECOFIN Council (provisional agenda)

Commission and EIB report on the loan guarantee system for lending to third countries.

Council draft of Broad Economic Policy Guidelines.

Preparation of Cardiff European Council.

Preparation of Stage 3 of EMU.

Adoption of ECB legislation under Article 106(6): Collection of statistical information by the ECB—minimum reserves of financial institutions at the ECB—Powers of the ECB to impose sanctions on institutions failing to comply with monetary regulations.

Appointment of ECB auditors.

Rules and composition of Economic and Financial Committee.

8 June 1998: Fisheries Council

Post-Amsterdam enforcement proposal: debate, (possible) adoption.

Commission report on the follow-up to the 1997 Bergan Inter-Ministerial meeting: Council conclusions.

Commission progress report on the 2002 Review: Progress report.

Proposal for revision of Structural Funds: Adoption (possible item).

Revision of basic Marketing Regulation (3759/1992): Policy debate.

Proposal on rules for mesh size combinations: Policy debate.

8–9 June 1998: General Affairs Council (provisional agenda)

Korea: Council Decision on Conclusion of EU/Korea framework Agreement (possible A point).

China: Council conclusions (possible A point).

Additional Protocols concerning the IAEA "93+2" Programme (possible A point).

Schengen.

Agenda 2000.

Preparations for Cardiff European Council: Procedural.

Enlargement.

Lomé.

Mediterranean Policy (possible item).

South Africa.

Western Balkans.

Middle East Peace Process.

Great Lakes.

EU/Mercosur and EU/Chile (possible item).

Renegotiation of Industrial GSP Regulation.

15–16 June 1998: European Council

Not yet available.

16–17 June 1998: Environment Council

Proposal for a Council Directive relating to limit values for sulphur dioxide, oxides of nitrogen, particulate matter and lead in ambient air: Common position, cooperation procedure Art. 189c.

Proposal for a Council Directive relating to a reduction of the sulphur content of certain liquid fuels and amending Directive 93/12/EEC: Common position, cooperation procedure Art. 189c.

Amended proposal for a Council Directive establishing a framework for a Community action in the field of water policy: Orientation debate, cooperation procedure Art. 189c.

Proposal for a Council recommendation relating to the keeping of wild animals in zoos: Common position, cooperation procedure Art. 189c.

Proposal for a Council Directive amending Directive 90/220 on the deliberate release into the environment of genetically modified organisms: Orientation debate.

Proposal for a Council Directive on emissions from heavy goods vehicles: Orientation debate.

Community strategy on climate change: Council conclusions.

Community strategy on biological diversity: Council conclusions (possible item).

Carbon dioxide emissions from cars: Council conclusions (possible item).

17 June 1998: Joint Transport and the Environment Council

Transport and Environment: Orientation debate and Council conclusions.

18 June 1998: Transport Council (provisional agenda)

EASA: Adoption.

Air traffic management: Adoption.

EU/US aviation: Debate.

Denied Boarding Compensation: Agreement of Conclusions.

Hush-kits: Debate, political agreement.

Computer reservation systems: Common position.

NOx: Agreement of conclusions.

Random checks: Debate, political agreement.

Dangerous goods safety adviser training: Debate, political agreement.

Railways: Progress report.

Transport safety: Debate.

Ferry Operators: Debate, political agreement.

Manning conditions: Debate.

Ports green paper: Report by Commission.

22 June 1998: Research Council

Fifth EC Framework Programme—specific programmes: Thematic programmes—International cooperation—Innovation and participation of SMEs—Improving human research potential and the socio-economic knowledge base: (possible) agreement.

Fifth EURATOM Framework Programme—EURATOM part of specific programmes: (possible) Agreement.

JRC programmes: (possible) Agreement.

Rules of participation and dissemination of results (Article 130j decisions): (possible) Common position (EC)/decision (EURATOM).

22–23 June 1998: Agriculture Council

Not yet available.

29–30 June: General Affairs Council (provisional agenda)

Enlargement.

Follow-up to Cardiff European Council.

Lomé.

Transatlantic Relations.

Western Balkans.

Middle East Peace Process.

Iran.

Pakistan (possible item).

European Calendar: June—November 1998

This calendar is primarily concerned with European Union matters, but certain other relevant events are also included. Events and dates quoted are based on the information available on the date of issue.

Date	Venue	Event
June 1998		
2	Luxembourg	Political Committee
3–4	Palermo	Ad-hoc meeting of Euro-Mediterranean Foreign Ministers
3–4	Luxembourg	Education and Social Affairs Council
4	Luxembourg	Euro X
5	Luxembourg	ECOFIN Council
8	Luxembourg	Fisheries Council
8–9	Luxembourg	General Affairs Council
8–9	Glasgow	Regional Policy/Spatial Planning Ministers' (Informal)
15–16	Cardiff	European Council
15–19	Strasbourg	European Parliament Plenary
16–17	Luxembourg	Environment Council
17	Luxembourg	Joint Environment and Transport Council
18	Luxembourg	Transport Council
19	Glasgow	Energy and Environment Conference
22	Luxembourg	Research Council
22–23	Luxembourg	Agriculture Council
25	Brussels	Presidency Biotechnology Round Table
29	Luxembourg	General Affairs Council
July 1998		
1–2	Brussels	European Parliament Plenary
6	Brussels	ECOFIN Council
6–7	Luxembourg	Political Committee
8–10	Innsbruck	Employment/Social Affairs/Women (Informal)
13	Luxembourg	Political Committee
13–14	Luxembourg	General Affairs Council
17	Brussels	Budget Council
17–19	Luxembourg	Environment Council (Informal)
20–21	Brussels	Agriculture Council
23	Luxembourg	Political Committee
August 1998		
There are no Councils scheduled for this month		
September 1998		
3	Brussels	Political Committee
5–6	Salzburg	Foreign Ministers (Informal)
7–8	Brussels	Special Committee on Agriculture
10–11	Linz	Culture Council
15–16	Bregenz	Transport Council (Informal)
21	New York	Political Committee
19–22	St. Wolfgang, Austria	Agriculture Council (Informal)
24	Brussels	Justice and Home Affairs
24	Brussels	Internal Market
25–27	Brussels	ECOFIN Council (Informal)
28–29	Brussels	Agriculture Council
October 1998		
1–2	Luxembourg	Transport Council
2–3	Luxembourg	Industry/Research and Technology Council (Informal)
5	Luxembourg	Work and Social Affairs Council
5–6	Luxembourg	General Affairs Council
6	Luxembourg	Environment Council
12	Luxembourg	ECOFIN Council
13	Luxembourg	Research Council
13	Luxembourg	Political Committee
16–17	Vienna	European Council
19–20	Luxembourg	Agriculture Council
22	Luxembourg	Fisheries Council
23–24	Luxembourg	Education Council (Informal)
26	Luxembourg	Political Committee
26–27	Luxembourg	General Affairs Council
28–29	Luxembourg	Transport Council
29–30	Luxembourg	Justice and Home Affairs Council
November 1998		
9	Brussels	Political Committee
9	Brussels	Internal Market Council
9–10	Brussels	General Affairs Council
12	Brussels	Health Council
16	Brussels	Industry Council
17	Brussels	Culture Council
20	Brussels	Budget Council
23	Brussels	ECOFIN Council
23–24	Brussels	Agriculture Council
25	Brussels	Telecommunications Council
26	Brussels	Youth Council
30	Brussels	Development Council
30–1 December 1998	Brussels	Transport Council

General Affairs Council

Mr. McWalter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will report on the outcome of the General Affairs Council in Brussels on 25 May. [44659]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The General Affairs Council met in Brussels on 25 May. The Council adopted the A Points, and noted the European Parliament Resolutions of 29–30 April and 2 May listed in document 8115/98. A copy will be placed in the House Library as soon as it becomes available.

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary provided a Presidency progress report on Agenda 2000 negotiations. Foreign Ministers set out their positions on a wide range of issues. The GAC agreed the proposed outline of the structure for a draft report to Cardiff. Foreign Ministers also agreed that COREPER should report back to the next GAC on how to respond to the latest letter from EP President Gil-Robles about European Parliament involvement.

The Council reached agreement on the text of the EU Code of Conduct for arms exports, which will be formally adopted at a future Council meeting. The Code aims to set high common standards for arms exports from all EU Member States. It develops the EU Common Criteria agreed in 1991 and 1992 and includes a mechanism under which a Member State will have to consult a Partner which has denied a licence for a particular export, before granting an essentially identical licence.

The Council took note of the reports of the EU/US and EU/Canada Summits. It agreed that the EU/US Summit, which made substantial progress towards resolving the problems of US sanctions legislation and endorsed the Transatlantic Economic Partnership, represented an important step.

The Council agreed a Declaration condemning the Indian nuclear tests and setting out the steps India has to take to rejoin the mainstream of international efforts on non-proliferation.

The Council underlined EU support for Indonesia, called on President Habibie to continue political reform, welcomed the release of two political prisoners and called on the Indonesian authorities to cooperate constructively with the efforts under the auspices of the UN Secretary-General on East Timor.

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary briefed partners on his visit to Ankara on 19 May, and reported Turkey's decision not to attend the Association Council which had been planned for 25 May.

The Council discussed preparations for the ad hoc meeting of Euro-Mediterranean Foreign Ministers in Palermo on 3–4 June. This should give renewed impetus to the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and prepare the ground for the third Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference in Stuttgart in April 1999. The Council endorsed the Presidency's handling, and reaffirmed its commitment to ensuring that the meeting is a success.

The Council took note of developments in the Middle East Peace Process in the light of on-going US efforts. The French Foreign Minister briefed colleagues on the Franco-Egyptian "Call for Peace".

The Council heard a report from Mr. Felipe Gonzalez, the EU and OSCE Special Representative from the FRY. It noted with concern recent developments in the FRY affecting the freedom of the media. It welcomed the opening of a dialogue between Belgrade and the leadership of the Kosovar Albanian community, while expressing grave concern about the escalating violence in the province. It underlined the need for the parliamentary elections in Montenegro on 31 May to be free and fair and for their results to be respected by all.

The Council agreed to consider on 29 June whether Croatia should continue to benefit from Autonomous Trade Measures in the light of that country's performance on refugee returns and other important issues such as democratisation and independent media.

The Council endorsed the principle of financial support for Azerbaijan (beyond that provided under TACIS), as proposed by the Commission, subject to technical examination by Financial Counsellors.

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary drew attention to the EU/Russia Summit (15 May) and reported on the outcome of the G8 Birmingham Summit.

East Timor

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on what date the EU Troika visit to East Timor is expected to take place. [44343]

Mr. Fatchett: We still hope that the visit, to which Indonesia has agreed, will take place during the UK Presidency.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the visits by *(a)* ministers and *(b)* officials of his Department to East Timor (i) undertaken since 1 May 1998 and (ii) planned for the next six months. [44301]

Mr. Fatchett: No Ministers or officials have visited East Timor since 1 May 1998. The only visit so far planned for the next six months is one by the British Ambassador in Jakarta as part of an EU Troika Mission. The date is not yet settled.

Land Mines

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which countries have ratified the Ottawa convention on land mines. [44209]

Mr. Fatchett: By 31 May, the following had ratified the Ottawa Convention on anti-personnel land mines:

Belize

Canada

Croatia

Djibouti

The Holy See

Ireland

Hungary

Mauritius

Niue (a Protectorate of New Zealand)

San Marino

Switzerland

Trinidad and Tobago

and Turkmenistan.

St. Helenians

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many St. Helenians were working on Ascension in the last 10 years for which figures are available. [44061]

Mr. Fatchett: The total numbers of St. Helenians working on Ascension Island in the last 10 years are as follows:

Year	
1989	549
1990	569
1991	530
1992	620
1993	599
1994	612
1995	579
1996	563
1997	587
1998	576

Entry Clearance Officers

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the complement of extra entry clearance officers provided to deal with the increased volume of summer entry clearance work for *(a)* Islamabad, *(b)* New Delhi, *(c)* Moscow, *(d)* Peking, *(e)* Lagos, *(f)* Bogota and *(g)* Colombo; how

many of these have already gone to each post; when the others are expected to travel to each post; and when they will be recalled from each post. [44229]

Mr. Fatchett: The information requested is contained in the following table:

Additional entry clearance officers deployed to deal with increased volume of summer entry clearance work

Post	*Total number of ECOs*	*Number already at post*	*Dates others expected to travel*	*Dates of expected departure from post*
Islamabad	5	2	3 early June	2 early September 3 late September
New Delhi	8	6	1 early July	2 early/ mid June 1 end July 2 early August 1 late August 2 early/late September
Moscow	8	7	—	1 already returned 2 early June 1 late June 2 end July 2 late August
Peking	3	1	2 early July	2 end August 1 end September
Lagos	4	1	2 early July 1 early August	2 end August 2 end September
Bogota	1	1	—	1 end July
Colombo	No additional Entry Clearance Officers			

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Derringham School

Mr. Alan Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations he has received opposing the proposed closure of Derringham School in Hull. [43151]

Ms Estelle Morris: Proposals to close Derringham School were first submitted on 8 December 1997. The Secretary of State received 19 letters and a petition containing 2,975 signatures opposing the closure. The proposals were then withdrawn and new proposals were submitted on 9 March 1998. The Department has received two letters opposing the new proposals; the formal objection period ended on 9 May and the LEA has until 9 June to send copies of further objections, plus the LEA's own comments, to the Secretary of State. All relevant representations will be taken into account by the Secretary of State in reaching a final decision.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps he is taking to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of TECs in *(a)* raising skill levels and *(b)* fostering enterprise. [43111]

Dr. Howells: The Government introduced a package of measures in September to raise TEC performance to the level of the best, which includes sharing good practice. As announced in The Learning Age, we have also set up a Training Standards Council to supervise a Training Inspectorate to drive up the standards of training funded through TECs.

In addition, on 13 May, the Secretary of State announced a review of the future role, purpose and funding framework for TECs in delivering the Government's education, skills and enterprise objectives. The review will consider how we will give a clear focus to the role of TECs, and will develop proposals for improving efficiency and effectiveness. The review will lead to the publication of new Strategic Guidance in the Autumn which will set out the future role of TECs and the Government's expectations of them.

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the surplus achieved by Staffordshire TEC on trading accounts in *(a)* 1995–96 and *(b)* 1996–97. [43113]

Dr. Howells: The surplus in 1995–96 was £385,000 and in 1996–97 was £1,548,000.

Medical Retirement

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) how many teacher ill health retirement cases have been *(a)* approved and *(b)* turned down since April 1997 in each local education authority area; [43117]

(2) how many *(a)* heads and *(b)* deputy heads have (i) sought ill health retirement and (ii) had their applications for ill health retirement rejected since April 1997 in each local education authority. [43118]

Dr. Howells: The table shows the number of teachers in each local education authority who were awarded ill-health retirement in financial year 1997–98. The table

covers the maintained nursery, primary, secondary and special education sectors in England. Information is not held by LEA of the number of applications which are rejected. The rejected rate is approximately 30 per cent. of all applications received.

Ill-health retirees whose last known service was in the maintained nursery, primary, secondary or special sector—England 1997–98 provisional

	Last known grade on or before 31 March 1997			
Last known LEA	*Headteachers*	*Deputy Headteachers*	*Classroom Teachers*	*Total*
City of London	0	0	0	0
Camden	*	0	6	7
Greenwich	*	0	9	11
Hackney	*	0	5	7
Hammersmith and Fulham	*	5	14	21
Islington	0	0	16	16
Kensington and Chelsea	0	0	*	*
Lambeth	*	0	10	11
Lewisham	0	0	7	7
Southwark	0	*	8	9
Tower Hamlets	0	*	11	13
Wandsworth	*	5	5	13
City of Westminster	0	*	5	6
Barking and Dagenham	*	*	8	10
Barnet	*	0	14	15
Bexley	*	*	6	10
Brent	0	0	9	9
Bromley	0	*	6	8
Croydon	*	0	10	11
Ealing	0	0	9	9
Enfield	0	0	9	9
Haringey	*	0	*	7
Harrow	*	0	5	7
Havering	*	0	13	14
Hillingdon	*	0	6	7
Hounslow	*	*	5	7
Kingston upon Thames	*	*	7	9
Merton	*	*	6	8
Newham	0	*	11	12
Redbridge	*	*	*	6
Richmond upon Thames	0	0	6	6
Sutton	0	*	6	7
Waltham Forest	*	*	9	13
Birmingham	8	7	64	79
Coventry	*	0	18	19
Dudley	*	*	12	17
Sandwell	*	0	15	17
Solihull	*	0	12	14
Walsall	*	0	17	20
Wolverhampton	*	0	23	25
Knowlsey	*	*	11	13
Liverpool	7	*	29	38
St. Helens	*	*	12	14
Sefton	*	*	24	31
Wirral	*	0	21	23
Bolton	5	*	26	33
Bury	*	0	7	8
Manchester	6	0	27	33
Oldham	*	*	20	25
Rochdale	*	*	13	15
Salford	*	*	13	19
Stockport	*	*	18	23
Tameside	*	0	11	13
Trafford	*	0	14	16
Wigan	*	*	21	23
Barnsley	*	*	11	19
Doncaster	*	0	13	14
Rotherham	*	*	14	17
Sheffield	5	*	25	34
Bradford	*	*	29	36
Calderdale	*	*	13	16
Kirklees	*	0	33	37
Leeds	8	*	50	62

Ill-health retirees whose last known service was in the maintained nursery, primary, secondary or special sector—England 1997–98 provisional

	Last known grade on or before 31 March 1997			
Last known LEA	*Headteachers*	*Deputy Headteachers*	*Classroom Teachers*	*Total*
Wakefield	*	*	13	16
Gateshead	*	*	13	15
Newcastle upon Tyne	*	0	14	16
North Tyneside	0	*	7	8
South Tyneside	*	*	18	20
Sunderland	*	*	23	29
Isles of Scilly	0	0	0	0
Bath and North East Somerset	*	*	5	8
City of Bristol	*	*	21	24
North Somerset	*	*	10	13
South Gloucestershire	*	*	8	10
Hartlepool	*	*	*	7
Middlesbrough	*	0	7	10
Redcar and Cleveland	*	*	16	19
Stockton-on-Tees	0	*	20	21
City of Kingston upon Hull	*	*	14	16
East Riding of Yorkshire	*	*	12	15
North East Lincolnshire	*	*	10	14
North Lincolnshire	*	*	12	15
North Yorkshire	9	*	20	31
York	*	0	9	11
Bedfordshire	*	0	9	12
Luton	0	0	8	8
Buckinghamshire	*	*	11	14
Milton Keynes	*	0	*	*
Derbyshire	6	*	20	30
City of Derby	*	*	8	10
Dorset	*	*	14	17
Poole	*	0	*	*
Bournemouth	0	*	*	5
Durham	0	*	35	37
Darlington	0	0	5	5
East Sussex	*	*	18	21
Brighton and Hove	*	*	7	10
Hampshire	*	*	40	47
Portsmouth	0	0	10	10
Southampton	0	0	*	*
Leicestershire	*	*	16	19
Leicester City	*	0	10	11
Rutland	0	0	*	*
Staffordshire	*	*	31	36
Stoke on Trent	*	*	22	25
Wiltshire	*	*	11	17
Swindon	*	0	*	*
Berkshire	6	*	30	37
Cambridgeshire	*	*	27	35
Cheshire	*	5	34	43
Cornwall	7	*	32	40
Cumbria	9	*	25	35
Devon	9	*	70	82
Essex	8	8	52	68
Gloucestershire	*	*	21	27
Hereford and Worcester	*	*	25	31
Hertfordshire	*	5	45	52
Isle of Wight	*	*	7	10
Kent	14	*	72	90
Lancashire	9	10	104	123
Lincolnshire	6	*	29	36
Norfolk	6	5	43	54
Northamptonshire	*	*	28	32
Northumberland	*	*	18	26
Nottinghamshire	*	*	54	62
Oxfordshire	*	*	23	29
Shropshire	9	*	19	29
Somerset	5	*	24	31
Suffolk	*	6	24	34
Surrey	*	*	31	37

Ill-health retirees whose last known service was in the maintained nursery, primary, secondary or special sector—England 1997–98 provisional

	Last known grade on or before 31 March 1997			
Last known LEA	*Headteachers*	*Deputy Headteachers*	*Classroom Teachers*	*Total*
Warwickshire	*	*	20	27
West Sussex	*	*	44	49
Not known	27	16	163	206
Total	349	227	2,477	3,053

Notes:
1. Includes all retirees whether or not retiring directly from teaching service.
2. The LEA shown is the last known before retirement.
3. To avoid disclosure of sensitive information on individuals, numbers less than 5 are shown as asterisks.
4. Not known category includes teachers whose last known LEA no longer exists due to local government re-organisation.

Source:
DfEE Database of Teacher Records and Pensioner statistics database.

Teacher Training

Mr. Michael J. Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many students undertook teacher training courses in each year since 1979. [43676]

Ms Estelle Morris: The table shows the number of new entrants to initial teacher training for the years 1981–82 to 1997–98. Information for 1979–80 and 1980–81 is not available.

Recruitment to initial teacher training (ITT) courses[1] in England and Wales, 1981–82 to 1997–98

Year	*Primary*	*Secondary*	*[2]Total*
1981–82	6,171	12,512	18,683
1982–83	6,435	10,493	16,928
1983–84	7,422	8,796	16,218
1984–85	8,257	8,450	16,707
1985–86	8,794	7,931	16,725
1986–87	8,964	7,925	16,889
1987–88	10,104	9,076	19,180
1988–89	11,373	8,810	20,183
1989–90	12,814	8,943	21,757
1990–91	14,331	9,464	23,795
1991–92	16,263	12,529	28,792
1992–93	18,364	13,616	31,980
1993–94	17,486	14,556	32,042
1994–95	15,087	16,407	31,494
1995–96	14,932	16,086	31,018
1996–97	13,817	16,842	30,659
1997–98[3]	13,020	16,912	29,932

[1] Includes School Centred ITT and Open University

[2] Where figures have been rounded, there may be discrepancies between the sum of the constituent items and the totals shown

[3] Data for 1997–98 are provisional

Sources:

England:

1981–82 to 1993–94: DFE ITT Annual Recruitment Survey

1994–95: Higher Education Funding Council for England's (HEFCE) Early Statistics Survey

1995–96 to 1997–98: TTA ITT recruitment survey

Wales:

1981–82 to 1993–94: DFE ITT Annual Recruitment Survey

1994–95 to 1997–98: Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) Early Statistics Survey

Nursery Education

Mr. Ennis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many and what proportion of *(a)* three year olds and *(b)* four year olds currently have nursery places in (i) Barnsley and (ii) Doncaster. [43360]

Ms Estelle Morris: 1,264 three year olds, 1,732 four year olds and 49 per cent. of children under 5 were in maintained nursery schools and nursery classes in maintained primary schools in the Barnsley Local Education Authority area in January 1997.

2,364 three year olds, 1,200 four year olds and 44 per cent. of children under 5 were in maintained nursery schools and nursery classes in maintained primary schools in the Doncaster Local Education Authority area in January 1997.

Training

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps his Department has taken to encourage the establishment of a stable training infrastructure for the United Kingdom printing, packaging and graphic communications industry. [43444]

Dr. Howells: The Department is establishing a network of National Training Organisations (NTOs), employer led bodies with the key responsibility for developing education and training arrangements in their sectors. The independent NTO Recognition Panel has recently considered a bid from the Printing and Graphics Industry. The Secretary of State will be considering advice from the Panel and making a decision shortly on whether to grant NTO status.

Welfare to Work

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what action his Department is taking to enable severely disabled people to participate in Welfare to Work. [43374]

Mr. Alan Howarth: Severely disabled people, including those in receipt of Severe Disablement Allowance, are part of the client group for the New Deal for Disabled People. They will be invited to meet a Personal Adviser to explore ways to overcome the particular barriers to work they may face. The Government are consulting

widely to ensure that appropriate help and support are in place to enable severely disabled people to benefit from the programme.

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what contact his Department has had with the Department of Health concerning inter-departmental co-operation to enable severely-disabled people to participate in Welfare to Work. [43371]

Mr. Alan Howarth: The Department for Education and Employment has close contact with the Department of Health on a range of issues. The Department of Health were represented on the inter-departmental working group which set the policy framework for the New Deal for Disabled People. They continue to contribute to the development of the New Deal for Disabled People.

Wheelchairs

Mr. Healey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what procedures exist to monitor the receipt, processing and outcome of applications for financial assistance to purchase wheelchairs through Access to Work; [43934]

(2) how much financial assistance was given to purchase wheelchairs through Access to Work *(a)* in total and *(b)* broken down by Employment Service district in each of the last five years; [43936]

(3) how many applications have been *(a)* received and *(b)* accepted for financial assistance to purchase wheelchairs through Access to Work (i) in total and (ii) broken down by Employment Service district in each of the last five years; [43935]

(4) what proportion of the financial assistance to purchase wheelchairs through Access to Work during the past five years has been spent on *(a)* indoor/outdoor powered wheelchairs and *(b)* manual wheelchairs; [43937]

(5) what was the average cost of *(a)* all wheelchairs, *(b)* manual wheelchairs and *(c)* indoor/outdoor powered wheelchairs obtained through Access to Work in each of the last five years. [43938]

Mr. Alan Howarth: Responsibility for the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its Chief Executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply.

Letter from Peter Collis to Mr. John Healey, dated 2 June 1998:

The Secretary of State for Education and Employment has asked Leigh Lewis, the Chief Executive of the Employment Service, to reply to your questions about applications for Access to Work, and the financial assistance given towards the purchase of wheelchairs through the programme during the last five years. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to Mr. Lewis. I am replying in his absence.

I must start by saying that we do not monitor separately the number of applications for wheelchairs or their cost. We do, of course, note details of equipment provided in individual case files but the Employment Service does not analyse information to the level of detail you requested. However, we can supply the following related information.

The Employment Service does monitor regularly the receipt, processing and outcomes of all applications for Access to Work. In addition, the Placing, Assessment and Counselling Teams have standards to meet when dealing with applications. For all applications for the 12 months ending in March, 93% of applicants had a decision on help within the standard of 12 working days, and 83% received at least initial help within 60 working days.

The Employment Service analyses cost information by broad categories. Wheelchairs come within the Special Aids and Equipment category but their cost cannot be separately identified. Expenditure on Special Aids and Equipment is not broken down below regional level and is available only for the last four years. This is since the introduction of Access to Work in June 1994. Table 1 below offers a regional breakdown.

Table 2 sets out the total number of people benefiting nationally over the past five years under Access to Work (and the previous Special Schemes), which include people given help with wheelchairs. We do not identify applications for wheelchairs separately but we have details, for the past two years, of the number of people making applications for Special Aids and Equipment. Again, we have a regional, but not a district, breakdown.

I am sorry I have not been able to answer your questions more fully. However, if you would like to discuss this further, you may care to contact Tom Gawn from the Disability Services Division, with policy responsibility for Access to Work. He can be contacted at Rockingham House, 123 West Street, Sheffield, S1 4ER or on 0114 259 6960.

I hope this is helpful.

Table 1: Cost of special aids and equipment by region: 1994–95 to 1997–98

£ million

	1994–95	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*
East Midlands	1.1	1.1	0.6	0.4
London and South East	3.2	4.2	2.0	2.0
North West	1.2	1.3	0.7	0.8
Northern	0.6	0.7	0.3	0.3
Scotland	0.8	1.0	0.3	0.5
South West	0.9	1.2	0.6	0.6
Wales	0.5	0.5	0.2	0.3
West Midlands	1.2	1.2	0.5	0.7
Yorkshire and the Humber	1.2	1.2	0.4	0.6
Total (rounded)	10.7	12.5	5.5	6.2

Table 2: Number of people helped through Access to Work 1993–94 to 1997–98; number of people receiving special aids and equipment (SAE) by region: 1996–97 and 1997–98

	1993–94	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*
East Midlands	—	—	—	389	447
London and South East	—	—	—	1,443	2,421
North West	—	—	—	759	1,098
Northern	—	—	—	252	498
Scotland	—	—	—	350	429
South West	—	—	—	450	611
Wales	—	—	—	235	298
West Midlands	—	—	—	551	828
Yorkshire and the Humber	—	—	—	618	753
Total SAE	—	—	—	5,047	7,383
All applications	8,172	10,394	13,577	10,119	12,825

Learning Support Assistants

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to introduce a national training framework for learning-support assistants. [43884]

Ms Estelle Morris: The Green Paper, "Excellence for all children: meeting special educational needs", sought views on the action we might take to improve the training of learning support assistants, including the option of a

national training framework. In the light of the responses to the Green Paper, we expect to publish proposals on this and other issues shortly after the Summer recess.

School Exclusions (Warrington)

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many children at *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary level in Warrington, North constituency were excluded from school in each of the past five years. [44208]

Ms Estelle Morris: Information on the number of pupils permanently excluded from schools in the Warrington, North constituency is shown in the table. Information on permanent exclusions was not collected prior to 1994/95. The Department does not currently collect information on fixed period exclusions:

Permanent exclusions from maintained schools in the Warrington North constituency

Type of school	*1994/95*	*1995/96*
Primary	3	4
Secondary	17	12
Special	0	0
Total	20	16

Exclusions data for 1996/97 are currently being collated and will be published later this year.

Job Vacancies (Chelmsford)

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many job vacancies were notified to the Chelmsford jobcentre in each of the last six months. [44175]

Mr. Alan Howarth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its Chief Executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Leigh Lewis to Mr. Simon Burns, dated 4 June 1998:

The Secretary of State for Education and Employment has asked me to reply to your question in which you asked for information about the number of job vacancies notified to Chelmsford Jobcentre in each of the last six months. This is something that falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Employment Service.

Vacancies notified to the Jobcentre were as follows:

November 1997: 782

December 1997: 584

January 1998: 248

February 1998: 591

March 1998: 549

April 1998: 483

I hope this is helpful.

Autism

Mr. Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many children of school age in West Sussex are currently statemented on account of problems relating to autism. [43283]

Ms Estelle Morris: The national figures which the Department collects on the number of children with special educational needs are not disaggregated by type of special need; it is for West Sussex—as for other individual local education authorities—to identify children with autism and other types of special educational needs in their areas and to make appropriate provision. West Sussex LEA estimates that approximately 150 children with autism, including Asperger's Syndrome, currently have statements in the county. There may be other children with autistic spectrum disorders whose statements relate primarily to other types of special education needs.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 5 June 1998

PRIME MINISTER

Older People

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Prime Minister what plans he has to co-ordinate Government policy for older people. [44582]

The Prime Minister: I have established a Ministerial Group which will be chaired by the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham). The terms of reference for the group are as set out:

1. To ensure that Government strategy and policy affecting older people is effectively co-ordinated, avoids duplication, and takes account of the needs of older people;
2. To develop a better understanding of the lives and aspirations of older people and how they are affected by Government policy by:
   - undertaking an audit of cross-Government initiatives to identify all those that may affect older people;
   - working with non-governmental groups representing older people's interests, to gain a better understanding of their lives and the implications of an ageing population; and
   - developing a statement of values and principles which reflect the findings of the audit and wider discussions.
3. To co-ordinate the presentation and promotion of Government policy affecting older people.

Membership of the group will comprise Ministers who have particular responsibilities for policy areas which affect older people. It will include the Minister without Portfolio, the Under-Secretary of State for Women and Ministers from the Department of Health, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, the Cabinet Office (Office of Public Service), the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, the Department for Education and Employment, the Home Office, HM Treasury, the Department of Trade and Industry, the Scottish Office, the Welsh Office and the Northern Ireland Office.

The group will make its first report to me before the Summer Recess.

Northern Ireland Assembly Elections

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Prime Minister if he will issue guidance on the conduct of Government business during the election campaign for the Northern Ireland Assembly. [44924]

The Prime Minister: The business of Government must, of course, continue during the election campaign period, including the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement now endorsed in the referendums. Nevertheless, it is important that the Government conduct business in a way which does not interfere with the electoral contest between the participating candidates and parties.

With that in mind, I have endorsed the issue of guidance to Government Ministers and Departments in Northern Ireland and I am arranging for copies to be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Indebted Countries

Mr. Reed: To ask the Prime Minister what plans he has for future relations with poor indebted countries following the G8 summit. [43468]

The Prime Minister: Debt was one of the main themes at Birmingham. The conclusions of the discussions mark a significant step forward, both in recognising the need for progress in debt relief by the year 2000, and in endorsing proposals put forward by the UK for faster debt relief to post conflict countries.

The British Government will be pressing for this work to be advanced urgently amongst other creditors and in the international financial institutions. The Department for International Development will also continue to build partnerships with developing countries as set out in its recent white paper.

Sierra Leone

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 1 June 1998, *Official Report*, column 92, when the workshop and seminar were held in the United Kingdom to help President Kabbah restore the legitimate Government of Sierra Leone; and what assessment he has made of the contributions of the workshop and seminar. [44346]

The Prime Minister: The workshop took place from 5 to 12 October 1997 and the seminar on 20 October 1997. The workshop produced a 90-day programme for implementation by President Kabbah's government on their return to Sierra Leone.

The plan was presented by President Kabbah at the seminar, attended by representatives from the United Nations, the Organisation for African Unity, the Commonwealth Secretariat, the European Commission, the US Embassy in Sierra Leone, and my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd) the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

The plan has provided the basis for immediate actions now being taken by the Government as they re-establish their functions and services in Sierra Leone.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the number of sites of special scientific interest in the area covered by the Lancashire (Wigan) local team office of English Nature; how many new sites were *(a)* added and *(b)* removed in each of the last five years; how many of the sites were damaged in the last 12 months; how many of the sites were subject to meetings with the Environment Agency concerning *(a)* pollution, *(b)* coastal defences and *(c)* water table levels in the last year; and what steps are

being taken in the area to identify new sites of special scientific interest in industrial and urban areas by the local team. [44114]

Angela Eagle: English Nature's Lancashire Team, based in Wigan, is responsible for 107 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSIs).

Twelve new sites were added in the last five years, none were removed.

In the last 12 months, nine sites suffered some damage by activities such as costal defence works, agricultural operations and emergency works. The Team maintains frequent contact with the Environment Agency over a range of site-specific issues where a number of topics may be discussed. It is not possible to specify each meeting where pollution, coastal defences and water table levels were specifically discussed.

No specific steps are taken by the Team to identify new sites in industrial and urban areas. However, if they become aware of the special interest of a site during the normal course of business these would be considered for notification.

River Tame

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many storm overflows allow untreated sewage to pass into the River Tame; if he will list the grid references of each overflow point; and how many are planned to be fixed by North West Water during each of the next five years. [44112]

Angela Eagle: There are 67 storm water overflows which have outfalls affecting the River Tame. The following table shows the location of the outfalls by name and national grid reference.

There are no plans for improvement of storm overflows into the River Tame during the remaining two years of North West Water's Asset Management Plan 2 (AMP2), agreed in 1994 with the then National Rivers Authority. However, in 1996, three unsatisfactory storm overflows in Audenshaw were abandoned and replaced by one of modern design.

The Asset Management Plan for the five years from March 2000 (AMP3) is currently under consideration as part of the Periodic Review of water company price limits from 2000–2005, and the unsatisfactory storm water overflows discharging into the River Tame will be considered as part of this process.

Number	*Location by name*	*Discharge area*	*Grid reference*
1	Delph New Road/Station	River Tame	SD 9873 0743
2	Dob Cross New Road	River Tame	SD 9903 0632
3	Clifton Holmes, Delph	River Tame	SD 9818 0804
4	Chew Valley Road	River Tame	SD 9935 0435
5	Royal George Pumping Station	River Tame	SD 9802 0385
6	Armit Road, (Grasscroft sewage scheme)	River Tame	SD 9802 0393
7	Dacres, Greenfield	River Tame	SD 9890 0416
8	St. Anne's Square, Delph	River Tame	SD 9861 0788
9	East Greenfield	River Tame	SD 9929 0429
10	Horest Lane	River Tame	SD 9705 0952
11	Brinnington Rise, Brinnington	River Tame	SJ 9064 9185
12	Manor Road, Pumping Station, Woodley	River Tame	SJ 9333 9288
13	Grimesbottom, Portwood (near pylon adjacent to Penny Lane)	River Tame	SJ 8975 9134
14	Grimesbottom, Portwood (recreation ground near Penny Lane)	—	—
15	Meadow Lane, Haughton Green	River Tame	SJ 9341 9298
16	Sheridan Way/Dark Lane Farm Estate No. 3	River Tame	SJ 9272 9452
17	Raglan Street near Peak Forest	River Tame	SJ 9426 9474
18	Roaches Lock, Mossley	River Tame	SD 9796 0313
19	Disused Railway Station in Rassbottom Street/Bayley Street	River Tame	SJ 9590 9855
20	Wharf Street	River Tame	SJ 9347 9822
21	Turner Lane/Alexandra Road	River Tame	SJ 9394 9877
22	Lower Wharf Street (manhole 482)	River Tame	SJ 9406 9875
23	Lower Wharf Street/Scotland Street (manhole 447)	River Tame	SJ 9391 9876
24	Hyde Road	River Tame	SJ 9371 9536
25	Wakeling Road/Stockport Road	Tributary River Tame	SJ 9223 9388
26	Two Trees Lane/Marina Avenue	Culvert to River Tame	SJ 9316 9438
27	Dukinfield Road/Throstle Bank Street	Tributary River Tame	SJ 9417 9561
28	Manchester Road	Culvert to River Tame	SD 9740 0166
29	Dark Lane	River Tame	SD 9765 0261
30	Waggon Road	River Tame	SD 9753 0197
31	Buckton Vale Road	Culvert to River Tame	SD 9768 0005
32	Grove Road/Spring Bank Lane	River Tame	SJ 9748 9995
33	Knowle Street	River Tame	SJ 9666 9860
34	Huddersfield Road	Culvert to River Tame	SJ 9723 9881
35	Corporation Street	River Tame	SJ 9655 9855
36	Market Street/Trinity Street	River Tame	SJ 9635 9860
37	Cumberland Street	Culvert to River Tame	SJ 9590 9880
38	Trinity Street/Dean Street	River Tame	SJ 9636 9853
39	Trinity Street	River Tame	SJ 9639 9853
40	Melbourne Street	River Tame	SJ 9628 9853
41	Caroline Street/Castle Street	River Tame	SJ 9606 9848
42	Tame Street/Park Road	River Tame	SJ 9539 9816
43	Park Road/Sandy Lane	River Tame	SJ 9510 9822

Number	Location by name	Discharge area	Grid reference
44	Hanover Street	Culvert to River Tame	SJ 9590 9882
45	Stamford Street/Astley Street	River Tame	SJ 9564 9843
46	Clarence Street South	River Tame	SJ 9534 9843
47	St. George Street/Hanover Street	River Tame	SJ 9591 9854
48	St. George Street/West Avenue	River Tame	SJ 9591 9854
49	St. George Street/Hanover Street	River Tame	SJ 9591 9854
50	Ridge Hill Lane/St. George Street	River Tame	SJ 9591 9854
51	Binns Street	River Tame	SJ 9534 9813
52	Copley Street	River Tame	SJ 9712 9924
53	Hough Hill Road	River Tame	SJ 9645 9830
54	Hough Hill Road/High Street	River Tame	SJ 9645 9825
55	Hough Hill Road/Grasscroft Street	River Tame	SJ 9645 9818
56	Walmsley Street 1	River Tame	SJ 9646 9811
57	Walmsley Street 2	River Tame	SJ 9646 9805
58	Walmsley Street 3	River Tame	SJ 9646 9798
59	Dukinfield Outfall Sewer	River Tame	SJ 9327 9670
60	Off St. Lawrences Road	River Tame	SJ 9335 9509
61	ASDA (manhole 773) Park Parade	River Tame	SJ 9383 9865
62	Caroline Street (North of Bridge)	River Tame	SJ 9610 9855
63	Illingworth Avenue	River Tame	SJ 9727 9843
64	Off Mill Lane	River Tame	SJ 9406 9478
65	Off Gibralter Lane	River Tame	SJ 9395 9378
66	Off Manor Road	River Tame	SJ 9415 9415
67	Broomstairs Road combined sewer overflow	River Tame	SJ 9304 9652

Housing (Wandsworth)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what discussions he has had with the London Borough of Wandsworth on its policy of providing affordable housing within the borough. [44116]

Mr. Raynsford: Ministers have had no discussions with the London Borough of Wandsworth about its policy of providing affordable housing within the borough. However, as part of the Housing Investment Programme, the Government Office for London, in conjunction with the Housing Corporation, regularly discuss with the authority its housing strategy and policy for assisting the supply of affordable housing.

The Government's policy on planning and affordable housing is set out in the revised PPG3: Housing and circular 6/98, which replaces circular 13/96. This policy advocates a needs-based, plan-led approach to securing affordable housing in new private housing proposals. This requires that planning authorities carry out rigorous and up-to-date assessments of need for affordable housing in their boroughs, as a basis for preparing their planned policies. Therefore, where there is evidence of need for affordable housing, as is the case in all London authorities, including Wandsworth, we would expect the authority to seek the inclusion of affordable housing in all new housing proposals on suitable sites.

American Bull Frog

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to ban the import and sale of the giant American bull frog; and if he will make a statement. [44300]

Angela Eagle: The EC Wildlife Trade Regulation (Council Regulation 338/97), which implements the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) within the European Union, contains provisions for the suspension of imports of species on the grounds that they pose an ecological threat to European wildlife. On 15 December 1997, imports into the EU of *Rana catesbeiana* (American bull frog) were suspended on these grounds. The sale of specimens already legally within the EU are not affected by this ban.

Common Land

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he intends to publish the Good Practice Guide on Managing the Use of Common Land. [44652]

Mr. Meacher: We have today published the Good Practice Guide on Managing the Use of Common Land, which has been produced for us by the Countryside and Community Research Unit of the Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Higher Education. Copies of the Guide have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

The Guide provides practical advice and solutions to problems experienced in the management of common land and highlights examples of good practice. It is designed for all involved in governing and managing common land. We are therefore distributing copies of the Guide widely to interested organisations and individuals.

Council Tax Debt Collection

Mr. Stringer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will change the way in which non-domestic rate debt is enforced following the recent changes to council tax debt collection procedures; and if he will make a statement. [44911]

Ms Armstrong: Many of those who respond to our consultation exercise on council tax debt collection expressed the view that similar changes should be made to the non-domestic rating regime. We have decided that,

where appropriate, the non-domestic collection and enforcement regulations should be brought into line with those for council tax. I am publishing today a consultation paper *"Changes to the enforcement and levying of distress for non-domestic rate debts"* setting out our proposals.

It is important that local authorities pursue unpaid business rates rigorously. At the same time, the system needs to operate as fairly as possible for ratepayers. Debtors need to be aware what the procedures are and why they are being pursued for payment. The changes we are proposing will make the system clearer and more effective.

A copy of the consultation document has been placed in the Library of the House.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Smoking

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the estimated gross cost of anti-smoking campaigns in Northern Ireland aimed at children and young people has been since 1988; and what assessment she has made of the impact of the campaigns on teenage *(a)* boys and *(b)* girls. [44013]

Mr. Worthington: The estimated expenditure on such campaigns by the Health Promotion Agency for Northern Ireland since its inception in October 1990 is £315,300.

Campaigns to reduce smoking among young people appear to have had a greater impact upon boys. Post-campaign quantitative and qualitative research among the target group has identified a number of issues which the Department of Health and Social Services will address in the context of the Government's forthcoming White Paper on tobacco control.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Transperience, Low Moor

Mrs. Ann Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will take steps to ensure that the collection of public transport vehicles at present housed at Transperience, Low Moor, Bradford, remains on public display in the Bradford District. [38555]

Mr. Fisher *[holding answer 21 April 1998]:* Coopers and Lybrand, the administrators dealing with the assets of the West Yorkshire Transport Trust Limited, have a legal duty to administer the assets, of which this collection forms a significant part, in order to recover moneys owed to the Trust's creditors.

I have met my hon. Friend to discuss the situation, and I understand that the Keighley Bus Museum Trust will be approaching the Yorkshire and Humberside Museums Council to discuss the heritage value of the collection.

WALES

Advisory Committee on Drug and Alcohol Misuse

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the members of the Welsh Advisory Committee on Drug and Alcohol Misuse; what their qualifications are; and when their terms of office expire. [44007]

Mr. Win Griffiths: The Welsh Advisory Committee on Drug and Alcohol Misuse (WACDAM) comprises a Chair and up to 26 members appointed by the Secretary of State for Wales. Members accept a time commitment of two days per month and receive no remuneration. The Committee is currently chaired by Dr. William Clee, a General Practitioner from Cardiff; his period of appointment extends to March 2000. A list of members of WACDAM, their residence/occupation and periods of appointment is as follows:

Member	*Residence/Occupation*	*Start Date*	*End Date*
Dr. Morfydd Rozella Keen, OBE	Cardiff Consultant Psychiatrist	1 November 1996	31 October 1999
Mrs. Sandra Mary Skinner	Brecon Powys Officer, Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme	1 November 1996	31 October 1999
Dr. Howard John Williamson	Pontypridd Rhondda Cynon Taff Senior Research Associate	1 November 1996	31 October 1999
Mr. Roger Bruce De Wisset Duncan	Penarth Vale of Glamorgan Director of Drugs Project	1 November 1996	31 October 1999
Mr. Arthur Graham Williams	Pontardawe Neath Port Talbot Director of Personal Services	1 November 1996	31 October 1999
Dr. Edward Coyle	Cardiff Director of Public Health Medicine	1 March 1997	28 February 2000
Mr. Dewi Tegla Williams	Carmarthen Carmarthenshire Director of Nursing Services	1 November 1996	31 October 1999
Mr. Richard Martin Pates	Monmouth Monmouthshire Consultant Clinical Psychologist	1 November 1996	31 October 1999
Mr. David Jonathan Temple	Penarth Vale of Glamorgan Director, Postgrad Pharmaceutical Studies	1 November 1996	31 October 1999

Member	Residence/Occupation	Start Date	End Date
Miss Marilyn Haydn Jones	Conwy Lecturer in Education	1 November 1996	31 October 1999
Dr. Michael Stanhope Shooter	Abergavenny Monmouthshire Consultant, Child and Adolescent Psychiatry	1 November 1996	31 October 1999
Mr. Ray Singh	Neath Neath Port Talbot Barrister	1 November 1996	31 October 1999
Mr. Tony Burden	South Wales Police	24 April 1998	31 October 1999
Mrs. Siân Rees	Clunderwen Carmarthenshire Manager of Health Promotion Centre	1 November 1996	31 October 1999
Mr. Rory Annesley	Presteigne Powys Retired	1 November 1996	31 October 1999
Mr. Owen Aneurin Owen	Denbigh Denbighshire Voluntary Agency Director	1 November 1996	31 October 1999
Mrs. Susan Marie Allerston	Bridgend Advisory Teacher for Health Education	1 November 1996	31 October 1999
Ms Rhoda Briony Emlyn-Jones	Cardiff Principal Social Services Officer	1 November 1996	31 October 1999
Mr. Jeffrey Anthony Collins	Swansea Chief Probation Officer	1 November 1996	31 October 1999
Dr. John Michael Browne	Reigate Surrey Deputy Director, Portman Group	1 November 1996	31 October 1999
Dr. Peter John Priddle Higson	Llanrwst Conwy Deputy Chief Executive	1 November 1996	31 October 1999
Dr. John Robert Kemm	Birmingham Director of Public Health Services	1 November 1996	31 October 1999
Dr. Duncan Meredydd Williams	Ammanford Carmarthenshire General Medical Practitioner	1 November 1996	31 October 1999

There are currently three vacancies on WACDAM.

Continence Services

Ms Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people in Dyfed/Powys Health Authority area by unitary authority area are provided with continence services; and what budget has been allocated to continence care in real terms for each year since 1990–91. [43472]

Mr. Win Griffiths: The funding for continence services is unhypothepothecated and is within each health authority's discretionary allocation. It is not possible, therefore, to give precise figures for budgets for these services for the years in question. Figures that are available for 1997/98 in the Pembrokeshire and Derwen NHS Trust show that it spent £198,000 on community-based continence care.

The GP Morbidity Database Project estimated a rate of 3.8 per 1,000 people in Wales suffering from incontinence during 1996. This would imply a total for Wales of around 11,000. This is likely to be an underestimate of the number of people provided with services because the data record those patients consulting their GP about incontinence in 1996; patients coded as suffering from incontinence in previous years would not appear in the data.

Estimates at more detailed geographical levels are not robust. Data collected from NHS Trusts situated in the Dyfed Powys area indicate that Continence Nurses made a total of 995 contacts during the financial year 1996–97. This does not equate with people seen, since more than one contact during the year may well have been made.

HOME DEPARTMENT

EU Justice and Home Affairs Council

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Justice and Home Affairs Council held in Brussels on 28 and 29 May. [44991]

Mr. Straw: I chaired the Council on behalf of the Presidency. The Minister of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead, East and Washington, West (Ms Quin) represented the United Kingdom.

This was a very successful Council, where agreement was reached on a number of outstanding issues. There was also full discussion of a range of issues relating to the justice and home affairs aspects of the enlargement process. The main matters dealt with were as follows.

Ministers signed the Convention on Jurisdiction and the Recognition and Enforcement of Judgments in Matrimonial Matters (known as the 'Brussels II Convention') and its Protocol relating to the European Court of Justice. This convention establishes grounds for court jurisdiction in cases of divorce, nullity and separation, as well as related parental responsibility orders securing care for any children involved.

The Council agreed as 'A' points, among other things, a report on terrorist funding aimed at combating terrorism by cutting off sources of funding and countering terrorist fund raising; a report on football hooliganism; a report on the exchange of DNA analysis results; conclusions on encryption and law enforcement; a recommendation seeking to establish uniform levels of expertise and equipment for detecting forged documents at points of entry into the European Union; and a Council Communication concerning a uniform format for residence permits.

The Council held a wide-ranging open debate on organised crime, in which Ministers stressed concerns about the growing threat posed by criminal organisations and the need for member states to act both individually and collectively to combat the threat. The Council agreed that environmental and economic crime in particular were activities on which more work should be taken forward.

The Council noted a report on progress in implementing the Action Plan on Organised Crime which, subject to appropriate updating, will now be submitted to the Cardiff European Council.

Political agreement was reached on the Convention on Driving Disqualification, which will now be finalised and made ready for early signature. This convention is an important road safety measure which will enable a driving disqualification imposed in one member state to be enforced in another.

A Joint Action was agreed on good practice in mutual legal assistance. A further Joint Action establishing a European Judicial Network was also agreed, which will help to speed up gathering of evidence across jurisdictions and facilitate contacts between magistrates and prosecutors. This was one of the recommendations in the Action Plan on Organised Crime.

The Council noted progress in the preparations for Europol to begin working. The ratification by all member states of the Convention is expected to be completed soon. The Council agreed that the activities of Europol should be extended to terrorism in principle from 1 January 1999 and that the necessary preparatory work should be put in hand. We also agreed the Europol budget for 1999.

The Council had a wide-ranging discussion on the Convention on Mutual Legal Assistance, and reached agreement on some of the outstanding issues. However, further work remains to be done on several important issues including data protection, interception of communications and the role of the European Court of Justice.

The Council agreed a Joint Action establishing a mechanism for collective evaluation of applicant states' implementation of the acquis in the Justice and Home Affairs field. A new expert group will be able to draw on the wide range of information already available and feed the results of its evaluations into the wider enlargement process. Conclusions on the 'rule of law' were also agreed, which will provide guidelines to the applicant states on what they need to do to build democratic and accountable institutions as a necessary pre-condition for European Union membership. There was also a discussion of ways in which the applicant states might be associated with the practical application of the Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) acquis before their formal accession, and this issue will be considered further.

The Council held a joint meeting with Interior and Justice Ministers from the applicant countries to approve the Pre-Accession Pact on Organised Crime, which was another of the recommendations of the Action Plan on Organised Crime; its approval six months ahead of the timetable set by the Amsterdam Council represents a significant achievement. Ministers also had a useful discussion covering organised crime, implementation of the pre-accession pact and the rule of law. There was full agreement on the importance placed on these issues, and members of the JHA Council emphasised that they stood ready to assist the candidate countries in these areas.

The Council agreed arrangements for the exchange of information and best practice in crime prevention, in advance of the coming into force of the Treaty of Amsterdam. A report on European Union drugs activities was approved and will be forwarded to the European Council in Cardiff. This included elements of a post-1999 European Union drugs strategy.

The Council discussed, on the basis of proposals from Italy, the varying data protection provisions which exist in different Justice and Home Affairs instruments. Further work was commissioned to examine the scope and need for greater harmonisation of approach.

A progress report was presented on the Action Plan on the influx of migrants from Iraq and the neighbouring region. The incoming Austrian Presidency agreed to pursue the implementation of the Action Plan and to report to the next meeting of the Council in September.

There was a full discussion of outstanding issues on the Eurodac convention, which is concerned with fingerprinting of asylum applicants. It was agreed that a Protocol should be drawn up to extend the convention to fingerprints of illegal immigrants. This is extended to be adopted by the end of 1998, when the other outstanding issues on the Convention itself should also be resolved.

After the Council, the first meeting was held of the Committee of Ministers set up under article 18 of the Dublin Convention, which lays down criteria for determining the State responsible for deciding asylum applications. The Committee agreed on a Decision and a Programme of Action aimed at improving the operation of the Dublin Convention.

Prison Service

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the Prison Service's Business Plan for 1998–99. [44992]

Ms Quin: I am publishing today the Prison Service Business Plan for 1998–99, including the key performance targets I have set. The majority will require some improvement on the Prison Service's very creditable performance in 1997–98.

They are:

Escapes:

to ensure no Category A Prisoners escape

to ensure that the number of escapes from prisons and from escorts, expressed as a proportion of the prison population, is lower than in 1997–98

Assaults:

to ensure that the number of assaults on staff, prisoners and others, expressed as a proportion of the average population, is lower than 9 per cent.

Drugs:

to ensure that the rate of positive testing for drugs (the number of random drug tests that prove positive expressed as a percentage of the total number of random tests carried out) is lower than 20 per cent.

Overcrowding:

to ensure that the percentage of the prison population above the uncrowded capacity of the estate is no more than 12 per cent.

Purposeful Activity:

to ensure that prisoners spend on average at least 24 hours per week engaged in purposeful activity

Time Unlocked:

to ensure that at least 60 per cent. of prisoners are held in establishments which normally unlock all prisoners on the standard or enhanced regime for at least 10 hours per weekday

Offending behaviour programmes:

to ensure that there are at least 3,000 completions by prisoners of programmes accredited as being effective in reducing re-offending, of which 680 should be completions of the Sex Offender Treatment Programmes

Cost per place:

to ensure that the average cost of a prison place does not exceed £24,615

Staff training:

to ensure that, on average, staff spend at least 6.5 days in training.

I will publish a long-term strategy for the Prison Service, including new objectives and targets, once the Comprehensive Spending Review is completed.

Chief Police Officers

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will place in the Library a copy of the full accounts of the Association of Chief Police Officers of England, Wales and Northern Ireland for the last year for which the accounts are available; [44096]

(2) which grades so entitled within the police service have refused to join *(a)* the Association of Chief Police Officers of England, Wales and Northern Ireland and *(b)* ACPO Ltd; [44098]

(3) if the members of ACPO who became directors of ACPO Ltd. informed their respective police authorities that ACPO was a limited company. [44102]

Mr. Michael: None of those entitled or invited to join have refused to join the Association of Chief Police Officers of England, Wales and Northern Ireland or ACPO Limited.

I have arranged for a full copy of the accounts for 1996/97 for the Association of Chief Police Officers of England, Wales and Northern Ireland (ACPO) to be placed in the Library.

The Association of Chief Police Officers of England, Wales and Northern Ireland is not part of the Home Office, nor is it accountable to the Secretary of State for the Home Department. The appointment of chief officers of police as directors of ACPO is a matter for those chief officers and their police authorities.

Prisoners (Self-harm)

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what research is being evaluated by his Department into the reporting of incidents of self-harm by young prisoners. [43875]

Ms Quin: A Prison Service Headquarters research and development group on suicide and self-injury acts as a forum for formulating and co-ordinating research into suicide and self-injury in forensic settings. A range of research has been conducted, including developing risk screening procedures amongst young offenders. Current commissioned research includes a project being undertaken at the University of Kent at Canterbury, examining current practices of recording and monitoring self-injury and suicidal behaviours, with the objective of identifying more effective methods of management.

The 1997 publication "Suicide and Self-Injury in Prisons" (by the British Psychological Society) includes an overview of recent and current research in the area.

In addition, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons, Sir David Ramsbotham, is currently preparing an independent thematic review on suicides and self-injury in prisons, which is expected to be completed later this summer.

Prisoners

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* males and *(b)* females aged (i) 14, (ii) 15, (iii) 16, (iv) 17 and (v) 18 years were held in prisons on 1 May. [43656]

Ms Quin: The latest available information is for 30 April 1998 and is given in the table. Information on the population of young persons, by age and type of custody is published in successive volumes of "Prison statistics, England and Wales" (Table 3.2 of the 1996 edition—Cm 3732), copies of which are in the Library.

Population of young persons in prisons in England and Wales by sex and age on 30 April 1998[1]

Age	*Male*	*Female*
14	—	—
15	224	5
16	685	21
17	1,501	61
18	2,309	102

[1] Provisional figures

Private Prisons

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements are made when assistance is provided by state prisons to private prisons for *(a)* controlling riot situations and *(b)* other purposes. [44008]

Ms Quin: The arrangements made for providing assistance from public sector prisons to a contracted-out prison for dealing with a serious incident are no different from those between public sector prisons. These arrangements are reciprocal between public and private sectors and staff from a contracted-out prison could be used in support of a public sector prison.

A serious incident is one which:

- poses a threat to the control of the whole or part of an establishment; and/or
- involves concerted hostile activities by a group or groups of prisoners; and/or
- may result in the evacuation of the whole or part of the establishment; and/or
- causes the governor/director to require assistance from other establishments and/or the emergency services.

Should a serious incident occur in a contracted-out prison, trained support and specialist staff from the public sector would be provided at the same level as for a similar incident in a public sector prison.

The provision of assistance to a contracted-out prison in the above circumstances does not incur a financial charge to the contractor. Where assistance is provided for other purposes, the cost would be charged to the contractor as appropriate.

SCOTLAND

Students (Tuition Fees)

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the estimated total of tuition fees which will be payable in the final year of four-year honours courses at Scottish universities and colleges by United Kingdom students from outside Scotland. [44427]

Mr. Wilson: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (Mr. Gorrie) on 24 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *422*.

Students

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many United Kingdom students from outside Scotland are in the final year of four-year honours degree courses at Scottish universities or colleges. [44428]

Mr. Wilson: Statistics on the numbers of students in the final year of an honours course are not held centrally.

The number of United Kingdom honours graduates from outside Scotland who qualified on first degree courses in Scotland in 1997 is given in the table.

1997 Non-Scottish United Kingdom honours graduates from Scottish higher education institutions, by mode of study and years on course

Years on course	*Full time*	*Part time*	*All students*
Three or fewer	508	2	510
Four	2,891	5	2,896
Five or more	635	12	647
Unknown	2	0	2
All graduates	4,036	19	4,055

Appointments

Mr. Moore: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the names of those people whom he has appointed since 1 May 1997, indicating *(a)* the positions to which they have been appointed, *(b)* the dates of their tenure, *(c)* their professions, *(d)* their salaries, *(e)* the name of the person they replaced and *(f)* the profession of the person they replaced. [44071]

Mr. Dewar: The information at *(a)* to *(d)* is available in the public appointments section of the Scottish Office website on the Internet (http://www.scotland.gov.uk). It is not possible to provide a meaningful response to *(e)* and *(f)* since individual members of public bodies—other than Chairmen—are not normally appointed in direct replacement for others.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Statistics (Boundary Maps)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to her answer of 5 May 1998, *Official Report*, column *265*, if she will make a statement on the basis on which the map for European NUTS II submitted to Eurostat was compiled, and if the map is being used to determine structural fund allocations. [43615]

Mrs. Roche: The criteria used by the UK Government Statistical Service in formulating proposals for changes to the NUTS classification are set out in the consultation document issued by the Office for National Statistics in June 1996. A copy of this was placed in the House of Commons Library.

The extent to which NUTS boundaries could be used for structural fund allocations will be set out in the relevant regulations. The European Commission made its proposals on 18 March 1998; these now need to be negotiated in the Council of Ministers and where appropriate approved by the European Parliament. The NUTS boundaries for the UK which might then be used may depend on the timing of the conclusion of discussions between the Government Statistical Service and Eurostat.

Insolvencies

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the cost to public funds of the processing of insolvencies in each of the past eight years. [44206]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths:

£000

Year	*Total cost*
1990–91	49,611
1991–92	56,897
1992–93	63,466
1993–94	69,350
1994–95	71,814
1995–96[1]	99,199
1996–97[1]	76,009

[1] The costs for 1995–96 and 1996–97 are from the agency's audited accounts. The 1995–96 accounts include an exceptional item of £12.502 million.

Annual accounts for the year ended 31 March 1998 are currently being audited.

The Department of Trade and Industry receives the income generated by the fees charged to insolvent estates administered by Official Receivers and insolvency practitioners. Additionally, HM Treasury receives investment income from the Insolvency Services Account and Insolvency Services Investment Account. Since March 1990, these have been:

£000

	1990–91	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94	1994–95	1995–96	1996–97
Fees paid to Department of Trade and Industry	22,385	35,403	45,849	38,661	25,957	41,308	30,076
Investment income paid to HM Treasury	26,545	27,367	26,509	31,775	41,415	47,079	37,994
Total income	48,930	62,770	72,358	70,436	67,372	88,387	68,070
Net (cost)/surplus to public funds	(681)	5,873	8,892	1,086	(4,442)	(10,812)	(7,939)

Arms Exhibitions

Ann Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will list those officials from her Department who attended the Contingency and Operational Procurement Exhibition (COPEX) in Jordan in April, indicating the costs of their attendance and the total amount of public funds extended by her Department to companies attending this event. [44506]

Mrs. Roche: No DTI officials attended the 1998 edition of COPEX in Jordan, and we did not subsidise UK firms to exhibit at or visit the event.

Dounreay

Dr. Moonie: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recommendations she has received about the future of Dounreay. [44559]

Mr. Battle: The UKAEA have advised me that there is no economic case for supporting commercial reprocessing at Dounreay over the longer term. The Government have therefore decided that Dounreay should take on no further commercial reprocessing work. Reprocessing at Dounreay will therefore come to an end when the plant has completed reprocessing its own fuel, the Georgian Highly Enriched Uranium (HEU) and its existing commercial contracts.

In carrying forward this remaining work, the UKAEA has assured my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and me that safety will be paramount and, for as long as their fuel reprocessing plans remain, they will continue to be maintained to the standards needed to satisfy all regulatory requirements. The Government believe that nothing is more important than safety in the management of nuclear facilities. That is why we welcome the audit of safety procedures and management currently being taken forward by the Health and Safety Executive and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency at Dounreay, which will ensure that the highest standards of safety are maintained.

TREASURY

Income Tax

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 20 April 1998, *Official Report*, columns *400–02*, concerning income tax, national insurance and child benefits, if he will provide comparable figures for *(a)* the tax year 1998–99 and *(b)* the second half of 1999–2000 on the basis of the figures used in the Financial Statement and Budget Report. [42670]

Dawn Primarolo: The information requested, including Family Credit or Working Families Tax Credit for the different family types, is contained in the table. The childcare tax credit within the WFTC will also provide substantial help for working families. For example, a family with one child could receive up to £70 per week towards childcare costs, and up to £105 a week for families with more than one child.

Gross income	*150*	*200*	*250*	*300*	*400*
For the 1998–99 tax year					
Single Person—no children					
National Insurance	9.88	14.88	19.88	24.88	34.88
Income Tax	13.87	24.96	36.46	47.96	70.96
Tax and NICs, as a percentage of gross earnings	15.8	19.9	22.5	24.3	26.5
Net income	126.25	160.16	193.66	227.16	294.16
Equivalised Net Income	206.97	262.55	317.47	372.39	482.22
Lone Parent (1 child aged 4 years)—new lone parent since April 1998, not receiving lone parents benefit					
National Insurance	9.88	14.88	19.88	24.88	34.88
Income Tax	8.38	19.48	30.98	42.48	65.48
Child Benefit	11.45	11.45	11.45	11.45	11.45
Family Credit	37.54	13.80	0.00	0.00	0.00
Tax and NICs, less child benefit and family credit, as a percentage of gross earnings	–20.5	4.6	15.8	18.6	22.2
Net Income	180.72	190.89	210.59	244.09	311.09
Equivalised Net Income	228.76	241.63	266.56	308.97	393.78

Gross income	*150*	*200*	*250*	*300*	*400*
Lone Parent (1 child aged 4 years)—lone parent from before April 1998, so still receiving lone parent benefit					
National Insurance	9.88	14.88	19.88	24.88	34.88
Income Tax	8.38	19.48	30.98	42.48	65.48
Child Benefit	17.10	17.10	17.10	17.10	17.10
Family Credit	37.54	13.80	0.00	0.00	0.00
Tax and NICs, less child benefit and family credit, as a percentage of gross earnings	−24.2	1.7	13.5	16.8	20.8
Net Income	186.37	196.54	216.24	249.74	316.74
Equivalised Net Income	235.91	248.79	273.72	316.12	400.93
Lone Parent (2 children aged 4 years and 6 years)—new lone parent since April 1998, not receiving lone parent benefit					
National Insurance	9.88	14.88	19.88	24.88	34.88
Income Tax	8.38	19.48	30.98	42.48	65.48
Child Benefit	20.75	20.75	20.75	20.75	20.75
Family Credit	52.39	28.65	5.20	0.00	0.00
Tax and NICs, less child benefit and family credit, as a percentage of gross earnings	−36.6	−7.5	10.0	15.5	19.9
Net Income	204.87	215.04	225.09	253.39	320.39
Equivalised Net Income	204.87	215.04	225.09	253.39	320.39
Lone Parent (2 children aged 4 years and 6 years)—lone parent from before April 1998, so still receiving lone parent benefit					
National Insurance	9.88	14.88	19.88	24.88	34.88
Income Tax	8.38	19.48	30.98	42.48	65.48
Child Benefit	26.10	26.10	26.10	26.10	26.10
Family Credit	52.39	28.65	5.20	0.00	0.00
Tax and NICs, less child benefit and family credit, as a percentage of gross earnings	−40.1	−10.2	7.8	13.8	18.6
Net Income	210.22	220.39	230.44	258.74	325.74
Equivalised Net Income	210.22	220.39	230.44	258.74	325.74
Single Earner Married Couple (1 child aged 4 years)					
National Insurance	9.88	14.88	19.88	24.88	34.88
Income Tax	8.38	19.48	30.98	42.48	65.48
Child Benefit	11.45	11.45	11.45	11.45	11.45
Family Credit	37.54	13.80	0.00	0.00	0.00
Tax and NICs, less child benefit and family credit, as a percentage of gross earnings	−20.5	4.6	15.8	18.6	22.2
Net Income	189.66	192.53	210.59	244.09	311.09
Equivalised Net Income	160.73	163.16	178.46	206.85	263.63
Single Earner Married Couple (2 children aged 4 and 6)					
National Insurance	9.88	14.88	19.88	24.88	34.88
Income Tax	8.38	19.48	30.98	42.48	65.48
Child Benefit	20.75	20.75	20.75	20.75	20.75
Family Credit	52.39	28.65	5.20	0.00	0.00
Tax and NICs, less child benefit and family credit, as a percentage of gross earnings	−36.6	−7.5	10.0	15.5	19.9
Net Income	214.10	216.95	225.09	253.39	320.39
Equivalised Net Income	154.03	156.08	161.94	182.29	230.49
With Budget measures coming into effect in 1999					
These figures include the effect of Budget measures coming into effect in 1999—using otherwise non-uprated 1998–99 tax and benefit rates					
Single Person—no children					
National Insurance	8.6	13.60	18.60	23.60	33.60
Income Tax	13.87	24.96	36.46	47.96	70.96
Tax and NICs, less child benefit and WFTC, as a percentage of gross earnings	15.0	19.3	22.0	23.9	26.1
Net Income	127.53	161.44	194.94	228.44	295.44
Equivalised Net Income	209.07	264.65	319.57	374.48	484.32
Lone Parent (1 child aged 4 years)—new lone parents since April 1998, not receiving lone parents benefit					
Equivalisation Factor	0.79	0.79	0.79	0.79	0.79
National Insurance	8.60	13.60	18.60	23.60	33.60
Income Tax	10.21	21.31	32.81	44.31	67.31
Child Benefit	13.95	13.95	13.95	13.95	13.95
WFTC	51.80	33.15	14.73	0.00	0.00
Tax and NICs, less child benefit and WFTC, as a percentage of gross earnings	−31.3	−6.1	9.1	18.0	21.7
Net Income	196.93	212.19	227.27	246.04	313.04
Equivalised Net Income	249.28	268.60	287.68	311.44	396.25
Lone Parent (1 child aged 4 years)—lone parent from before April 1998, so still receiving lone parent benefit					
National Insurance	8.60	13.60	18.60	23.60	33.60
Income Tax	10.21	21.31	32.81	44.31	67.31
Child Benefit	17.10	17.10	17.10	17.10	17.10
WFTC	51.80	33.15	14.73	0.00	0.00
Tax and NICs, less child benefit and WFTC, as a percentage of gross earnings	−33.4	−7.7	7.8	16.9	21.0
Net Income	200.08	215.34	230.42	249.19	316.19
Equivalised Net Income	253.27	272.58	291.66	315.43	400.24

Gross income	*150*	*200*	*250*	*300*	*400*
Lone Parent (2 children aged 4 years and 6 years)—new lone parents since April 1998, not receiving lone parents benefit					
National Insurance	8.60	13.60	18.60	23.60	33.60
Income Tax	10.21	21.31	32.81	44.31	67.31
Child Benefit	23.25	23.25	23.25	23.25	23.25
WFTC	66.65	48.00	29.58	11.15	0.00
Tax and NICs, less child benefit and WFTC, as a percnetage of gross earnings	–47.4	–18.2	–0.6	11.2	19.4
Net Income	221.08	236.34	251.42	266.49	322.34
Equivalised Net Income	221.08	236.34	251.42	266.49	322.34
Lone Parent (2 children aged 4 years and 6 years)—lone parent from before April 1998, so still receiving lone parent benefit					
National Insurance	8.60	13.60	18.60	23.60	33.60
Income Tax	10.21	21.31	32.81	44.31	67.31
Child Benefit	26.10	26.10	26.10	26.10	26.10
WFTC	66.65	48.00	29.58	11.15	0.00
Tax and NICs, less child benefit and WFTC, as a percentage of gross earnings	–49.3	–19.6	–1.7	10.2	18.7
Net Income	223.93	239.19	254.27	269.34	325.19
Equivalised Net Income	223.93	239.19	254.27	269.34	325.19
Single Earner Married Couple (1 child aged 4 years)					
National Insurance	8.60	13.60	18.60	23.60	33.60
Income Tax	10.21	21.31	32.81	44.31	67.31
Child Benefit	13.95	13.95	13.95	13.95	13.95
WFTC	51.80	33.15	14.73	0.00	0.00
Tax and NICs, less child benefit and WFTC, as a percentage of gross earnings	–31.3	–6.1	9.1	18.0	21.7
Net Income	196.93	212.19	227.27	246.04	313.04
Equivalised Net Income	166.89	179.82	192.60	208.51	265.29
Single Earner Married Couple (2 children aged 4 and 6)					
National Insurance	8.60	13.60	18.60	23.60	33.60
Income Tax	10.21	21.31	32.81	44.31	67.31
Child Benefit	23.25	23.25	23.25	23.25	23.25
WFTC	66.65	48.00	29.58	11.15	0.00
Tax and NICs, less child benefit and WFTC, as a percentage of gross earnings	–47.4	–18.2	–0.6	11.2	19.4
Net Income	221.08	236.34	251.42	266.49	322.34
Equivalised Net Income	159.05	170.03	180.87	191.72	231.90

The figures in the table are weekly amounts for the 1998–99 tax year. The figures for 1998–99 include the effect of increasing child credits in income related benefits for under 11s which will be introduced in November 1998.

The data assume that the earner in the household is working over 30 hours a week for Family Credit and Working Families Tax Credit purposes; that earnings are from employment; and that there are no other sources of income. Two versions of each lone parent example are shown: one with new lone parents since April 1998; and one set with those who have been lone parents since 1998, and so will still be receiving lone parent benefit.

The standard McClements scales have been used to determine equivalised income. This is the same process that is used in the DSS's Households Below Average Income publication.

Income tax and NICs, less child benefit and family credit, are shown as a percentage of gross earnings, with negative figures where the family is a net gainer overall from direct taxes and benefits.

Some of these families may also be entitled to housing benefit and council tax benefit. However, as this will depend upon the composition of the housing costs (between mortgage payments, council tax, and rent) housing benefit and council tax benefit have been left out of these figures.

Tax Reclaims

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what amount of tax was reclaimed on bank and building society interest by *(a)* all people and *(b)* people aged 65 years or over in 1996–97, indicating (i) the average, (ii) the medium, (iii) the smallest and (iv) the largest amount reclaimed. [43338]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 1 June 1998]:* The latest information is derived from the 1995–96 Survey of Personal Incomes. It is estimated that claims were received for the repayment of £110 million tax deducted from bank and building society interest that was paid or credited in 1995–96. The average amount claimed per claimant was £130 and the median was £60.

People aged 65 or over accounted for £65 million of these claims; for these people the average amount of tax claimed back was £140 and the median was £75.

Information is not available about the smallest and largest amounts claimed.

Tax was deducted from bank and building society interest at 25 per cent. in 1995–96.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the number of *(a)* people of all ages and *(b)* people aged 65 years or over who did not reclaim tax paid on bank and building society interest in 1996–97 and who were entitled to do so; and if he will indicate the average amount not reclaimed. [43340]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 1 June 1998]:* The Inland Revenue have no way of identifying most non-taxpayers, so estimates of the numbers of eligible people who have not claimed back tax on their bank or building society interest are not available from Inland Revenue sources. The external sources that have been used in the past to help provide rough estimates are now out of date.

People who know that they are likely to be non-taxpayers are able to register their bank and building society accounts to receive their interest without tax deducted.

Double Tax Relief

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the parameters of the review into double tax relief for companies are that the relief should be revenue neutral. [43572]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 1 June 1998]:* The Government attach great importance to the relief of double taxation, as indicated in the Inland Revenue press release of 17 March 1998. The current review will examine the functioning and fairness of the present system, its effectiveness in meeting the objectives for which it is provided and the compliance costs that it involves for business. Its purpose is to consider the case for structural reform in the context of international developments and the organisation of multinational businesses. The cost of the relief is influenced by a number of factors, including the amount of foreign income that is taxed in the UK and relative tax rates in the UK and other countries. A consultation document will be issued in due course.

Tax Credit

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the number of *(a)* non-taxpayers and *(b)* non-taxpayers aged over 65 years who did not reclaim a tax credit to which they were entitled on dividends paid in 1996–97; and if he will indicate the average amount not reclaimed and the saving to the Treasury. [43339]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 1 June 1998]:* The Inland Revenue have no way of identifying most non-taxpayers, so estimates of the numbers of eligible people who have not claimed payments of tax credits on dividends are not available from Inland Revenue sources. Neither are there external sources that could provide reliable estimates.

Public Sector Pay

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if it is his policy to pay in full the recommendations of the public sector review bodies for pay settlements in the year 1999–2000; and if he will make a statement. [44295]

Mr. Darling *[holding answer 4 June 1998]:* The recommendations are being paid in full this year, although staged. We will consider next year's recommendations at the time.

Child Benefit

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has for taxing child benefit. [44574]

Dawn Primarolo: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer indicated in his Budget statement that, if Child Benefit were raised, there must be a case in principle for higher rate taxpayers paying tax on it.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Kashmir

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the current United Nations Resolutions which apply to Kashmir and the date on which each was agreed; and if he will take steps to ensure that each is updated. [44221]

Mr. Fatchett: The United Nations Security Council has adopted the following resolutions on Kashmir:

Resolution number	*Date*	*Resolution*
38(1948)	17 January 1948	Calls on India and Pakistan not to aggravate Kashmir dispute
39(1948)	20 January 1948	Establishes Commission (UNCIP) to investigate and mediate in Jammu and Kashmir
47(1948)	21 April 1948	Recommends plebiscite to decide sovereignty of Jammu and Kashmir
51(1948)	3 June 1948	Urges Commission to speed up work on SCR 47
80(1950)	14 March 1950	Calls for demilitarisation of Jammu and Kashmir and appoints UN Representative to the region
91(1951)	30 March 1951	Reaffirms need for demilitarisation and plebiscite in Jammu and Kashmir
96(1951)	10 November 1951	Approves India and Pakistan's willingness to observe ceasefire and work for plebiscite in Jammu and Kashmir
98(1952)	23 December 1952	Urges India and Pakistan to negotiate two outstanding proposals of UN Representative
122(1957)	24 January 1957	Denies recognition for decisions of "All Jammu and Kashmir National Conference"
123(1957)	21 February 1957	SC President asked to discuss Jammu and Kashmir dispute with India and Pakistan
126(1957)	2 December 1957	Notes report of SC President; urges India and Pakistan to refrain from aggravating situation

We believe that it is primarily for India and Pakistan to find a solution to the problem. In doing so, we believe that the two sides should build on both the UN Resolutions and the 1972 Simla agreement.

Correspondence

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the Minister of State, the hon. Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd) expects to reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Spelthorne dated 8 May. [44105]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: I replied to the hon. Member on 1 June.

DEFENCE

NATO Exercise (Macedonia)

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the code name of the NATO exercise in Macedonia in September; when he decided to commit British troops; and when *(a)* he or *(b)* his officials consulted (i) ministers and (ii) officials in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. [41182]

Mr. George Robertson *[holding answer 8 May 1998]:* The NATO Partnership for Peace exercise due to take place in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia this September is called Cooperative Best Effort 98. My Department has decided, in consultation with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, that British troops will participate in the exercise. We will announce our contribution shortly.

Married Quarters

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many married quarters or commercial hirings he estimates would be required if a single Divisional HQ was established to cover Scotland and the north of England; what would be the capital value of these quarters if such an HQ were located in Scotland; and if the capital cost of the married quarters will be included in the estimates of the relative costs of establishing such an HQ in Scotland and in England. [43991]

Dr. Reid *[holding answer 1 June 1998]:* These are matters to be studied during the course of the review that is being undertaken; and I should expect them to be reflected in the cost estimates of the options, when presented to Ministers, to the extent that they materially affect the options.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many married quarters and commercial hirings there are currently for soldiers working at UK Land Command's *(a)* 2 Div HQ and *(b)* Scottish District HQ; and what is the estimated capital value of the married quarters used by soldiers at the Scottish District HQ. [43990]

Dr. Reid *[holding answer 1 June 1998]:* Service Families Accommodation (SFA) in mainland UK is provided and allocated on a tri-service basis by the Defence Housing Executive. Houses are not generally provided for the exclusive use of particular formations or units. Currently, about 50 personnel at 2 Div HQ in York occupy SFA, mainly leased from Annington Homes which currently attract no capital charge. About 30 Service personnel at Scottish District HQ in Edinburgh occupy SFA, all owned by MOD, the capital value of which is approximately £2.5 million.

Helicopters

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* Sea Harrier, *(b)* Lynx and *(c)* Sea King were (i) allocated to frontline Fleet Air arm units, (ii) fully serviceable, (iii) undergoing major maintenance and (iv) held as in use reserve on 1 June. [44126]

Dr. Reid: On 1 June 1998, 24 Sea Harriers, 51 Lynx and 83 Sea King aircraft were allocated to front line Fleet Air Arm Units. The number fully serviceable were 20, 43 and 66 respectively. Those undergoing major maintenance were 4, 7 and 13 respectively, and these, together with 2 additional Lynx, form the In Use Reserves.

Defence Explosive Ordnance Disposal School

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the letter sent to the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East by the Minister for the Armed Forces on 18 May, if a decision has now been made on the relocation of the Defence Explosive Ordnance Disposal School; and if he will make a statement. [44222]

Dr. Reid: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 6 April 1998, *Official Report*, column *51*. I expect to be able to announce, before the summer recess, the findings of the study into the possible relocation of the Defence Explosive Ordnance Disposal School from its present site in Kent.

Skills Shortages

Mr. Wills: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what were the levels of skills shortages as regards his Department's technical civilian staff in *(a)* 1995, *(b)* 1996 and *(c)* 1997. [44390]

Mr. Spellar: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, recruitment campaigns have been necessary in recent years across a range of technical specialisms. Difficulties have been experienced primarily with computer sciences, satellite communications, electrical/electronic engineering, mathematicians and physicists. Shortages have also occurred in specialisms, such as naval architects and in the aeronautical, stress and mechanical engineering areas.

Defence Medical Training Organisation

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what key targets have been set for the Defence Medical Training Organisation for 1998–99. [45106]

Dr. Reid: Key targets have been set for the Chief Executive of the Defence Medical Training Organisation for financial year 1998–99. The targets build on the progress already made by the Agency since it formed in April 1997 and are as follows:

Key Target 1

To achieve the following academic success rate for the categories of training shown:

Common Core Course (CCC)—92 per cent.

Specialist Register (SpR)—95 per cent.

Pre Registration Nurses (Pre Reg Nurses)—96 per cent.

Key Target 2

The following per cent. of trainees achieving academic success to be delivered on time agreed with the customer:

CCC—95 per cent. (remainder to be delivered within 6 weeks of expected completion date)

SpR—96 per cent.

Pre Reg Nurses—98 per cent.

Key Target 3

Establish and agree with customers the baseline requirement for individual medical services training by 31 March 1999.

Key Target 4

Ensure that availability meets the requirement as defined in the Agreed Annual Training Requirement (AATR)—100 per cent.

Key Target 5

Develop and implement a corporate index of efficiency be 31 March 1999 that will then form a baseline for measuring year on year efficiency improvements.

Key Target 6

Ensure comprehensive application of the Systems Approach to Training to a minimum of 33 per cent. of all appropriate courses.

Key Target 7

Achieve satisfactory rating of customer satisfaction.

Medical Supplies Agency

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what key targets have been set for the Medical Supplies Agency for 1998–99. [45107]

Dr. Reid: Key Targets have been set for the Chief Executive of the Medical Supplies Agency for financial year 1998–99. The targets build on the progress already made by the Agency since it formed in March 1996 and are as follows:

Key Target 1

To build, completely and to time and within budget, for all 3 services, 95 per cent. of the programme for kits, outfits and packs, as defined in endorsed Equipment Tables and as directed by D Med Prog & Plans.

Key Target 2

To meet 100 per cent. of the Service's requirements for stocked medical material and blood products for operations.

Key Target 3

To meet 98 per cent. of the Services' requirements for stocked medical material and blood products for exercises and training.

Key Target 4

To meet 85 per cent. of demands for Category B items, within MSA's new charter standard (next day delivery of priority demands; 72 hours for routine) and 95 per cent. within one week.

Key Target 5

To improve the ratio of stock issued to stock held from 1.30 to 1.72.

Key Target 6

By the 31 December 1998, the MSA will have set in place a mechanism which communicates the full cost of the drugs and medical material supplied. The communicated costs will be in a format which is acceptable to the Agency's major customers, whether or not they have an SLA.

Defence Secondary Care Agency

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what key targets have been set for the Defence Secondary Care Agency for 1998–99. [45108]

Dr. Reid: Key Targets have been set for the Chief Executive of the Defence Secondary Care Agency for financial year 1998–99. The targets build on the progress already made by the Agency since it formed in April 1996 and are as follows:

Key Target 1—The Operational Requirement

From within the personnel resources provided to the DSCA by the single Services, to meet 100 per cent. of the Commanders in Chief's requirements for secondary care trained personnel for operational deployments.

Key Target 2—Outpatient Waiting Times

To ensure that 55 per cent. of Service patients referred to the Agency are offered a first outpatient appointment within four weeks of receipt of a referral and 95 per cent. within 13 weeks.

Key Target 3—Inpatient Waiting Times

To ensure that 80 per cent. of Service patients are offered a treatment date which is within three months of the decision to give inpatient treatment.

Key Target 4—Financial Efficiency

To develop, by 31 December 1998, a target for DSCA which represents a measure of the Agency's efficiency in achieving its corporate targets and to have set measurable Performance Indicators for subsequent years.

Key Target 5—Quality and Patient Care

By 31 December 1998, the DSCA will link the management systems introduced for Clinical and Non-Clinical risks and Health and Safety, with Clinical Audit and quality improvement programmes in order to determine a Quality Strategy for 1999–2000 and will have set measurable Performance indicators for subsequent years.

Key Target 6—Military Training

To ensure that 80 per cent. of all DSCA personnel, whose medical category permits, receive their respective Service's annual mandatory military training.

Key Target 7—Exercises

To ensure that 80 per cent. of the posts detailed for each Field Unit's exercise requirement are to be filled by the DSCA, are filled.

Key Target 8—Clinical Training

To have compiled, by 31 December 1998, a table by specialty of the total of approved years of Specialist Registrar training at each of the DSCA Units and to set measurable targets for subsequent years.

Defence Dental Agency

Ms Kingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what key targets have been set for the Defence Dental Agency for 1998–99. [45109]

Dr. Reid: Key targets have been set for the Chief Executive of the Defence Dental Agency for the financial year 1998–99. The targets build on the progress already made by the Agency since it formed in March 1996 and are as follows:

Key Target 1

From within available personnel resources, achieve 100 per cent. of required professionally and militarily trained personnel, at the specified readiness required for deployment in support of the National Contingency Force.

Key Target 2

To achieve an overall increase in dental fitness to 75 per cent.

Key Target 3

Measures are to be implemented to target dental treatment towards clinical priority groups leading to a zero increase in the Treatment Needs performance indicator.

Key Target 4

To reduce the percentage of failed appointments with dental officers and the time wasted by such failures by 10 per cent. To reduce the percentage of failed appointments with dental hygienists and the time wasted by such failures by 25 per cent.

Key Target 5

To limit the number of personnel in dental fitness Category D4 to 15 per cent. of the total Service population.

Key Target 6

To achieve a success rate for Dental Support Specialist (DSS) Part II training of 95 per cent.

Naval Bases and Supply Agency

Mrs. Gilroy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what key targets have been set for the Naval Bases and Supply Agency for 1998–99. [45110]

Dr. Reid: The Chief Executive of the Naval Bases and Supply Agency has been set the following key targets:

Key Target 1

Complete 95 per cent. of the Fleet Time Maintenance Loading programme to time, budget and standard.

Key Target 2

Complete 95 per cent. of the agreed Maintenance Requirements at Assisted Maintenance Periods start date to time, budget and standard.

Key Target 3

Utilise the Fleet Time Maintenance Loading programme to establish the baseline for the NBSA shipwork element of the overall cost per Materially Available Vessel Day, and then set targets for reduction.

Key Target 4

Supply 95 per cent. of available material to rectify high priority (A1-B1) Operational Defects within Required Delivery Dates.

Key Target 5

Establish the Agency account via the CAPITAL Project, including the provision of an Executive Information System to meet business requirements, by March 2000.

Key Target 6

To ensure Year 2000 Information Systems compliance by completing 100 per cent. plans by 30 June 1998.

Key Target 7

Achieve year on year Efficiency improvement of 2.2 per cent.

Key Target 8

Achieve full accreditation of Investors in People by December 1999.

Ships Support Agency

Mrs. Gilroy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what key targets have been set for the Ships Support Agency for 1998–99. [45111]

Dr. Reid: The Chief Executive of the Ships Support Agency has been set the following key targets:

Performance indicator	*Targets*
Materially Available Vessel Days (MAVDs)	
To provide the Royal Navy with the agreed percentage of materially available vessel days	66 per cent.
Pounds per Standard MAVD	
To provide the agreed Fleet available cost-effectively	£38k per Standard MAVD
Upkeep Period Timeliness	
To deliver programmed Upkeep Periods within the specified percentage tolerance of the agreed programme upkeep time	+10 per cent.
Upkeep Period Costs	
To contain the cost of Upkeep Periods completed during the year within the specified percentage tolerance of predicted costs	+/-3 per cent.
Fleet Time Material Performance (Quality)	
To limit the average number of outstanding Operational Defects per vessel in Fleet Time	6
Fleet Time Material Performance (Duration)	
To limit the percentage of Fleet Time during which vessels are unable, for material reasons, to perform their programmed task	8 per cent.
Efficient Stockholding	
To improve the stockholding to issue ratio	2.9:1
Resource Accounting	
To produce accruals based accounts to meet Accounts Direction	March 1999

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Higher Education Staff

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if his Department will publish statistical data for each of the last five academic years on *(a)* academic and *(b)* non-academic staff in higher education institutions to include a breakdown of employment by (i) age band, (ii) gender, (iii) ethnicity, (iv) mode of employment to include (A) part-time and (B) casual and hourly-paid employees and (v) grading; and if he will arrange for these statistics to be published annually within six months of the end of each academic year. [42388]

Dr. Howells: Up to and including the 1993–94 academic year, data on staff in higher education institutions were published by the Universities Statistical Record (USR), covering the former UFC-funded universities, in "University Statistics: Volume 1", and the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council (PCFC), covering the former PCFC funded establishments, in "The Academic Staff of Polytechnics and Colleges". Copies of these publications are available in the Library.

Since 1994–95, information covering all higher education establishments has been published by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) in "Resources of Higher Education Institutions". Editions are currently available for the years 1994–95 and 1995–96 and copies of these are also in the Library. The data requested for academic staff are contained in tables 17 and 21, but these tables do not separately identify casual and hourly paid employees. The following tables show casual and hourly paid employees by gender, ethnicity, age and grade corresponding to the figures in the published tables. In summary, between 1994–95 and 1995–96 total academic staff numbers increased by over 10 per cent. In the same period, hourly paid/casual staff went up by around 23 per cent. but in both years accounted for less than 2 per cent. of the total staff in numbers. It should also be noted that ethnicity breakdowns are available only for staff of known UK nationality.

Information for the 1996–97 academic year will be published by HESA next month. We will pursue with HESA whether casual and hourly paid staff can be separately identified in future years.

Data on non-academic staff are not collected centrally. This will be reviewed for the academic year 1999–2000.

The HESA volume giving staff data is currently published in June following the end of the academic year. This period is necessary to allow institutions to return the raw data to HESA (by 30 September), HESA to finalise the data (by 1 December) and then compile and publish the volume.

Hourly paid/casual academic staff of known UK nationality in all UK HE institutions by ethnicity and gender

	1994–95			1995–96		
	Female	*Male*	*Total*	*Female*	*Male*	*Total*
White	274	384	658	452	668	1,120
Black Caribbean	0	1	1	0	2	2
Black African	0	0	0	1	0	1
Black other	0	0	0	0	1	1
Indian	0	3	3	1	5	6
Pakistani	0	0	0	0	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0	0	0	0	0
Chinese	0	0	0	2	0	2
Asian other	2	1	3	4	3	7
Other	4	0	4	19	10	29
Total known ethnicity	280	389	669	479	689	1,168
Information refused	71	85	156	50	50	100
Total	351	474	825	529	739	1,268

Hourly paid/casual academic staff in all UK HE institutions by age and grade

	Professors	*Senior lecturers and researchers*	*Lecturers*	*Researchers*	*Other grades*	*Total*
1994–95						
Under 26	0	0	1	0	84	85
26–30	0	0	8	1	173	182
31–35	0	0	5	3	206	214
36–40	0	1	10	1	216	228
41–45	0	0	18	1	218	237
46–50	0	0	11	0	193	204
51–55	0	0	11	0	148	159
56–60	0	1	12	0	138	151
61–65	1	0	9	0	95	105
66+	0	0	6	0	26	32
Unknown	0	0	0	0	232	232
Total	1	2	91	6	1,729	1,829
1995–96						
Under 26	0	0	0	1	77	78
26–30	0	0	7	4	196	207
31–35	0	0	22	4	247	273
36–40	0	0	22	2	244	268
41–45	0	0	34	0	240	274
46–50	2	0	17	0	240	259
51–55	1	0	23	0	185	209
56–60	3	2	17	0	184	206
61–65	0	0	9	0	99	108
66+	1	0	11	0	42	54
Unknown	0	0	0	0	317	317
Total	7	2	162	11	2,071	2,253

Schools (Co-operation)

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many applications were submitted under the Government's proposals for co-operation between maintained and private schools; and what was the success rate for proposals submitted by *(a)* local education authorities and *(b)* the independent sector. [44139]

Mr. Byers: We received 294 applications; we are supporting 48 projects. Each application had to involve at least one maintained and one independent school and specify a lead organisation. Five successful projects currently involve LEAs, and in one of those the LEA is acting as the lead organisation. The information requested is set out in the table:

Lead organisation	*Number of applications*	*Number of successful applications*	*Percentage of successful applications*
Maintained school	179	38	21
Independent school	89	8	9
Local education authority	12	1	8
Other[1]	14	1	7
Total	294	48	16.3

[1] 'Other' lead organisations are organisations that are not a school or a local education authority, e.g. universities, charitable trusts, and associations of schools.

Class Sizes (Essex)

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many children in *(a)* Essex and *(b)* Mid-Essex at (i) primary schools and (ii) secondary schools were in classes with 31 or more children at the latest available time; and what the corresponding figures were for 12 months earlier. [44174]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 4 June 1998]:* The information for Essex Local Education Authority area is shown in the table.

Numbers of pupils in classes of 31 or more pupils taught by one teacher in maintained primary and secondary schools

Essex Local Education Authority area

Position in January each year

Year	*Primary schools*	*Secondary schools*
1996	34,741	8,064
1997	38,831	8,263

We do not hold information for Mid-Essex.

St. Austell College

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when he will publish Professor Newby's report on St. Austell College. [45098]

Mr. Blunkett: I am quite clear that there are important lessons to be learnt from this episode. These lessons extend beyond the FE sector and indeed beyond the world of education. I therefore consider that there is a clear public interest to be served by publishing the report, which I am doing today. Copies have been placed in the Library.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Family Resources Survey

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to her answer of 21 January 1998, *Official Report*, columns *565–66*, how many higher-rate taxpayers have children aged *(a)* under five years, *(b)* from five to 10 years, *(c)* 11 to 16 years and *(d)* 17 years and over. [44323]

Mr. Keith Bradley: An estimate for 1998–99 from the 1995–96 Family Resources Survey-based Policy Simulation Model suggests there are 350,000 higher rate taxpayers with children aged under 5 years, 435,000 higher rate taxpayers with children aged five to 10 years, 420,000 higher rate taxpayers with children aged 11 to 16 years, and 110,000 higher rate taxpayers with children aged 17 years and over.

Notes:

1. The estimates show how many benefit units with at least one higher rate taxpayer have at least one child in each of the age categories. However, these figures cannot be added up to give the total number of higher rate taxpayers with children since a number of these families have two or more children of differing ages and so will be represented in more than one category.

2. The estimates should be treated with some caution as they are based on survey data which use current weekly income to model tax liability which may not accurately represent current annual tax liabilities. Estimates may also be influenced by sampling error and response rates.

Child Benefit

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what the total *(a)* gross and *(b)* net savings will be in 1998–99 from not having uprated child benefit in line with prices since 1979; and what the current rate per child would be had it been uprated in line with prices without any additional payment for the eldest child. [44322]

Mr. Keith Bradley: If Child Benefit had been subject to annual uprating as described, the level of the benefit in April 1998 would have been £12.70 per week per child. The gross additional cost in 1998–99 is estimated to be £1.5 billion. The cost net of income-related benefit offsets would be around £1.1 billion.

Notes:

1. Cost estimates are rounded to the nearest £10 million.

2. Figures are calibrated to the caseload and expenditure forecasts underlying the 1998 Departmental Report.

3. The uprating calculation assumes rounding to the nearest 5p at each annual uprating.

4. Estimates apply only to Child Benefit, and exclude any changes made to One Parent Benefit.

Source:

Based on data taken from the 1995–96 Family Resources Survey and the May 1996 Income Support Quarterly Statistical Inquiry uprated to 1998–99 prices, benefits and earnings level.

Winter Fuel Payments

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much of the £400 million budgeted for winter fuel payments has been spent on this year's payments. [44575]

Mr. Denham: Winter Fuel payments are one of a number of initiatives the Government have taken to help vulnerable people, especially the elderly, keep warm in the winter. A total of £400 million has been committed for two years (1997/98 and 1998/99), to help pensioners with fuel bills to pay.

Overall, almost ten million eligible pensioners in over seven million households received a payment between January and March 1998 at a total cost of nearly £200 million.

Lone Parents

Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will make it her policy to make attendance at an interview compulsory for those invited to take part in the New Deal for Lone Parents. [44572]

Mr. Keith Bradley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith) on 25 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *540*.

Widows Pension

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans she has to extend the widows

pension to women aged under 45 years; what estimate she has made of the cost of that extension; and if she will make a statement. [41629]

Mr. Denham: Modernising the Social Security system is a key priority of the Government. In our examination of the current Social Security structure, we will take account of the needs and responsibilities of widows in pursuit of our aim of reducing poverty and welfare dependency, promoting work incentives and providing better, simpler and more efficient services to clients.

The estimated gross cost in 1998/99 of extending widows pension to women aged under 45 years would be £58 million.

Note:

It is assumed that widows under 45 would be paid at the current minimum rate for a widow aged 45.

HEALTH

Paediatric Physiotherapists (London)

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many paediatric physiotherapists are employed by each NHS trust in London; and how many posts are currently vacant. [43882]

Mr. Milburn: Information about the number of paediatric physiotherapists employed by National Health Service trusts in London is not available centrally as the Department's non-medical workforce census does not separately identify them from other physiotherapists; the table gives the information that is available. Figures on physiotherapist vacancies are collected by the Office of Manpower and Economics and published in the annual reports of the Review Body for Nursing staff, Midwives, Health Visitors and Professions Allied to Medicine, copies of which are in the Library.

NHS Hospital and Community Health Services: physiotherapists employed by London NHS trusts as at 30 September 1997

Equivalents	*Whole-time*
Barnet Healthcare NHS Trust	30
BHB Community Healthcare NHS Trust	50
The Bethlem and Maudsley NHS Trust	10
Bromley Hospitals NHS Trust	40
Camden and Islington Community Health Services NHS Trust	30
Central Middlesex Hospital NHS Trust	20
Chase Farm Hospitals NHS Trust	20
Chelsea and Westminster Healthcare NHS Trust	50
City and Hackney Community Services NHS Trust	40
Croydon Community Health NHS Trust	20
Ealing Hospital NHS Trust	10
Enfield Community Care NHS Trust	30
Forest Health Care NHS Trust	50
The Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children NHS Trust	20
Greenwich Healthcare NHS Trust	40
Guy's and St. Thomas' Hospital NHS Trust	70
The Hammersmith Hospitals NHS Trust	60
Harefield Hospital NHS Trust	10
Harrow and Hillingdon Healthcare NHS Trust	20
The Hillingdon Hospital NHS Trust	20
Hounslow and Spelthorne Community & Mental Health NHS Trust	30
Kings Healthcare NHS Trust	60
Kingston and District Community NHS Trust	20
Kingston Hospital NHS Trust	20

NHS Hospital and Community Health Services: physiotherapists employed by London NHS trusts as at 30 September 1997

Equivalents	*Whole-time*
Lambeth Healthcare NHS Trust	10
Lewisham and Guys Mental Health NHS Trust	[1]—
The Lewisham Hospital NHS Trust	20
Lifecare NHS Trust	[1]—
Mayday Healthcare NHS Trust	50
Merton and Sutton Community NHS Trust	[1]—
Moorfields Eye Hospital NHS Trust	[1]—
Mount Vernon and Watford Hospitals NHS Trust	40
Newham Community NHS Trust	40
North Middlesex Hospital NHS Trust	50
North West London Mental Health NHS Trust	[1]—
Northwick Park St. Marks NHS Trust	50
Optimum Health Services NHS Trust	30
Parkside NHS Trust	40
Pathfinder Mental Health Services NHS Trust	10
Queen Mary's Sidcup NHS Trust	30
Ravensbourne NHS Trust	20
Redbridge Health Care NHS Trust	40
Richmond Twickenham and Roehampton Healthcare NHS Trust	20
Riverside Mental Health NHS Trust	[1]—
Royal Brompton Hospital NHS Trust	20
The Royal Free Hampstead NHS Trust	50
The Royal Hospitals NHS Trust	10
Royal London Homeopathic Hospital NHS Trust	[1]—
The Royal Marsden Hospital NHS Trust	10
Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital NHS Trust	40
St. George's Healthcare NHS Trust	90
The St. Helier NHS Trust	50
St. Mary's NHS Trust	40
Teddington Memorial Trust	10
Tower Hamlets Healthcare NHS Trust	80
University London College Hospitals NHS Trust	40
Wandsworth Community Health NHS Trust	[1]—
Wellhouse NHS Trust	40
West London Healthcare NHS Trust	20
West Middlesex University Hospital NHS Trust	10
Whittington Hospital NHS Trust	30
Total	2,950

[1] less than 5 and greater than zero

Note:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest ten.
2. Due to rounding the total will not be equal to the sum of component parts.

Source:

Department of Health Non-Medical Workforce Census

Breast Feeding

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps are currently being taken to promote a higher rate of breastfeeding. [43609]

Ms Jowell: We are fully committed to the promotion of breastfeeding, which is universally accepted as the best form of nutrition for infants. Nevertheless, it is important that women are able to make a fully informed choice based on accurate and consistent information on the benefits of breastfeeding.

The Department funds the National Network of Breastfeeding Co-ordinators (NNBC). The NNBC has been established to promote breastfeeding at a local level and to share ideas nationally with a view to increasing both the number of mothers breastfeeding and the length of time they continue to breastfeed.

Each year, the four United Kingdom Health Departments support national breastfeeding awareness week to increase public awareness of the benefits of breastfeeding, which this year took place between 17–23 May. This year, as in other years, the Department funded and provided the publicity materials used during the week. These included posters and postcards aimed at promoting breastfeeding with the slogan "free fast food for babies".

The Department also provides financial support to the three main voluntary organisations in this area, the National Childbirth Trust, La Leche League and the Association of Breastfeeding Mothers. Close links are also kept with United Nations Children's Fund Baby-friendly Initiative which includes a Departmental observer sitting on the Steering Committee of the UK Baby Friendly Initiative.

The Department offers support for research into breastfeeding through the Quinquennial Surveys of Infant Feeding Practice, the report of the 1995 survey was published last year. The Department also receives and publishes expert advice on breastfeeding through its advisory committees, such as Committee on Medical Aspects of Food and Nutrition Policy Panel on Child and Material Nutrition.

We are concerned about the apparently low breastfeeding rates in this country, especially when compared with some other European countries such as Norway, Sweden and Denmark. The low incidence of breastfeeding is especially marked in low-income groups. That is why, as part of the Department's research initiative on health inequalities, we are planning to support a study aimed at identifying the barriers to breastfeeding in low-income groups. This should help us to understand what influences a woman's decision whether to breastfeed or not. In turn, this will help us to develop and test new interventions aimed at increasing breastfeeding levels and improving the health of babies from low-income families.

Occupational Health

Dr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many whole-time equivalent consultants in occupational health are employed in each National Health Service region. [43741]

Mr. Milburn: The latest information is shown in the table.

Whole-time equivalents of consultants in occupational health by region on 30 September 1996

Region	*Number*
Anglia and Oxford	5
North Thames	9
North West	6
Northern and Yorkshire	4
South and West	8
South Thames	9
Trent	4
West Midlands	5

Notes:

1. The census is a snapshot at 30 September each year
2. All figures are rounded to the nearest whole number

Source:

The Medical and Dental Workforce Census 30 September 1996.

Dr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many unfilled *(a)* consultant and *(b)* approved training posts there are in occupational health in each National Health Service region. [43740]

Mr. Milburn: The information requested is not available centrally.

NHS Trusts (Health and Safety)

Dr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list all National Health Service trusts that have been found to be in breach of the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974 since 1991; and if he will make a statement. [43738]

Mr. Milburn: Between 1991 and 1994, not all hospitals were National Health Service trusts, and the relevant health authority was liable for prosecution where a hospital was in breach of the Health and Safety at Work Act. Information from the Health and Safety Executive shows that the following trusts and health authorities have been prosecuted under the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act since 1991:

1991

South West Durham Health Authority
Riverside Health Authority
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Health Authority
Trafford Health Authority
Oxford Health Authority

1992

South Birmingham Health Authority
Norwich Health Authority

1993

South Derbyshire Health Authority
Airedale NHS Trust
North Staffordshire Health Authority

1994

Salford Community Healthcare
Loddon NHS Trust
Parkside Health NHS Trust
North Staffordshire Hospitals NHS Trust
West Suffolk Hospitals NHS Trust

1995

Frenchay Healthcare Trust
Dorset Community NHS Trust
Forest Healthcare NHS Trust
Stockport Healthcare NHS Trust

1996

City Hospitals Sunderland NHS Trust
Bedford Hospital NHS Trust

1997

Surrey Heartlands NHS Trust
Premier Health NHS Trust
Community Health Sheffield NHS Trust
Leeds Community and Mental Health Services (Teaching) NHS Trust
Gloucestershire Ambulance Service NHS Trust
Eastbourne Hospital NHS Trust
Swindon and Marlborough NHS Trust

1998

Horton General Hospital Trust.

NHS Staff (Ill-health)

Dr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many retirements on the grounds of ill-health there have been from the NHS Pension Scheme in each of the last five years. [43885]

Mr. Milburn: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the National Health Service Pensions Agency under its Chief Executive, Mr. A. F. Cowan. I have asked him to reply to the hon. Member.

Letter from A. F. Cowan to Dr. Evan Harris, dated June 1998:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question, as it falls within my area of responsibility.

The number of ill-health retirement awards made by the NHS Pension Scheme in each of the last five years was:

Year	*Number of ill-health retirement awards*
1993–94	9,520
1994–95	9,030
1995–96	8,082
1996–97	6,928
1997–98	6,510

Histopathology Services (Kent and Canterbury Hospital)

Dr. Ladyman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the terms of reference for the recently announced review of histopathology at the Kent and Canterbury Hospital; and if he intends to widen the scope of the review. [43794]

Mr. Boateng: The terms of reference for the review of histopathology services provided by Kent and Canterbury Hospital have been agreed with the Royal College of Pathologists and have been published. There are no plans to widen the scope of this review.

Homicide Inquiries

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what factors underlie the differences between his answers of 16 February 1998, *Official Report*, column *494*, and 13 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *377*, in respect of the number of inquiries under way into homicides committed by mentally-ill people. [43977]

Mr. Boateng: The reply given on 16 February 1998, *Official Report*, column *494*, showed that the total number of independent inquiries currently underway was 24.

In the reply given on 13 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *377*, the list showed only those inquiries which were nearing completion. The total number remains 24 although the dates of publication have not all been settled yet.

Epilepsy

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will provide resources for research into sudden unexpected death in epilepsy; [44092]

(2) if he will set up an inquiry into sudden unexpected death in epilepsy. [44093]

Mr. Boateng: I met a delegation led by the organisation Epilepsy Bereaved?, on 2 June to discuss their concerns about sudden unexpected death in epilepsy (SUDEP). The delegation, which included epilepsy specialists who have conducted research into SUDEP, has been invited to design and submit a bid for a national sentinel audit of epilepsy services. This will involve working closely with several relevant national organisations.

The Department supports Epilepsy Bereaved? through a Section 64 core grant of £45,000 in total for the years 1997–2000.

Disabled People

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of adults with severe learning disabilities residing in *(a)* long-stay hospitals and *(b)* the community. [44077]

Mr. Boateng: It is estimated that there are about 160,000 adults with severe learning disabilities in England. We estimate that approximately 5,000 of these are placed in continuing National Health Service care. There are also about 3,000 other people in old long-stay learning disability hospitals. This means that there are approximately 152,000 people with severe learning disabilities living in the community outside long-stay NHS care. A significant number of the approximately 3,000 people currently in old long-stay learning disability hospitals are also likely to move into the community over the next few years.

NHS Trusts (London)

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what financial transitional support has been made available in the years *(a)* 1994–95, *(b)* 1995–96, *(c)* 1996–97 and *(d)* 1997–98 to London trusts, excluding the London teaching hospitals. [43891]

Mr. Milburn *[holding answer 2 June 1998]:* The information requested is provided in the table.

Transitional support to London trusts, excluding the London teaching hospitals 1994/95–1997/98

Year	*Total £000*
1994/95	11,622
1995/96	13,309
1996/97	8,291
1997/98	8,631

Notes:

1. Trusts included in total are: Lewisham, Greenwich, Lambeth and Southwark, Kingston Hospitals, Royal Free, Royal National Throat Nose and Ear Hospital, Central Middlesex, National Hospital for Neurology and Neurosurgery, Northwick Park, Eastman Dental, Royal London Homoeopathic Hospital, Tavistock and Portman, Whittington
2. In addition to these, financial transitional support has been made available over the period to other London trusts and to London health authorities. The total central funding for London was included in the Turnberg Report, copies of which are available in the Library

Residential Child Care Workers

Mr. Dawson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to review the pay, conditions, training and qualifications of residential social workers working with children in care. [44550]

Mr. Boateng: The pay and conditions of all staff are matters for their individual employers.

We are jointly with the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work developing a new post qualifying award in child care and the relevant training for that award. In addition, we have put aside £2 million in 1998–99 to secure the training of significant numbers of child care staff leading to national vocational qualification in care at level III.

Foster Carers

Mr. Dawson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to review the fees, reimbursement of costs, training and support of foster carers. [44551]

Mr. Boateng: The level of allowances paid to foster carers is not set by central Government, but is determined by individual local authorities. It is for each authority to decide what amount it pays according to prevailing local requirements. Many authorities base the allowances they pay on those recommended and published each year by the National Foster Care Association, copies of which are available in the Library.

Training and support for foster carers is one of the issues being considered by the United Kingdom Joint Working Party on Foster Care. The group's broad aim is to develop national standards for foster care. It began work in October 1997 and expects to publish a good practice guide in the spring of 1999. The Department is helping to fund this work. The training and support for foster carers was also addressed in the report 'People Like Us' by Sir William Utting, published in November 1997. We established a Ministerial task force to prepare its response to the recommendations contained in the report. Our response will be published later in the summer.

The Department is also funding work being undertaken by the National Foster Care Association to develop training materials for use by foster carers who are relatives and friends of the children being cared for, and for social work staff. The launch of the training pack is scheduled for March 1999.

Trust Mergers

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many management posts have been abolished, and how much money has been saved, as a result of his approving the merger of Ashford (Middlesex) and St. Peter's Hospital NHS Trusts. [44106]

Mr. Milburn: To date, five management posts have been removed as a consequence of the merger resulting in a saving of £400,000.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 8 June 1998

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Public Trust Office

Mr. Faber: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what guidelines are followed by the Public Trust Office on consulting relatives when a transfer of receivership is proposed. [43673]

Mr. Hoon: The guidelines followed by the Public Trust Office to consult relatives when a transfer of receivership is proposed are set out in the Court of Protection Rules 1994 at rule 27.

Mr. Faber: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many clients under the supervision of the Public Trust Office have suffered financial losses under its supervision in each year since 1990. [43671]

Mr. Hoon: No client under the supervision of the Public Trust Office has suffered a financial loss since 1990. Any loss that has occurred as a result of a mistake by the Public Trust Office is made good.

Mr. Faber: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the number of clients under the supervision of the Public Trust Office in each year since 1990. [43672]

Mr. Hoon: It is only from the 1993/94 financial year that caseload figures in the Public Trust Office have been monitored on the same basis year on year. Although figures prior to 1993/94 exist, they have not been formulated in the same manner as those available from that date. On this basis, I am able to provide the figures from 1993/94 which include those cases in the Trust and Funds Sector of the Public Trust Office, as well as the Mental Health Sector caseload:

1993–94—261,603;

1994–95—262,409;

1995–96—284,619;

1996–97—297,195;

1997–98—302,506.

Mr. Faber: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list how many times a complaint against the Public Trust Office has been referred to the Parliamentary Commissioner; and how many were upheld, for each year since 1990. [43685]

Mr. Hoon: No separate records are available before 1995 as, prior to the Public Trust Office being established as an executive agency on 1 July 1994, complaints referred to the parliamentary Commissioner were not separately recorded. Since 1995, one formal complaint has been received from the Parliamentary Commissioner which he is currently investigating and he has made preliminary inquiries into three complaints which were taken no further.

Mr. Faber: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many complaints were received by *(a)* the Public Trust Office and *(b)* his Department in respect of the operation of the Public Trust Office in each year since 1990. [43674]

Mr. Hoon: I am able to supply the figures for each financial year from 1990–91. However, it should be noted that the introduction of Charter Standards by the Public Trust Office, to coincide with the launch of the Office as an executive agency on 1 July 1994, together with the recommendations made by the Citizen's Charter Complaints Task Force, meant that, from 1994–95, complaints were monitored in a more rigorous and consistent fashion across the Office.

The figures for each year from 1990–91, showing the number of complaints received by the Public Trust Office, and the number of complaints received by the Lord Chancellor's Department in respect of the operation of the Public Trust Office, respectively are as follows:

1990–91: 64 and none;

1991–92: 101 and none;

1992–93: 115 and none;

1993–94: 136 and 13;

1994–95: 169 and 8;

1995–96: 331 and 21;

1996–97: 443 and 33;

1997–98: 512 and 20.

Magistrates Court, Worcester

Mr. Michael J. Foster: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what progress is being made on the building of a new magistrates court in Worcester. [43724]

Mr. Hoon: A new magistrates court for Worcester is being procured though the Private Finance Initiative. Final offers have been submitted by two bidders. It is hoped that a preferred bidder will be announced shortly with the contract finalised later this year. The new accommodation is expected to be available in 2001.

Legal Aid

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what percentage of legal aid cases are solely for parental access. [43888]

Mr. Hoon: The Legal Aid Board is unable to provide the information in the format requested. Legal aid cases relating solely to parental access are not separately recorded by the Board. Such cases could be covered by a certificate issued in response to applications for residence and contact orders; or by combined certificates including injunctions ancillary relief, residence and contact orders. Applications for residence and contact orders are not solely covered by civil legal aid. Work relating to such orders could also be included under Legal Advice and Assistance (Green Form Scheme) and ABWOR.

The table sets out the figures available for certificates issued and ABWOR bills paid which related specifically to residence and contact orders, as reported in the Board's annual report (Tables Civil 6, Civil 6A and Civil 7 refer). However, these figures do not include combined civil legal aid certificates or any green form bills paid, as neither are separately recognised.

Proceedings	*Total civil legal aid certificates issued 1996/97*	*Certificate issued for residence and contact orders*	*Percentages of all certificates issued which relate to residence and contact*
Matrimonial proceedings	91,911	12,099	13.16
Private Law proceedings[1]	69,889	58,072	83.09
Non-matrimonial proceedings	162,752	n/a	n/a
Public Law proceedings[1]	21,434	n/a	n/a
Total certificates	345,986	70,171	20.28
ABWOR bills paid	7,703	6,272	81.42

[1] Applications for the various different orders available under the Children Act 1989 can be made under either Public or Private law proceedings. Applications for residence and contact orders made under the Children Act 1989 are specifically included under Private law proceedings above.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to review the training of administrators on the Legal Aid Board. [43889]

Mr. Hoon: The Legal Aid Board is an independent body and I do not interfere in the day-to-day running of the organisation. There are two executive members of the Legal Aid Board who are administrators, the Chief Executive and the Director of Resources and Supplier Development. Their training is monitored by the Board's Top Management and Personnel Committee. The Committee is chaired by the Chairman of the Board and oversees the performance of all senior executives and is responsible for ensuring that they are adequately trained. We have no plans to review arrangements.

Adult Protective Legislation

Mr. O'Hara: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when he expects to introduce legislation to reform *(a)* adult protective legislation and *(b)* enduring power of attorney. [43959]

Mr. Hoon: Consultation on the Green Paper "Who Decides—Making Decisions on Behalf of Mentally Incapacitated Adults" has not closed. Well over 3,000 responses have been received and are being collated for analysis by an interdepartmental working group of officials. No decision has yet been made as to a timetable for taking matters forward if it is decided to proceed to legislation in these areas.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Nuclear Deterrence

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 18 May 1998, *Official Report*, column *218*, what factors underlie the delay in replying to the letter from the hon. Member for New Forest, East. [43624]

Mr. Prescott: I responded to the points raised in the letter in my answer of 18 May 1998, *Official Report*, column *218*, and I now consider the matter closed.

Bicycle Lanes (Greater London)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many miles of cycle lanes there are currently within the Greater London area. [44120]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Taking together the London Cycle Network, the Thames Cycle Route, the Priority (Red Routes) programme, and other measures on London's trunk roads, approximately 225 miles of cycle lanes had been introduced by March 1998. Highway authorities have also provided cycle lanes on local roads, outside of the London Cycle Network and the Red Routes, but mileage figures are not held centrally.

Nuclear Materials (Transportation)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what reports he has received from his French counterpart, concerning her decision to halt movement of spent irradiated nuclear fuel transport flasks on 6 May; how many flasks of this type have been transported into the United Kingdom; and if he will place the safety of spent fuel transportation on the Agenda for the next European Environment and Transport Council meetings. [44108]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I understand that consignments of irradiated nuclear fuel from power stations are currently suspended in both France and Germany following revelations of high levels of non-fixed radioactive contamination arising during shipments to the reprocessing facility at La Hague. I am not aware of any shipments from European power stations to Sellafield revealing similarly high levels of contamination in the United Kingdom. I further understand that my counterparts in France and Germany have set up a working group of the representatives of their safety authorities, charged to organise the bilateral co-operation of the specialists in the disciplines concerned. My officials have offered to participate in this working group. I believe it would be appropriate to await the findings and recommendations of this working group before consideration is given to putting this item on to the Agenda for the European Environment and Transport Council meeting.

New Parishes

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many applications for the creation of new parishes under the Local Government and Rating Act 1997 his Department has received; what is the average time taken to determine the applications; and what were the outcomes of such determinations. [44391]

Mr. Raynsford: Since 1 May 1997, my right hon. Friend has received seven requests for new parishes in the form of petitions and 13 from district councils following parish reviews. To date, he has decided that three new parishes should be created; he has yet to decide on the other requests.

The three parishes for East Cowes, Beverley and Cottingham were all requested by petition and took, on average, around six months from receipt of paperwork to the decision being made.

Air Pollution

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions on how many days during May the Government's ozone health safety guideline in atmospheric air was breached in High Peak; and if he will make a statement. [44376]

Angela Eagle: My Department measures air quality at the Ladybower site in Derbyshire.

There were six days during May when the National Air Quality standard for ozone (50 parts per billion (ppb) as an 8-hour running mean) was exceeded at Ladybower. The levels on these days reached the "moderate" air pollution band. There were no days during May when air pollution reached "high" (greater than 90ppb as an hourly mean). The highest hourly ozone concentration recorded during May at Ladybower was 69ppb.

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what targets he has set and measures he has put in place to reduce atmospheric ozone to below the Government's ozone health safety limit. [44377]

Angela Eagle: The Government have adopted a provisional objective for ozone of 50 parts per billion as a running 8-hour mean, to be achieved at the 97th percentile level, i.e. on all but 10 days per year assuming perfect operation of the monitoring station with 100 per cent. data capture throughout the year, by 2005.

Ozone is a secondary pollutant found in the atmosphere from the reaction of Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs) and nitrogen oxides (NOx) in the presence of sunlight. It is a transboundary pollutant in that precursors emitted in one country can contribute to ozone formation in others. Action to tackle ozone formation needs, therefore, to be taken in a coherent fashion at a European scale in order to optimise the cost effectiveness of abatement measures.

The United Kingdom has implemented many measures aimed at reducing ozone precursor emissions. These include ratification of the UNECE-CLRTAP (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe-Convention on Long Range Transboundary Air Pollution) Protocol to reduce emissions of VOCs by 30 per cent. relative to 1988, ratification of a UNECE-CLRTAP Protocol to stabilise emissions of nitrogen oxides at 1987 levels, implementation of several European Community Directives to reduce exhaust emissions of VOCs and nitrogen oxides from road vehicles, implementation of an EC Directive to reduce emissions of VOCs from the storage and distribution of petrol and implementation of the European Community Directive limiting the emissions from Large Combustion Plant.

In addition, the Government are currently actively participating in discussions on further European measures to reduce emissions of VOCs from the use of solvents and further measures to reduce emissions from road vehicles planned for the years 2000 and 2005. Furthermore, and due to the international nature of ozone formation, the Government are actively participating in discussions to develop a further UNECE-CLRTAP protocol and a European Community Strategy to address ozone.

Highways Maintenance (Cumbria)

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will publish the Highways Maintenance Budget for Cumbria for each of the last 10 years. [44859]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Figures for Cumbria County Council's net current expenditure on highways maintenance are only available for the last eight years, as listed.

Year	*£000*
1990–91	23,460
1991–92	24,031
1992–93	24,358
1993–94	22,607
1994–95	23,558
1995–96	22,066
1996–97	23,974
1997–98	22,365

[1] Provisional outturn

The budget estimate for 1998–99 is £22,781,000.

Disabled Facility Grants

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what was the expenditure in 1996–97 and 1997–98 on disabled facilities grants; how many such grants were awarded in each of these years; and what was the average cost of a disabled facilities grant in each year. [44664]

Mr. Raynsford: In 1996–97, more than 22,000 mandatory and discretionary disabled facilities grants were given at a cost of over £90 million in public expenditure. The average grant was just over £4,100. No figures are yet available for 1997–98.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 1 June 1998, *Official Report*, column *17*, concerning disabled facility grants, if he will set out the timetable for developing policy; and what plans he has to consult on the matter. [44618]

Mr. Raynsford: We will be considering policy on disabled facilities grants during the forthcoming year. We have no current plans to consult formally.

Prison Planning Inquiry, Morecambe

Miss Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what questions were asked in the telephone survey mentioned in the planning inspector's report carried out on holidaymakers to Middleton Sands, Morecambe, relating to the proposed prison there; if he will provide a breakdown of the results; and if he will make a statement. [44395]

Mr. Raynsford *[holding answer 5 June 1998]:* I will write to my hon. Friend.

Duty Free

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate his Department has made of the increase in the costs of transporting freight on the cross-Channel ferries that will arise from the abolition of the duty-free trade and consequent increase in ticket prices. [44810]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 13 May 1998, *Official Report*, columns *117–18*.

National Air Quality Strategy

Mr. Pound: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what account he will take of the findings of the Atmospheric Particles Expert Group on the extent of pollution from coal-fired and oil-fired power stations in his review of the National Air Quality Strategy. [44639]

Angela Eagle: We will be considering information from a variety of experts, including the Airborne Particles Expert Group, during the process of the review of the National Air Quality Strategy. The report of the Airborne Particles Expert Group has yet to be published. A draft of the report will be circulated for peer review in the summer. The final report is due to be published towards the end of this year.

Genetically Modified Organisms

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what research has been carried out into the effects of genetically modified crops planted in England on *(a)* surrounding areas and *(b)* those who consume the food and into the risks of cross-fertilisation with non-genetically modified crops planted nearby. [44581]

Angela Eagle: The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions funds a research programme to support the risk assessment of proposed releases of genetically modified organisms into the environment. Copies of all our published research reports have been placed in the House of Commons Library. Six completed reports are awaiting publication and seven projects are currently under way. Our assessment of the likely effects of the GMOs always includes the surrounding area. This would include, for example, gene transfer to wild relatives and other crops, effects on Sites of Special Scientific Interest, and the safety of those living in the vicinity of the release. Therefore, all our research projects contribute to our assessment of applications for consent in this respect.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food are responsible for safety of GMOs and products derived from GMOs which may be consumed as food and animal feed. MAFF are currently funding 25 research projects which address specific risk assessment issues with respect to use for food. Completed reports are publicly available in the MAFF library.

With respect to cross fertilisation, the risk assessment for applications for consent to release GMOs always considers firstly, the likelihood of gene transfer occurring and secondly, the consequences of gene transfer for human health or the environment. In coming to a view on gene transfer, we also take into account internationally agreed standards for seed purity which have been developed over years of plant breeding experience. These set out required isolation distances to achieve the required level of seed purity for seed certification.

A number of research projects have been carried out by both my Department and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to investigate transgene movement.

- Gene flow in natural populations of Brassica and Beta (DETR)
- Genetically Modified crops and their wild relatives (DETR)
- Investigation of feral oilseed rape populations (DETR—to be published shortly)
- Local and regional scale movement of an oilseed rape transgene (MAFF);
- Risk assessment of transgene movement (MAFF).

In addition to this research, my Department has commissioned monitoring of releases of genetically modified oilseed rape being planted for seed production under a marketing consent. This includes field sampling and testing for evidence of gene transfer. A report of the first three years' work will be published in due course.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many acres in England have been given over to genetically modified crops; and if he will make a statement as to the acreage of the different crops involved. [44580]

Angela Eagle: Currently, there are 64 experimental trials of genetically modified crops in progress covering a total of approximately 841 acres. Of these, one site is 494 acres, with the remainder consisting of small size plots with an average area of less than 2 acres. In addition to the sites for experimental releases, there is one oilseed rape trial for commercial seed production covering 17.5 acres.

The majority of the experimental trials are for oilseed rape (27), sugar beet (16), and potatoes (14), although GM wheat (3), maize (2), chicory (1) and barley (1) are also grown.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what will be done with genetically modified crops sown in Staverton and under the control of his Department once they have been harvested. [44579]

Angela Eagle: The genetically modified maize crop sown at Staverton has animal feed safety clearance from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, and it is normal practice for such material to be used as animal fodder after harvest. In addition, some of the crop may be used for analysis of seed production and yield, as it forms part of the National List Trials for maize.

Kent County Council

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what was the salary bill for Kent County Council for the years *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97, *(c)* 1997–98 and *(d)* 1998–99 anticipated. [44211]

Mr. Raynsford: Kent County Council have reported employee expenses in 1995–96 and 1996–97 as £539 million and £558 million respectively. Employee expenses are not separately identified within the available data on 1997–98 provisional outturn and 1998–99 budgeted expenditure.

The above figures for employee expenses include indirect expenditures such as relocation and training expenses as well as the direct salary bill.

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many staff were employed by Kent County Council in *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97, *(c)* 1997–98 and *(d)* 1998–99. [44210]

Mr. Raynsford: The available information refers to the position at June each year, so data for 1998 are not yet available. The figures for earlier years are as follows:

Staff employed by Kent County Council at June of each year

Year	*Full-time*	*Part-time*	*Total staff*
(a) 1995	19,300	21,000	40,300
(b) 1996	19,000	21,100	40,100
(c) 1997	18,700	20,200	38,900

Source:
Joint staffing watch for England

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many staff left the employ of Kent County Council in 1997–98 to join the staff at the Medway Unitary Authority. [44212]

Mr. Raynsford: I understand from Kent County Council that 5,873 staff transferred from their employment to that of the Medway Unitary Authority in 1997–98.

Waste Strategy

Mr. Pound: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what progress has been made in developing a new waste strategy for England and Wales. [45124]

Mr. Meacher: I promised earlier this year that I would begin the process of preparing a new national waste strategy with a wide ranging public consultation. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales and I will be launching tomorrow, at the Institute of Waste Management Centenary Conference in Torbay, a consultation paper: "Less Waste: More Value", which sets out the key principles underlying our approach, and seeks views on how to improve the way our society deals with its waste.

The consultation exercise will last through the Summer. We will be looking for views from a wide range of people and organisations, and want to provoke a wide debate on the options open to us and the best way to take waste management into the twenty-first century. The consultation period will end on 25 September, after which we will carefully study all the views presented to us and start drafting the new waste strategy.

Copies will be sent to hon. Members, and will also be available tomorrow morning in the Library of the House.

Derbyshire County Council

Mr. Pond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is his decision on the final cap for Derbyshire County Council; and if he will make a statement. [45125]

Mr. Prescott: I have today laid before the House a draft Order, under section 57 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, setting out our decision on the final cap for Derbyshire County Council.

We have considered very carefully all the available relevant information, including the case made by the Council in support of a higher cap, before taking our decision. We have decided to increase the cap proposed for Derbyshire, by £2.9 million.

Derbyshire's cap is, in our view, reasonable, appropriate and achievable in all the circumstances of the County Council. This decision will reduce public expenditure and the burden on council taxpayers in the County by £1 million in 1998–99. This will result in a council tax reduction (at Band D) of around £4.31.

Paper Pulp Disposal

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many breaches of regulations in respect of the disposal of paper pulp on agricultural land there have been in the last three years; and what action was taken against those responsible. [43640]

Angela Eagle *[pursuant to her reply, 1 June 1998, c. 28]:* Under section 33 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, it is unlawful to deposit, recover or dispose of controlled waste without a waste management licence, contrary to the conditions of a licence or in a way which causes pollution of the environment or harm to human health. Where someone purports to be carrying out an activity which is exempt from waste management licensing but fails to comply with the terms of the exemption, that person may be prosecuted under section 33 of the 1990 Act for carrying out a licensable activity without a licence. The Environment Agency is responsible for the enforcement of these provisions in England and Wales.

Most landspreading of waste is carried out under the terms of the exemption from waste management licensing in paragraph 7 of Schedule 3 of the Waste Management Licensing Regulations 1994. I understand that the Environment Agency is developing a central prosecution database. However, I am advised that, at present, the Agency does not maintain a central record of occasions or sites on which waste may have been landspread in a manner which is inconsistent with the terms of the exemption in the 1994 Regulations.

DEFENCE

Territorial Army

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which Territorial Army headquarters Ministers have visited since 1 May 1997. [43644]

Dr. Reid: No visits have yet been made to Territorial Army Headquarters by any Ministers in my Department. Ministers have, however, met both senior TA officers and representatives of the TVRAs on a number of occasions since 1 May 1997.

Aircraft

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* Tornado, *(b)* Tornado F3, *(c)* Harrier, *(d)* Jaguar, *(e)* Hawk, *(f)* Nimrod, *(g)* Sentry, *(h)* TriStar, *(i)* Puma, *(j)* Sea King and *(k)* Chinook were (i) allocated to frontline RAF units, (ii) fully serviceable, (iii) undergoing major maintenance and (iv) held as in use reserve on 1 June. [44130]

Dr. Reid: I will write to the hon. and learned Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library.

C-17 Aircraft

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will make a statement on the procurement of C-17; [44467]

(2) how many companies are involved in the production of C-17s; and what guidelines are being used for the purchase of C-17. [44468]

Mr. Spellar: Our future air transport requirement is being scrutinised closely in the Strategic Defence Review and no decisions have yet been taken. Any future airlift procurement will be subject to normal procurement rules. In reply to the specific question on C-17, the aircraft is produced by the Boeing Company.

Future Large Aircraft

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the British Government's commitment to the Future Large Aircraft. [44469]

Mr. Spellar: A provisional request for proposals has been issued to Airbus, Turkish Aerospace Industries, Alenia and FLABEL pending the formation of Airbus Military Company, AMC. We are still discussing with our partners when Requests for Proposals will be issued to potential suppliers under competitive arrangements. A procurement decision will be made in the light of the conclusions of the Strategic Defence Review and of the responses to the Request for Proposals.

Defence Exports

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence at what rate commercial exploitation levies are normally levied against the export of defence equipment whose development has been funded by his Department. [44511]

Mr. Spellar: Commercial Exploitation Levy rates are negotiated case by case, either on the basis of fixed percentage rates according to the nature of the equipment, or through profit sharing schemes. Details of levy arrangements for individual equipments are commercially confidential, as are the amounts of levy received in respect of specific sales.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what was the cost to public funds for each year since 1990 incurred by branches of his Department other than DESO in the promotion of British defence exports; [44435]

(2) what was the cost to his Department of the attendance of *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials at defence and aerospace shows and trade fairs in each of the last eight years; what other costs were incurred in each year; and which bodies have funded these costs. [44437]

Mr. Spellar: This information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the value of the commercial exploitation levies paid by Vickers to the Government as a result of each of the contracts from the Government of Oman for the export of Challenger II tanks; and what percentage of the contract this represents. [44509]

Mr. Spellar: Disclosure of this information would harm the competitive position of contractors and I am therefore withholding it under Exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Military Assistance Fund

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the purpose of the Defence Military Assistance Fund; when it was set up; and what was its budget in the last year. [44434]

Dr. Reid: The Defence Military Assistance Fund is a cash fund which is available to subsidise the cost of overseas military assistance in support of defence objectives, including training, loan service personnel and other support activities. It was introduced on 1 April 1996 to replace the Defence Policy Fund and the Defence Sales Fund. The budget allocated for the Defence Military Assistance Fund last year was £10.506 million.

Ex-Service Men (Mental Welfare)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much his Department has provided in financial assistance to the Ex-Services Mental Welfare Society (Combat Stress) in each of the last five years. [44386]

Dr. Reid: In keeping with the practice that central Government do not provide funding in support of charities' core activities, the Ex-Services Mental Welfare Society (Combat Stress) does not receive any financial support from the Ministry of Defence and is responsible for raising its own funding.

Service Families Quarters (Kingston)

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans his Department has made for the disposal of The Keep in Kingston; and if he will make a statement. [44563]

Mr. Spellar: My Department has no plans to dispose of Service Families Quarters at The Keep in Kingston.

Joint Command and Staff Training

Mr. Alan Keen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on joint command and staff training matters. [45105]

Mr. George Robertson: The establishment of the Joint Services' Command and Staff College at its interim site at Bracknell has highlighted the considerable benefits to be had from a joint approach to command and staff training within a multinational environment. Opportunities for the common understanding of warfare and Defence as a whole are maximised. Specially selected officers have their command, analytical and communication skills tested against challenging scenarios ranging from Peace Support Operations to modern warfare. As part of our commitment to joint training, my Department has signed a PFI contract with Defence Management (Watchfield) Ltd. to build a new Joint College at Shrivenham (Watchfield) and to provide a range of facility management services. The new College is scheduled to open in September 2000.

Equipment Exhibition

Mr. Sedgemore: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the Royal Navy and British Army Equipment Exhibition. [45141]

Mr. Spellar: Following consultations with the UK Defence Trade Associations, we propose to change the future arrangements for the exhibition of naval and land systems equipment. In future, the Royal Navy and British Army Equipment Exhibition will be replaced by an international defence exhibition, run by a professional exhibition company, in a partnership to be formed with the Trade Associations. Subject to the conclusion of satisfactory arrangements, including a decision on the venue, the first exhibition will be held in September 1999. The Ministry of Defence will ensure that the exhibition is run fully in line with Government policy on defence exports and MOD officials will be closely involved to ensure that comprehensive security and emergency arrangements are in place. The move to an international format reflects the wide involvement of UK industry in collaborative projects and joint ventures and the Government's encouragement of these trends.

Land Mines

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps his Department is taking to assist in the global elimination of anti-personnel land mines. [45140]

Mr. George Robertson: I have on a number of occasions underlined my commitment to doing as much as possible to achieve this objective. My hon. Friend will recall my letter of 27 January, in which I set out our plans to destroy all of the Army's operational stockpiles of anti-personnel land mines by 1 January 2000—well ahead of the deadline set by the Ottawa Convention. I am delighted to say that plans have now also been put in place to destroy the HB 876 anti-personnel submunition of the RAF's JP233 Airfield Denial Weapon by the same date.

The MOD is also heavily involved in addressing the problem of the millions of mines that are the legacy of devastating conflicts around the world. We have made good progress in implementing the five point action plan on humanitarian demining I announced in October last year—in particular, the Mine Information and Training Centre at Minley is now fully operational—and we continue to look for ways to do more; the recent gifting of 10 demining tractors to the HALO Trust is one example of our commitment in this area.

Aircraft Noise Measurement Trial (Tewkesbury)

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what were the results of the noise measurement trial relating to low-flying aircraft in the Tewkesbury area; and if he will make a statement. [44403]

Mr. Spellar: A paper on the results of the noise monitoring trial is in preparation. It is our intention that this paper will be submitted for consideration for critical peer review at an international noise conference due to take place in New Zealand later this year. I will arrange for copies to be sent to the hon. Member, and placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

PRIME MINISTER

Rebuttal Officers

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Prime Minister on what dates each Government and agency rebuttal officer was thus designated. [43552]

The Prime Minister: The early and effective response to criticism of Government policy has always been an important and non-political duty of all departmental and agency press officers under all administrations. Titles of officers is a matter for Departments and agencies and is not centrally determined.

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health said in his reply to the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) of 11 May 1998, *Official Report*, column *40*, one officer in his Departments has been designated a rebuttal officer.

Evacuees Reunion Association

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Prime Minister what steps the Government are taking to promote the 1999 anniversary celebrations of the Evacuees Reunion Association. [44591]

The Prime Minister: The Evacuees Reunion Association (ERA) contacted me last year seeking Government support for their proposal to mark the 60th anniversary of wartime evacuation with a church service and rally in central London. The Home Office, which has responsibility for remaining civilian wartime matters, has taken a lead on this issue and will be seconding an official to provide help and guidance with the preparations.

Sierra Leone

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Prime Minister which *(a)* Ministers in HM Government and *(b)* parliamentary private secretaries have spoken to the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee on matters relating to the Committee's First Special report of Session 1997–98 (HC 760) Sierra Leone: Exchange of Correspondence with the Foreign Secretary. [44321]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 5 June 1998]:* I would expect Ministers and parliamentary private secretaries to have spoken both formally and informally to members of the Foreign Affairs Committee from all parties over the last few weeks on issues relating to Sierra Leone. This is part of the normal interface between Select Committees and Government.

Child Pornography

Ms Beverley Hughes: To ask the Prime Minister what progress has been made by the G8 countries in preventing the international production and distribution of child pornography, with particular reference to the Internet; if this matter was considered at the Birmingham Summit; and if he will make a statement. [43951]

The Prime Minister: At our summit in Birmingham last month, we agreed to implement rapidly the Principles and 10-point Action Plan against high-tech crime adopted by our Justice and Interior Ministers in Washington last December. Our governments are engaged in co-ordinated discussions with relevant industries in our countries, including Internet Service Providers, to develop better arrangements for obtaining electronic evidence of crimes and making it available to investigators and prosecutors in other jurisdictions. This will help us to combat a wide range of crimes including abuse of the Internet for the distribution of child pornography.

The UK has an absolute prohibition on the production, circulation and possession of child pornography and these stringent laws equally apply to the Internet.

The Government support the work of the Internet Watch Foundation which was established in September 1996 by Internet Service Providers primarily in response to growing concern about child pornography on the Internet. The Foundation passes all child pornography reports to the National Criminal Intelligence Service who route these to the relevant enforcement agency of the country concerned when the material appears to have originated outside the UK.

The UK Government are committed to tackling the problem of child pornography and will continue to support initiatives to curb this gross misuse of our computer networks.

Mr. Stephen Kock

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Prime Minister what sums of money were paid *(a)* by Her Majesty's Government and *(b)* by those acting on their behalf in salary and expenses to Mr. Stephen Kock between 1985 and 1992. [44809]

The Prime Minister: None.

WALES

European Structural Funds

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what the costs were in each year since 1990 of administering European Structural Fund programmes in Wales. [43844]

Mr. Hain: The separately identifiable administrative costs to the Welsh Office from 1992–93 onwards are set out in the following table. Information on a comparable basis is not readily available for earlier years.

£

Financial year	*Expenditure*
1992–93	501,457
1993–94	588,834
1994–95	623,738
1995–96	601,340
1996–97	706,973
1997–98	590,200

The Welsh European Programme Executive Ltd. was incorporated on 15 October 1996. The financial transactions of the company commenced on 1 January 1997. Responsibility for most Structural Funds programme management was delegated to the company by the Welsh Office from 1 July 1997.

The administration costs for the company from 1 January 1997 to 31 December 1997 amounted to £854,384. These costs are not directly comparable to those given for the Welsh Office as they include setting-up costs and a range of overheads not included in the Welsh Office figures.

European Affairs Forum

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what progress he has made in establishing a Welsh Forum on European Affairs; if he will list the names of those who attended the meeting of the preparatory group on 7 May; and if he will make a statement. [44062]

Mr. Hain: No such meeting was held on that date. The future relationship between Wales and Europe is, however, under review by Ministers.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Historic Properties

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans he has to provide new resources to repair historic properties; and if he will make a statement on the recent English Heritage report on neglected historic properties. [44005]

Mr. Banks: The majority of Government funding for the repair of historic properties is channelled through English Heritage (EH), which will receive £102.0 million in funding this year from my Department. EH plans to offer £34.5 million in conservation grants for 1998–99. This includes £2 million for a new fast track grants scheme for repairs needed to limit further deterioration, and a further £5.3 million for grants schemes under its new Buildings at Risk initiative. The Government welcome EH's Register of Buildings at Risk, which highlights the most important historic buildings in need of repair. Combined with the new grants scheme, it marks the start of a new strategy to encourage best practice in the preservation of historic buildings, in accordance with the Government's planning and policy guidance note 15—"planning and the historic environment".

Bradenstoke Priory Barn

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what representations he has received from the villagers of Bradenstoke in Wiltshire concerning their attempt to repatriate the mediaeval barn of Bradenstoke Priory from California; and if he will make a statement; [44331]

(2) what applications the National Lottery has received from the villagers of Bradenstoke concerning the mediaeval barn of Bradenstoke Priory. [44330]

Mr. Banks: My Department has received no representations concerning the barn, although I am aware of the proposal to restore it to its original site. The Government have no locus to intervene in the matter. I understand that no application for Lottery funding in respect of the barn has so far been made. The Heritage Lottery Fund would in principle be prepared to consider such an application. Its success would depend upon the Trustees' assessment of the project against their normal funding criteria, which centre on heritage merit and benefit to the public.

SCOTLAND

Hunts

Jackie Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if hunts which are licensed to hunt on Forestry Commission land have to follow the same rules as members of the public with respect to control of dogs and use of authorised routes only. [43747]

Mr. Macdonald: The subject of the question relates to matters undertaken by Forest Enterprise. I have asked its Chief Executive, Dr. Bob McIntosh, to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Bob McIntosh to Jackie Ballard, dated 8 June 1998:

The Secretary of State for Scotland has asked me to reply to your question regarding the licensing of hunts on Forestry Commission land and whether hunts have to follow the same rules as members of the public with respect to the control of dogs and use of authorised routes only.

As you will be aware, the Forestry Commission welcomes members of the public to its estate through a policy of freedom of access on foot where there are no legal or other restrictions. To help manage this freedom of access the Forestry Commission's Byelaws 1982 apply to all land managed by the Forestry Commission to which access is provided.

The control of dogs is specifically mentioned in the Byelaws. Under Byelaw 5 (xiii) it is an offence for a person to permit any animal in his charge to be out of control, while Byelaw 5 (xiv) makes it an offence for a person to permit any dog for which he is responsible to disturb, worry or chase any bird or animal or, on being requested by an officer of the Commissioners, fail to keep the dog on a leash.

Fox hunting is an activity which is controlled by licence on the Forestry Commission estate, the licences restricting the areas where hunting can take place and the activities which can be carried out.

The licences which are used to authorise hunting all contain enforceable conditions, including one requiring compliance with the Forestry Commission byelaws, except as expressly authorised by the licence. I would like to assure you that the conditions are designed to ensure that hounds and terriers are kept under control, and it is the Forestry Commission's intention to tighten these conditions further in the near future.

At present, the licences include conditions which:

- Designate the specific areas of land over which the Hunt may operate
- Provide specific instructions for Masters of Foxhounds on the use of terriers
- Require Masters of Foxhounds to ensure compliance with requirements relating to the protection and welfare of animals including the Protection of Badgers Act 1992
- Require Masters to call off hounds in the event of them starting to hunt deer
- Provide for monitoring of the activities of Hunts by Forest District Managers to ensure compliance with all the terms and conditions. In the event of non compliance, the licence may be revoked.

I hope that this reassures you that the activities of fox hunts and in particular hounds and terriers associated with hunting are rigorously controlled.

Higher Education Students

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a document for the guidance of students and higher and further education institutes setting out the new arrangements on fees, grants, loans, access funds and hardship loans; and if he will do so in consultation with students and institutions to ensure that it answers the questions frequently asked. [43874]

Mr. Wilson: In October 1997, we published the booklet "Scottish Higher Education for the 21st Century" which gave those proposing to enter higher education in 1998–99 and beyond a guide to the new arrangements. The arrangements have also been the subject of discussions with representatives of institutions.

The annual information booklet, "Student Support in Scotland—A Guide for Undergraduate Students 1998–99", was subsequently published by the Student Awards Agency for Scotland at Easter and has been widely available to both students and institutions. The booklet is part of the student support applications package and it provides full details of the assistance available to meet tuition fees, together with the grant and loan entitlements of new students entering higher education in session 1998–99. It also explains how students can apply for hardship loans and assistance form the Access Funds.

We will be publishing additional factsheets this month which set out in bullet format answers to the questions most frequently asked in relation to specific types of students.

Further information will be published later in the year and we will be happy to consider suggestions about the content.

Derelict and Contaminated Land

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make it his policy to collect statistics on the acreage of *(a)* derelict and *(b)* contaminated land in each constituency in Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [43332]

Mr. Macdonald *[holding answer 1 June 1998]:* Information on derelict and contaminated land is collected for the Scottish Vacant and Derelict Land Survey by local authorities and is supplied to the Scottish Office who publish this in aggregated form. Further development of the survey would be required in consultation with the data

providers before analyses could be provided at Parliamentary Constituency level. While the information supplied to the Scottish Office provides a grid reference for each affected site, assembling and publication of the information by Parliamentary Constituency would require geographic coding of sites and additional preparatory work by local authorities. As with all official statistics, the Survey is kept under review.

Secure Accommodation

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many places currently exist in Scotland for secure accommodation for children; how many there were in each year since 1988; how many children are waiting for secure accommodation to become available; and if he will make a statement. [44026]

Mr. Galbraith: There are currently 86 secure places for children in Scotland, proportionately twice the number of secure places available in England and Wales. We therefore have no plans to increase significantly the number of places. Information on the number of secure places has been collected since 1991 and is noted in the table.

Year	*Number*
1991	84
1992	84
1993	84
1994	84
1995	88
1996	88
1997	86
1998	86

Details of the number of children waiting for a secure place are not held centrally, but peaks and troughs of demand arising from the combined needs of Courts and Children's Hearings mean that from time to time there will be situations where a secure place may not be available. A National Planning Group was set up in June last year to advise on the planning, management and development of secure accommodation and its alternatives. A report on its work to date is expected in the next few months.

Housing Budget

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what his Department's budget was for council and other publicly financed housing (i) in cash terms and (ii) in real terms, in 1998–99 prices and (iii) as a percentage of Scottish GDP each year since 1978–79; and how much was spent per council tenant and publicly financed housing tenant in Scotland in (i) cash terms and (ii) real terms, in 1998–99 prices, in each of these years. [43392]

Mr. Macdonald *[holding answer 2 June 1998]:* The available information is set out in the table. To provide meaningful information relating expenditure on housing to GDP, it would be necessary to include not only housing expenditure by the Scottish Office but also other public housing expenditure including, in particular, Housing Benefit which has increased substantially over the period.

Given that Scottish Homes' grant in aid is used largely to support housing development by housing associations and private developers, it is not meaningful to divide the totals in the table by the numbers of public sector tenants in each year.

£ million

Year	*Scottish Office housing budget in cash terms* [1]	*Column 2 at estimated 1998–99 prices*
1978–79	542	1,760
1979–80	691	1,922
1980–81	738	1,736
1981–82	667	1,430
1982–83	616	1,233
1983–84	535	1,023
1984–85	516	940
1985–86	430	742
1986–87	457	766
1987–88	504	802
1988–89	434	647
1989–90	459	640
1990–91	539	696
1991–92	604	733
1992–93	536	624
1993–94	541	612
1994–95	552	615
1995–96	497	539
1996–97	449	474
1997–98	531	546
1998–99	508	508

[1] The figures for the Scottish Office housing budget in columns 2 and 3 include Housing Support Grant, Housing Revenue Account capital allocations, Scottish Homes grant-in-aid (prior to 1989–90, expenditure on the Housing Corporation and Scottish Special Housing Association), allocations to the former New Town Development Corporations, and resources made available in 1997–98 and 1998–99 under the capital receipts initiative.

[2] The figures exclude, however, repairs and improvement grants made by local authorities to owner occupiers, expenditure on Housing Benefit, local authorities' capital receipts and local authority capital funded from current revenue. They also exclude private sector investment levered in as a result of Scottish Homes' grants to housing associations and private developers.

Chief Police Officers

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which grades so entitled within the police service have refused to join the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland. [44099]

Mr. McLeish: I am not aware of any eligible grades so entitled who have refused to join the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will place a copy of the full accounts of the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland for the last year for which the accounts are available in the Library. [44095]

Mr. McLeish: The accounts of the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland are contained in the Association's annual report. I have arranged for a copy of the 1997–98 report to be placed in the Library of the House.

Firearms

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland on what dates his Department held consultative meetings on the Review of the Firearms Forms and Rules with (i) the British Medical Association and other professional medical representative bodies, (ii) the National Farmers Union (England and Wales), (iii) the National Farmers Union (Scotland), (iv) the Country Landowners Association (England and Wales), (v) the Country Landowners Association (Scotland), (vi) firearms clubs and associations, (vii) the British Deer Society, and the Deer Commission for Scotland and (viii) the British Sports Association for the Disabled; when he plans to conclude the review of firearms forms and rules; when he plans to implement the proposed new forms and rules; for what reasons the Home Office Note of the main issues raised at the meeting on 19 February to discuss the forms, was not sent to all consultees when requesting further written submissions; and when he intends to meet consultees to discuss these matters. [44100]

Mr. McLeish: These are matters for my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary who has overall responsibility for policy in relation to firearms in Great Britain.

Free School Meals

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many children received free school meals in each year since 1979; and what proportion of children this represents. [44205]

Mr. Wilson: The information requested is shown in the table.

Education authority schools: number and percentage of pupils receiving free school meals in Scotland 1979–80 to 1996–97

Year	Number of pupils present on census day	Number of pupils taking free school meals	Percentage of pupils taking free school meals
1979–80	867,816	122,618	14.1
1980–81	867,786	114,711	13.2
1981–82	823,646	124,547	15.1
1982–83	814,506	132,953	16.3
1983–84	756,735	129,335	17.1
1984–85	752,07[illegible]	136,669	18.2
1985–86	735,54[illegible]	136,627	18.6
1986–87	729,869	143,194	19.6
1987–88	729,505	145,219	19.9
1988–89	713,034	105,232	14.8
1989–90	704,357	99,303	14.1
1990–91	698,554	101,915	14.6
1991–92	695,201	107,186	15.4
1992–93	687,081	107,709	15.7
1993–94	727,101	121,479	16.7
1994–95	729,089	121,123	16.6
1995–96	730,835	121,318	16.6
1996–97	731,096	115,421	15.8

Insolvencies

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* individual and *(b)* corporate insolvencies there have been in each of the last eight years. [44202]

Mr. Wilson: Statistics on insolvencies are produced by statisticians in the Department of Trade and Industry. The information requested is shown in the table:

Insolvencies in Scotland

	Individuals	Companies		
	Sequestrations	Total	Compulsory liquidations	Creditors' voluntary liquidations
1990	4,350	470	251	219
1991	7,665	616	304	312
1992	10,845	670	310	360
1993	6,828	551	286	265
1994	2,182	444	242	202
1995	2,188	441	252	189
1996	2,503	441	266	175
1997	2,502	447	254	223

Education Funding (Argyll and Bute)

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proportion of his Department's funding for education has been allocated to Argyll and Bute; for what purpose; and under what headings since May 1997. [44576]

Mr. Wilson: The Department's funding for education extends principally to the further and higher education sectors, including grants to students. Such expenditure is not readily identifiable for particular geographical areas. Responsibility for school education in the Argyll and Bute area lies with Argyll and Bute Council and is funded through the general arrangements for local authority resources. Resources have also been allocated to Argyll and Bute Council since May 1997 for the following specified purposes related to school education:

£

	1997–98	1998–99
Early Intervention	118,289	107,450
Alternatives to Exclusion	23,663	54,000
School Security	239,000	239,000
In-Service Training for SEN	21,437	17,278
In-Service Training for Pre-school	21,693	—
Pre-School capital	70,008	—
New Deal for Schools	202,090	607,000
School Rationalisation	—	440,000
Spend to Save	—	341,000
Main Pre-school Grant	—	758,480
Additional Pre-school Grant	—	388,430

NORTHERN IRELAND

Lisnevin Disturbances (Children)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* Catholic and *(b)* Protestant children were held in Lisnevin at the time of each disturbance there in 1994; how many of each group were prosecuted and convicted arising out of the disturbances; and how many were transferred to the Young Offenders Centre, Hydebank. [31626]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 27 February 1998]:* There have been no serious disturbances in Lisnevin since 1994. In that year, two incidents occurred. The first in April and the second in November. The details requested are as follows:

	Protestant	*Catholic*	*Total*
April 1994			
Population	16	16	32
Transferred to YOC	6	11	17
Prosecuted	5	8	13
Convicted	4	5	9
November 1994			
Population	14	27	41
Transferred to YOC	1	8	9
Prosecuted	1	6	7
Convicted	1	6	7

HOME DEPARTMENT

Non-custodial Sentences

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the estimated annual cost of running *(a)* home detention orders and *(b)* community curfew orders backed by electronic tagging. [43876]

Ms Quin: The proposals in the Crime and Disorder Bill relating to Home Detention Curfew are estimated to cost up to £35 million per year, but are expected to avoid the need for estimated expenditure of up to £180 million a year on new prison places. Research conducted on the current trials of curfew orders estimated that a national roll-out of curfew orders could cost up to £22 million per year. However, this estimate does not take account of the effect of providing electronic monitoring for curfew orders simultaneously with Home Detention Curfew.

The Home Office is currently letting contracts for electronic monitoring services under which contractors will be responsible for providing a range of applications of electronic monitoring. The final cost of electronic monitoring services will depend on the outcome of the procurement process.

Ecstasy

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he proposes to take in respect of the supply of ecstasy testing kits; and if he will make a statement. [44169]

Mr. George Howarth: Kits which test for the presence of ecstasy are, in our view, of doubtful value in reducing risks to users. Ecstasy itself is a drug with well-documented short-term risks; and there are worries about its long-term effects. Ecstasy tablets seized in this country which have been tested by the Forensic Science Service have not been contaminated by substances more harmful than ecstasy itself. While the situation will be kept under review, there is no present intention to introduce specific controls on the supply of these kits. But it should be noted that possession of a substance for the purpose of testing it would be an offence if the substance was a controlled drug or a preparation or product containing one.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received from the UK Drugs Tsar regarding the E-Z ecstasy testing kits. [44167]

Mr. George Howarth: My officials anticipated such representations and advised the United Kingdom Anti-Drugs Co-ordination Unit on 28 May that it appeared that the E-Z Test kit did not contain any controlled substance which would require it to be licensed.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what advice his Department has given to the distributors of the E-Z Test ecstasy testing kits; [44170]

(2) what communications his Department has received from the United Kingdom distributor of the E-Z Test ecstasy testing kits; and when they were received. [44168]

Mr. George Howarth: The Department was asked by E-Z Limited on 23 March for its view of the ecstasy testing kit it proposed selling. In reply, officials explained that the Home Office did not endorse such products, and that the Government believed that testing could give a false sense of security and would not help to reduce the risks involved in taking the drug.

Nightclubs (Illegal Drugs)

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many night clubs have *(a)* had their licence revoked and *(b)* been refused a renewal of their licence by local authorities following receipt of a report from a chief police officer concerning problems with illegal drugs on their premises under recent legislation; [44161]

(2) how many club licences have been *(a)* revoked and *(b)* refused a renewal as a result of conviction of the licensee for operating in breach of conditions as a result of problems with illegal drugs in each of the last five years; [44159]

(3) how many night clubs have been the subject of reports from chief police officers concerning problems with illegal drugs on their premises in each of the last five years. [44160]

Mr. George Howarth: This information is not held centrally.

In practice, many clubs are already doing a good deal to tackle drugs misuse in partnership with the police, local authorities and other agencies. For those not able or willing to do so, the Public Entertainments Licences (Drugs Misuse) Act 1997 was brought into effect on 1 May 1998. This gives local authorities new powers of immediate closure where there are serious problems with the supply or use of controlled drugs at premises controlled by a club licence holder.

Drivers (Drugs)

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Barnsley, East and Mexborough (Mr. Ennis)

on 21 May 1998, *Official Report*, column *454*, regarding driving under the influence of drugs, what is the most recent estimate made by the Forensic Science Service regarding the prevalence of drug/driving cases; and what were estimates for each of the last 10 years. [44200]

Mr. Michael: The Forensic Science Service (FSS) has not made such an estimate. Figures are available for the last three years on cases submitted to the FSS by police forces. These are:

Year	*Number*
1995–96	1,218
1996–97	1,343
1997–98	1,700

Forensic Science Service

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average time taken for fingerprint analysis to be carried out by the Forensic Science Service at the request of the police. [44166]

Mr. Michael: It should be remembered that the Forensic Science Service (FSS) is involved in a minority of cases, where the technology is complex and technical/chemical enhancement of fingerprints is requested, not in the vast bulk of routine cases. The average turn-around time (taken over the year 1997–98) is 50 days. Where a result is needed urgently, the FSS endeavours to respond accordingly and fast-track responses are included in these overall figures.

Greyhounds

Mr. Fitzpatrick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what factors underlie the priority which the Government have given to introducing legislation to cover the welfare of greyhounds; [44156]

(2) if he will provide independently funded vets to attend all greyhound tracks; [44154]

(3) if he will implement a levy on betting on greyhound racing to provide a fund for improving tracks, veterinary support and greyhound welfare; [44155]

(4) what plans he has to implement the recommendations contained in the Sixth report of the Home Affairs Committee of Session 1990–91 (HC 463) on the Financing of Greyhound Racing *(a)* relating to the increase in the registration fee to owners (paragraph 44) and *(b)* a requirement on track owners and on and-off course bookmakers to donate a part of their profits to the Retired Greyhound Trust (paragraph 44). [44157]

Mr. George Howarth: The present law, principally the Protection of Animals Act 1911, makes it an offence to ill-treat any animals, including greyhounds. We have no plans for further legislation in this area. The greyhound racing industry already takes greyhound welfare most seriously—both during and after the dogs' racing careers.

Neither the 1978 Royal Commission on Gambling nor the 1991 Home Affairs Committee report recommended a levy on greyhound betting. Both regarded this as a commercial activity that did not demand direct Government involvement. We take the same view.

Mr. Fitzpatrick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will include independent greyhound tracks within the legislation which oversees standards for dogs in competitive sport. [44153]

Mr. George Howarth: Independent greyhound tracks are already covered by the animal protection and gambling laws—in particular, the Protection of Animals Act 1911 and the Betting, Gaming and Lotteries Act 1963. There are no plans to make separate provision for them.

Mr. Fitzpatrick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will establish a statutory body concerned with greyhound racing. [44152]

Mr. George Howarth: There are no plans to establish such a body.

Public Safety Radio Communications Project

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to (i) promote and (ii) support the public safety radio communications project in North Yorkshire. [44220]

Mr. Michael: The Public Safety Radio Communications Project (PSRCP) is intended to replace all radio infrastructures for the police service with the new generation of digital radio communication systems from 1999 onwards. The project is being managed by the Police Information Technology Organisation (PITO) which became a Non-Departmental Public Body in April this year. Under the PSRCP, a national co-ordinated approach is being taken to the planning, design and implementation of the new communications systems, and PITO has been supporting North Yorkshire Police, along with all other forces in England and Wales, to achieve this. A Business Case for the implementation of the project will be completed this year, and a decision taken on whether to proceed. If a contract is awarded, the North Yorkshire Police force is scheduled to be one of the first forces to receive the new service.

Members of the European Parliament

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the procedures which will apply when vacancies for UK MEPs occur. [44194]

Mr. George Howarth: Our intention is that, where a vacancy arises from the death or resignation of an MEP who was a candidate on a party list, the vacancy will be filled by the next eligible and willing candidate on that list, provided that the party concerned is still content to be represented by that person.

Where a party list has been exhausted or where the person whose death or resignation has caused the vacancy stood as an independent candidate, a by-election will be held.

If a vacancy occurs in Northern Ireland it will, as now, be filled by means of a by-election.

Emergency Services

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answers of 20 April 1998, *Official Report*, columns *524–27*, if he will list for each fire and civil defence authority the total amount of

grant aid given to such authorities for emergency planning in 1995–96, 1996–97, 1997–98 and the provision for 1998–99, identifying where applicable any allocations transferred to fire and civil defence authorities by metropolitan district or London borough councils. [44562]

Mr. George Howarth: The information required is given in the table.

Civil Defence Grant Allocations (£000s)

Fire and Civil Defence Authorities	*1995/96*	*1996/97*	*1997/98*	*1998/99*
London	388	388	338	318
Greater Manchester	[1]364	[2]229	[2]204	[2]194
Merseyside	[3]369	[3]369	[3]342	[3]335
South Yorkshire	[4]229	[4]229	[4]204	159
Tyne and Wear	[5]369	[5]369	[5]345	[5]335
West Midlands	194	194	169	159
West Yorkshire	194	194	169	159

Metropolitan Districts transferring their allocations to FCDA:

[1] Salford, Stockport, Tameside and Wigan

[2] Stockport

[3] All Districts in Merseyside

[4] Sheffield

[5] All Districts in Tyne and Wear

Police Staffing

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what research his Department has evaluated into staffing demands for the police during bank holiday periods. [44179]

Mr. Michael: The Home Office has not commissioned or evaluated any research into staffing demands for the police during bank holiday periods and we are not aware of any research in this area. The allocation of resources and the deployment of officers is decided locally by chief constables.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures he has taken to increase the number of police officers since 1 May 1997. [44178]

Mr. Michael: The last Government removed from Ministers any direct control over police numbers or the deployment of police officers. Under the Police and Magistrates' Courts Act 1994, it is for individual chief constables to determine the number of police officers in their force within the resources available to them. Resources for the police in England and Wales this year increased by 3.7 per cent., or £258 million, to £7.15 billion.

We are working with the police to ensure that these resources are used as effectively as possible, and to reduce administrative burdens in order to enable chief constables to put more officers back into the community.

Asylum Seekers

Sir Norman Fowler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many current applicants for political asylum have been granted work permits pending consideration of their cases; and if he will make a statement; [44633]

(2) how many applications for political asylum are currently pending; what is the average length of time for consideration of an application; and if he will make a statement; [44632]

(3) what plans he has for speeding up the process of dealing with applications for political asylum; and if he will make a statement. [44634]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: At the end of April 1998, there were 51,465 asylum applications awaiting an initial decision, a reduction on the previous year. Applications are currently estimated to be taking, on average, 14 months to reach an initial decision in cases lodged after the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993, and 58 months for those lodged prior to that Act. Both these figures reflect the proportion of inherited old cases within the system. But figures for 1997 show that 38 per cent. of initial decisions on asylum applications were taken within six months, as against only 10 per cent. in 1992.

We are committed to bringing a fresh approach to asylum: one that is fairer, faster and firmer than the one we inherited. We will make announcements on the way ahead as soon as we can.

I regret that information on the number of asylum applicants granted permission to work is not available.

Firearms Compensation

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many claims under the firearms compensation scheme currently remain outstanding under each of options A, B and C; and by what dates he expects all claims under each option to be settled. [44470]

Mr. Michael: Payments under Options A and B of the large calibre handgun compensation scheme and the parallel ex gratia scheme for small calibre pistols were completed by the end of May, as planned. The only exceptions are around 300 cases involving firearms dealers and individual owners where payment cannot be finalised because of outstanding queries over the eligibility of items claimed for, difficulties in obtaining the required details to enable payment to be made, or where the claimant has declined to complete the required Declaration on the claim form. Payment on these remaining claims will completed as soon as the necessary information and signatures are provided.

The Firearms Compensation Section (FCS) is now devoting the bulk of its resources to processing the Option C claims, which are fewer in number but more complicated. There are around 24,500 Option C claims to be processed, the great majority of which are mixed claims on which payments have been made already under Option A or B. The rate of payment on these claims will increase now that we have more staff allocated to this task. In the interests of fairness, Option C claims are being dealt with in the order in which the guns were surrendered to the police, so that the claimant will not be penalised by any subsequent delay in forwarding the claim to the Home Office. The target is to complete most of these payments by the end of the year, if not all, and we will do everything that can be done to clear these claims in a shorter time if at all possible.

Around 11,000 claims were submitted during February under the statutory surrender scheme for small calibre pistols. These are being registered on the FCS computer system by data-processing staff, and substantive work will begin on them when the overall work position permits. Until the claims have been examined in detail, it is not possible to give a firm date for completion.

The FCS Information Line on 0171 271 8977 gives regularly updated details of the current processing times for all classes of claim, to enable claimants to monitor the progress of their claims.

Closed Circuit Television

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when a decision will be made on the application by Wootton Bassett Town Council for funds to install closed circuit television. [44708]

Mr. Michael: The results of round 4 of the Closed Circuit Television challenge competition will be announced shortly.

Wymott and Garth Prisons

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what initiatives he is taking to extend the prison accommodation at the HM Wymott and Garth Prison sites. [44624]

Ms Quin: The Prison Service has no immediate plans to extend prisoner accommodation at these prisons. A programme of general maintenance and building repair works continues at the prisons.

The Prison Service keeps under regular review the need to house the rising prison population. The issues taken into account when determining how to meet this demand are strategic need, timing, cost and implications for the establishment concerned.

Prisons (Illegal Substances)

Mr. Pearson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will estimate the number of visitors to prisons found to be in possession of illegal substances in the last year; and how many were subsequently charged with an offence. [44715]

Mr. George Howarth: In the 12 months ending 31 May 1998, a total of 1,071 people visiting prisons were arrested by the police in connection with possible drug-related offences.

The Prison Service does not record what action was subsequently taken by the police.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Mobile Telephones

Ms Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will require mobile telephones to be sold and labelled with a health warning; and if she will make a statement. [43698]

Mrs. Roche: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Minister for Public Health on 8 December 1997, *Official Report*, column *456*.

The Department is aware of public concern on this subject, which is taken seriously. Advice on the health implications of exposure to electromagnetic fields from mobile telecommunications equipment is discussed with the National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB) and also with the Department of Health.

The exposure guidelines of the NRPB for fields associated with mobile telecommunications equipment are based on well-established thermal effects. NRPB's view is that mobile phones currently used in the United Kingdom comply with the recommended exposure limit. There are no plans to require mobile phones to have a health warning.

I would add that Type Approval of mobile phones is required before they can be connected to a mobile telecommunications network. This includes testing of the power output to the antenna. Mobile telecommunications equipment must also comply with the EU Directive on Electromagnetic Compatibility.

Indonesia

Ann Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if ancillary equipment in *(a)* standard individual export licences and *(b)* open individual licence categories, may be included with the delivery of Hawk aircraft to Indonesia in 1998. [44436]

Mr. Spellar: I have been asked to reply.

Ancillary equipment in standard individual export licences and open individual licence categories has been approved for supply to Indonesia in support of the sale of Hawk aircraft. The timing of delivery of any equipment is a matter for the exporter subject to the conditions of any export licence necessary.

TREASURY

Departmental Energy Use

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of the Department's energy usage was from *(a)* renewable energy and *(b)* combined heating in each year since 1989–90. [44081]

Mrs. Liddell: The Treasury does not use energy *(a)* from a renewable source or *(b)* combined heat and power.

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much *(a)* oil, *(b)* gas and *(c)* electricity was purchased for the heating, lighting and powering of accommodation occupied by his Department within the United Kingdom in each year since 1989–90; and what was the total cost in real terms of each in each year. [44086]

Mrs. Liddell: The table shows the costs and quantity of oil, gas and electricity purchased for heating, lighting and power in Treasury accommodation since 1989–90.

Fuel	*Actual expenditure (£)*	*Annual consumption units k Wh*
1990–91		
Gas	46,951	1,438,663
Oil	37,536	2,724,116
Electricity	245,470	4,423,000
Whitehall District Heating System[1]	43,272	5,751,128
1991–92		
Gas	59,674	1,847,046
Oil	84,855	806,088
Electricity	230,835	4,123,618
Whitehall District Heating System[1]	45,872	5,930,656
1992–93		
Gas	12,942	813,156
Oil	5,251	19,714
Electricity	242,357	3,094,580
Whitehall District Heating System[1]	48,468	6,203,602
1993–94		
Gas	6,066	331,358
Oil	Nil	—
Electricity	219,911	3,555,058
Whitehall District Heating System[1]	40,143	5,977,659
1994–95		
Gas	12,995	1,087,116
Oil	6,785	40,869
Electricity	218,583	3,553,202
Whitehall District Heating System[1]	47,864	5,987,000
1995–96		
Gas	22,734	1,192,052
Oil	1,844	14,053
Electricity	161,086	3,474,725
Whitehall District Heating System[1]	47,535	4,596,833
1996–97		
Gas	20,810	843,163
Oil	Nil	—
Electricity	215,958	3,994,845
Whitehall District Heating System[1]	194,081	5,292,210

[1] Whitehall District Heating System (WDHS) is run by Property Advisers Civil Estate (PACE) and provides heating to Government buildings in Whitehall including GOGGS.

Economic and Monetary Union

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which body will guarantee the value of notional euro in Phase B of Stage Three of EMU from January 1999 to July 2002. [44459]

Mrs. Liddell: On 1 January 1999, the euro will become the actual and sole currency of participating member states. The old national currencies of these member states will continue only as denominations of the euro. The conversion rates between these currencies and the euro will be legally fixed. The European Central Bank will become responsible for euro monetary policy from this date onward.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what profits he estimates will derive to the United Kingdom from seigniorage if the United Kingdom participates in Stage Three of Economic and Monetary Union. [44456]

Mrs. Liddell: If the UK participated in Economic and Monetary Union, its share of the monetary income accruing to the national central banks would depend on a number of factors, including the number of other Member States in EMU, the level of note issue by the European Central Bank, and the level of ECB reserve requirements. It is impossible to estimate with any degree of certainty now the size of the UK's allocation if and when it joined the single currency.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how profits of seigniorage on euro notes and coins will be distributed among participants. [44453]

Mrs. Liddell: The method for allocating monetary income between national central banks in Stage Three of EMU is described in the Statute of the ESCB. The sum of monetary income accruing to the national central banks in the performance of the ESCB's monetary policy function will be allocated in proportion to each central bank's paid-up share in the capital of the ECB. National central banks' contributions to the capital of the ECB will be based on Member States' relative population and GDP.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent changes have been made to the remit of the European Union Monetary Committee; and what is its role in relation to *(a)* the EMI and *(b)* the ECB. [44455]

Mrs. Liddell: The remit of the Monetary Committee continues to be as set out in Article 109c(1) of the Treaty. In accordance with Article 109c(2) of the Treaty, the Monetary Committee will be replaced by an Economic and Financial Committee at the start of Stage Three of EMU. The ECB shall appoint two members of the Economic and Financial Committee. The Monetary Committee and the Economic and Financial Committee contribute to the preparation of the work of the Council, including with respect to matters involving the EMI and the ECB.

Population Statistics

Ms Walley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the estimated or projected numbers of people aged *(a)* 65 years or over, *(b)* 75 years or over and *(c)* 85 years or over in (i) North Staffordshire Health Authority area (ii) the West Midlands and (iii) the United Kingdom for (1) 1996, (2) 2001 and (3) 2006; and in each case what the figures are as a percentage of the total population. [44327]

Mrs. Liddell: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Ms Joan Walley, dated 8 June 1998:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your parliamentary question asking for the

estimated or projected numbers of people aged *(a)* 65 years or over, *(b)* 75 years or over, *(c)* 85 years or over in North Staffordshire Health Authority area, the West Midlands and the United Kingdom for (1) 1996, (2) 2001 and (3) 2006 and in each case, what the figures are as a percentage of the total population.

The table provides the information requested.

Resident population of North Staffordshire Health Authority, West Midlands Health area and the UK in 1996, 2001 and 2006

	All ages (thousands)	*Age 65 and over (thousands)*	*Age 75 and over (thousands)*	*Age 85 and over (thousands)*	*Percentage aged 65 and over of all persons*	*Percentage aged 75 and over of all persons*	*Percentage aged 85 and over of all persons*
North Staffordshire Health Authority							
1996	471.2	76.1	32.5	7.8	16.2	6.9	1.7
2001	484.9	74.0	34.1	8.3	15.3	7.0	1.7
2006	492.6	73.7	34.7	9.0	15.0	7.1	1.8
West Midlands Health area							
1996	5,316.6	828.1	363.0	86.5	15.6	6.8	1.6
2001	5,375.0	831.6	390.9	100.7	15.5	7.3	1.9
2006	5,417.2	849.4	406.4	111.4	15.7	7.5	2.1
United Kingdom							
1996	58,801.5	9,250.8	4,192.5	1,067.2	15.7	7.1	1.8
2001	59,618.1	9,298.7	4,405.6	1,162.5	15.6	7.4	1.9
2006	60,286.6	9,467.4	4,504.1	1,208.4	15.7	7.5	2.0

Sources:
Population Estimates Unit, ONS
Migration & Subnational Population Projections Unit, ONS
Government Actuary's Department

Jersey

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the fiscal and monetary responsibilities of *(a)* the Government and *(b)* the Bank of England in relation to the financial institutions and affairs of Jersey; to what extent the liabilities of the Jersey financial institutions are underwritten by each; and if he will make a statement. [43922]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 3 June 1998]:* The responsibilities of the UK Government in relation to Jersey and the other Crown Dependencies were last set out in the Kilbrandon report in 1973. In essence, the Government are responsible for Jersey's external relations and defence, and the Crown has ultimate responsibility for the good governance of the Bailiwick.

Although Jersey is in monetary union with the UK, neither the Government nor the Bank of England have responsibility for the fiscal or monetary affairs of the Bailiwick, nor for underwriting the liabilities of Jersey's financial institutions.

Thyroid Cancers

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many incidents of thyroid cancer in young people under the age of 18 years there were in each health authority for each of the last 10 years for which figures are available. [44319]

Mrs. Liddell: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Nigel Jones, dated June 1998:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics, I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary question on thyroid cancer.

The number of newly diagnosed cases in persons aged under 18 by regional health authority in England and Wales, 1982–91 (the latest ten year for which data are available), are shown in the following table.

New cases of thyroid cancer (International Classification of Diseases, 9th Revision, ICD9, 193) in children aged under 18, diagnosed in 1982–91, by regional health authority of residence, England and Wales

	1982	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*
Northern	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	1	2
Yorkshire	0	0	4	0	1	1	0	0	4	1
Trent	2	3	0	0	1	1	2	3	0	0
E. Anglian	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
N.W. Thames	0	2	1	1	0	1	1	2	0	1
N.E. Thames	0	0	0	0	2	2	1	0	1	2
S.E. Thames	2	2	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	1
S.W. Thames	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
Wessex	3	2	2	1	2	1	4	1	0	0
Oxford	0	1	1	0	1	3	0	0	1	0
S. Western	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	1	1	2
W. Midlands	2	2	2	2	1	1	0	0	1	0
Mersey	0	2	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
N. Western	2	0	1	2	0	0	2	0	0	0
Wales	0	1	0	4	2	0	3	1	1	0
England and Wales	11	17	14	11	17	14	15	10	12	9

Interest Rates

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 5 May 1998, *Official Report*, column *454*, if he will list the real interest rates in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* the USA, *(c)* Germany and *(d)* Japan, defined as actual interest rates less the rate of inflation for these countries. [43443]

Mrs. Liddell: These approximate measures can be readily calculated using actual interest rates and rates of inflation, both of which are listed for the named countries in OECD Main Economic Indicators and in other publications available in the House of Commons library.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Sierra Leone

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what was the level of United Kingdom bilateral aid for basic social services in Sierra Leone *(a)* in the year before and *(b)* in the period since the 1997 coup d'état; and what efforts her Department made to ensure that these services were maintained for particularly vulnerable groups following the coup. [44172]

Clare Short: *(a)* In financial year 1996–97 the level of UK bilateral aid for basic social services (water and sanitation, education, health and welfare, and humanitarian aid) in Sierra Leone was £2.87 million.

(b) Since the military coup on 25 May 1997, we provided £3.24m to support the humanitarian work of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), NGO programmes in neighbouring countries for Sierra Leonean refugees, and NGO relief and development work restarted since the return of President Kabbah's Government.

Following the coup, DFID provided funds to ICRC and contributed to EU humanitarian programmes. We contributed funds for the UN Humanitarian Aid Co-ordination Unit (HACU) which co-ordinated humanitarian activities of the UN agencies and NGOs working in Sierra Leone and neighbouring countries. HACU produced a code of conduct to ensure that humanitarian aid reached targeted groups. DFID officials also joined the EU humanitarian assessment mission to Conakry, Guinea, in September 1997.

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what British Government co-funded NGO projects were cancelled or postponed as a result of the decision to suspend aid to Sierra Leone following the 1997 coup d'état. [44173]

Clare Short: The following projects were suspended when aid to Sierra Leone was discontinued following the 1997 Coup:

Action Aid—Water and Sanitation project

Cause Canada—Water and Sanitation project

Primary Health Care—Medical Research Centre, Bo

Christian Children's Fund—Children affected by war/ Community based support

Concern Universal—Assistance to Children Affected by War Programme.

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what resources her Department provided to the Kabbah Government in exile; and for what purposes. [44199]

Clare Short: The Department for International Development (DFID) provided £240,000 to President Kabbah's government in exile. £50,000 of this was to enable them to pursue activities to promote the return of the democratically elected government, and £190,000 for a workshop and seminar in the United Kingdom in October 1997 to plan for the restoration of government after their return.

European Development Assistance

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the names and positions of her Department's officials who are currently working in the external development Directorate-Generals of the EC. [44314]

Clare Short: My Department currently has 10 staff on secondment to the external development directorates of the EC.

Name	*Directorate-General*	*Specialism*
Guy Mustard	DGIA	Administrator
Matthew Wyatt	DGIA	Administrator
David Daniels	DGIB	Health
Andrew Hall	DGIB	Economist
Alex Kremer	DGIB	Economist
Andy Roby	DGIB	Environment—(Forestry)
Sean Conlin	DGVIII	Social Development
Michael Parkes	DGVIII	Urban Development
John Roberts	DGVIII	Economist
Digby Swift	DGVIII	Education

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps the United Kingdom Government are taking to increase access to information in Europe and recipient countries on projects funded by the European Commission's development assistance programme. [44311]

Clare Short: The UK Government are committed to increasing transparency in EU decision making, including the activities of the EU institutions. During our Presidency, I have taken part in a debate at the European Parliament on development assistance and given evidence on two occasions to its Development Committee. The UK has supported the Commission's proposals on Information and Communication programmes for TACIS and Phare and the Department for Trade and Industry maintains a database of projects being funded by major multilateral agencies, including the EC.

Some progress has been made on our initiatives to improve openness in the EU. We have also begun preparatory work with the European Commission and European Parliament on implementing the openness provisions in the Amsterdam Treaty. These provisions will cover all areas of EU activity, including development assistance programmes.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans she has to increase the number of her Department's officials working in the external development Directorate-Generals of the EC. [44315]

Clare Short: My officials frequently talk to the Commission in Brussels and in delegations about the opportunities for placing secondees in the external development Directorate-Generals.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the meeting of the European development ministers on 18 May. [44313]

Clare Short: I refer the hon. Member to my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Burton (Mrs. Dean) of 3 June 1998, *Official Report*, column *236*.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) what is Government policy in respect of environmental impact assessments of projects within the European Commission's aid programme; [44308]

(2) what is the Government's policy on the integration of environmental and social considerations into European Commission-funded infrastructure development projects. [44306]

Clare Short: As stated in the White Paper *Eliminating World Poverty: a Challenge for the 21st Century*, this Government are committed to encouraging all multilateral developments institutions—including the European Commission—to integrate environmental and social sustainability into their projects and devote more attention to evaluating and monitoring their activities. DFID worked closely with the European Commission to develop procedural guidelines for this purpose. However, continuing efforts are required to ensure the Commission's guidance is always fully reflected in the design and implementation of projects and programmes. My Department continues to work with the Commission to seek to improve effectiveness in this area.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary to one of his previous questions on 11 May 1998, *Official Report*, column *24*, for details of the ways my Department has been doing this.

Cameroon

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what representations her Department has made to the European Commission regarding the implementation of an Environmental Impact Assessment of the Commission's road rehabilitation programme in Cameroon. [44307]

Clare Short: My Department made representations to the European Commission regarding implementation of an Environmental Impact Assessment when notification of the new road rehabilitation programme was received last year. The EC has assured us that appropriate environmental protection measures will be clearly spelt out in the project document. The project will be considered towards the end of this year by the European Development Fund Committee on which my Department sits.

Lomé Convention

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) if she will place in the Library records of decisions and approvals of Government disbursements to the EDF; [44310]

(2) if she will list with dates the amounts of the United Kingdom's disbursements to the EDF under the current Lomé Convention; and when the next disbursements are due to be called from the Commission. [44309]

Clare Short: Disbursements against the Lomé Convention began under the Seventh European Development (EDF) in 1994. The Commission calls down funds from Member States as it needs them. There are usually four quarterly payments each year, normally in January, April, July and October. The table sets out the payments for each quarter under the seventh EDF.

Year	*Quarter*	*Payment (£)*
1994	Third	82,902,220
	Fourth	70,505,090
1995	First	25,759,245
	Second	53,782,341
	Third	82,158,009
	Fourth	60,110,159
1996	Second	27,013,201
	Third	39,493,366
	Fourth	58,673,835
1997	First	11,768,512
	Second	40,895,789
	Third	44,363,144
	Fourth	39,042,589
1998	First	21,603,431
	Second	31,848,249

The next disbursement is expected in July.

Stabex Projects

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, (1) pursuant to her answer of 5 May 1998, *Official Report*, column *276*, on Stabex, what steps she has taken to press for the reform or abolition of the Stabex programme; [44317]

(2) what mechanisms exist to ensure that the European Commission takes account of her Department's views on environmental and social impact in Stabex funding proposals; [44316]

(3) if she will place in the Library records of the Government's recommendations to the European Commission on Stabex funding proposals. [44312]

Clare Short: The UK clearly set out its position on Stabex for the Commission and other Member States in the Government's paper on the future of Lomé in October 1997. I have placed a copy of this paper in the Library. There has been strong opposition to the abolition of Stabex from some Member States in subsequent discussions on the EU's negotiating mandate for the successor to the Lomé Convention. However, the UK has been negotiating vigorously to reform this instrument, most recently at the Development Council on 18 May which my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State and I attended.

I refer the hon. Member to my answer to him of 5 May 1998, *Official Report*, column 276, on the procedures my Department uses to assess Stabex projects. There are no formal mechanisms under the Lomé Convention to ensure the UK's views are taken account of by the Commission. Information on the views my Department has fed to the Commission on Stabex proposals could be gathered only at disproportionate cost.

Sudan

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what financial aid has been given by Her Majesty's Government to alleviate child hunger in Southern Sudan; and what estimate she has made of the annual cost of feeding one child for a year. [44709]

Mr. Foulkes: The British Government allocated £6.2 million for the crisis in Southern Sudan during May bringing our overall assistance to Sudan since February to £10.2 million. This assistance is in support of vulnerable groups and families, including children. There is no useful estimate of the costs of feeding one child for a year since the figure can vary a great deal depending on the circumstances.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans she has to increase aid from her Department to help people in the Sudan suffering from famine; and if she will make a statement. [44335]

Clare Short: Since 1991, my Department has provided £145 million in humanitarian assistance for Sudan.

Since my statement to the House on 29 April 1998, *Official Report*, columns 331–38, the Government of Sudan have been gradually improving access to the worst affected areas, particularly in Bahr El Ghazal. I approved further British contributions during May totalling £6.23 million which brings our overall assistance to Sudan since February to £10.23 million. I have made it clear since the beginning of the current emergency that we alongside other governments will provide the funding needed for the Sudanese emergency and that the problem is one of access rather than resources. The EU General Affairs Council on 25 May again called for a ceasefire for humanitarian purposes, which remains the most urgent requirement. This is why we have been pressing for a ceasefire for humanitarian purposes, which remains the most important requirement in order to provide help to the people in need.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

New Deal (Thanet)

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) how many eligible participants have to date registered interest in the New Deal within the Thanet travel-to-work area; [44472]

(2) how many eligible participants are currently undergoing Gateway preparation for the New Deal within the Thanet travel-to-work area to date; [44473]

(3) how many eligible participants have within the Thanet travel-to-work area currently obtained New Deal placements with *(a)* the private and *(b)* the public sector. [44474]

Mr. Andrew Smith: New Deal was launched nationally on 6 April and it is of course early days for this ambitious undertaking. I am encouraged by the start in the Canterbury Unit of Delivery which includes the Thanet travel-to-work area. 223 young people have attended their initial New Deal interview and of these 115 have requested early entry. 62 clients are currently participating in the Gateway process and 26 have found work in the Private Sector.

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many *(a)* private and *(b)* public sector employers have expressed interest within the Thanet travel-to-work area in offering New Deal placements; and if he will list them. [44475]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Within the Employment Service Canterbury District, which forms the major part of the Thanet travel-to-work area, 71 employers have so far signed formal agreements to enable them to offer jobs under the New Deal employer option to young unemployed people.

Of these, 68 employers are from the private sector and three are from the public sector. I have asked the local Employment Service District Manager to supply the list of employers.

Education and Social Affairs Council

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the Education and Social Affairs Council of Ministers meeting on 4 June. [43020]

Mr. Andrew Smith: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry and I chaired the joint Council of Education and Social Affairs Ministers on 3–4 June. My hon. Friend the Scottish Office Minister of State for Education and Industry and my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales also attended.

The Council discussed National Employment Action Plans which all Member States have provided in accordance with the process agreed at last November's Luxembourg 'Jobs Summit', and completed its assessment of the Plans in preparation for the European Council at Cardiff on 15–16 June.

The Council reached political agreement on a Regulation extending Regulation 1408/71 (social security for migrant workers) to civil servants in special schemes and adopted a package of annual amendments to Regulations 1408/71 and 574/72. The Council also reached political agreement on a Directive safeguarding the supplementary (i.e. occupational and private) pension rights of migrant workers, subject to the lifting of a Danish Parliamentary scrutiny reserve and a Portuguese linguistic reserve.

The Council adopted a Recommendation on a Parking Card for people with disabilities.

The Council reached political agreement on the text of a common position on the promotion of European pathways for work-linked training (Europass).

The Council reached a common position on a Directive amending the Acquired Rights Directive, subject to the lifting of a German Parliamentary scrutiny reserve. The Council made further progress on the employee involvement aspects of the proposed European Company Statute.

The Council heard presentations from the Presidency on a pilot project to promote teacher mobility across the EU and from the Commission on its proposals for a new generation of programmes on education, training and youth. A copy of the Council minutes will be placed in the Library when it becomes available. The Commission also made presentations on its Communication on developing the social dialogue at Community level; its Communications on a new Social Action Programme (1998–2000); and on the proposed ILO Declaration on Fundamental Rights.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Correspondence

Mr. Cran: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the system used in his Department to monitor correspondence from hon. Members; and what plans he has to improve it. [43004]

Dr. John Cunningham *[holding answer 21 May 1998]:* Letters from hon. Members and Peers are recorded on a computerised database. Correspondence is carefully monitored to ensure letters are dealt with as soon as possible after receipt.

Abattoirs

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will issue guidance as to arrangements for the reporting of acts of intimidation by abattoir employers and owners against Meat Hygiene Service staff and veterinarians. [43376]

Mr. Rooker: Meat Hygiene Service (MHS) operational staff (Official Veterinary Surgeons, Meat Hygiene Inspectors and Meat Technicians) have been instructed to inform their Senior Managers immediately of any instances of intimidation which prevent them from carrying out their duties to protect public health. A confidential helpline has been set up to assist any MHS employee who feels intimidated or subject to threatening behaviour from plant operators or employees.

Information on prosecutions relating to instances of intimidation, obstruction and aggression against MHS staff is published in the Meat Hygiene Enforcement Report, a copy of which is placed in the Library of the House each month.

All successful prosecutions relating to acts against MHS staff will be published immediately via a separate Press Notice.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many slaughterhouses there are in Great Britain; and how many of these slaughter *(a)* poultry, *(b)* pigs, *(c)* cattle and *(d)* horses. [44236]

Mr. Rooker: At 1 May, there were 607 slaughterhouses in Great Britain licensed to produce meat for sale for human consumption. Of these, 153 were licensed to slaughter poultry, 310 pigs, 399 cattle and 12 horses. Licences are generally not required for slaughterhouses with an annual production of less than 10,000 birds for sale for human consumption.

Suffolk Farmers (Subsidy)

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list, by crop, the total amount of subsidy paid to farmers in Suffolk for each of the past five years. [44292]

Mr. Rooker: The following table gives information for payments to farmers in Suffolk under the Arable Area Payments Scheme (AAPS).

£

	1993	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*
Simplified Scheme[1]	857,573	962,047	1,257,807	1,174,990	1,064,093
Main Scheme:					
Cereals	17,558,515	24,991,146	36,871,045	38,482,551	37,831,102
Oilseeds	4,319,060	4,272,686	4,818,064	4,834,745	5,999,961
Proteins	6,026,268	4,244,039	3,771,947	3,269,814	3,202,411
Linseed	—[2]	1,384,788	1,376,113	1,052,701	1,803,395
Set-aside	6,864,098	9,367,276	9,281,101	7,343,384	4,152,753

[1] All eligible crops under the Simplified Scheme are paid at the cereals rate

[2] In 1993 linseed growers received subsidy under the linseed subsidy scheme but this cannot be broken down by county

Subsidy was also paid on hemp as follows:

Year	£
1993	7,090
1994	79,241
1995	176,484
1996	125,638
1997	234,432

In addition farmers in Suffolk will have benefited indirectly from a number of other EU support measures but this cannot be quantified on a county basis.

Knackers

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what measures he proposes to take to encourage farmers to make better use of the knackers' trade. [44358]

Mr. Rooker: It is for the livestock industry to take responsibility for disposing of its waste in a safe and sustainable manner. Nevertheless, the Department will continue to urge the industry to use knackers' yards and hunt kennels to dispose of fallen stock wherever possible. Officials will also continue to liaise with representatives of the knacker and farming industries over future arrangements for the disposal of fallen stock.

EU Support Payments

Dr. Cable: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the impact of the euro on *(a)* EU support payments, *(b)* farm incomes and *(c)* United Kingdom agricultural exports. [44143]

Mr. Rooker: The European Commission is expected to make proposals during June on the future of the EU agrimonetary arrangements. A detailed examination of the impact of the Euro on UK agriculture will need to be made in the light of those proposals.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to give United Kingdom farmers the choice of receiving EU support payments in sterling or euros; what assessment he has made of the impact of such a system; and if he will make a statement. [44144]

Mr. Rooker: We intend to examine this question in the light of the proposals on the future of the EU agrimonetary system which we expect from the European Commission in June.

Novel Foods

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on Article 8 of the Novel Foods Regulations (258/97/EC), with particular reference to the substantial equivalence criteria; and what plans he has to review those criteria. [44291]

Mr. Rooker: The labelling rules in the Novel Foods and Novel Food Ingredients Regulation (258/97) apply to all foods and food ingredients covered by the regulation including those considered under the simplified criteria on the grounds of substantial equivalence. There are no plans to review this regulation at this time. However, last month, detailed rules for labelling of genetically modified (GM) soya and maize ingredients were agreed which require all foods to be labelled where any material arising from the genetic modification process is present. These rules are expected to set a precedent for the way all future GM foods will be required to be labelled in Europe.

Milk Prices

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of reasons for the decrease in milk prices over the last year; and if he will make a statement. [44122]

Mr. Rooker: In March this year, milk producers received an average of about 19.7p per litre, which was nearly 4p lower than for the same period in 1997. The main factor was probably the strength of sterling and the related revaluations of the green pound. More generally, at the request of the Director General of Fair Trading, the Monopolies and Mergers Commission is currently investigating the supply of raw milk in Great Britain. It is due to report to the President of the Board of Trade in October.

Canadian Pedigree Friesians

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if meat from Canadian pedigree Friesians of over 30 months old slaughtered in the United Kingdom is permitted to be sold in the United Kingdom. [44717]

Mr. Rooker: No. The Fresh Meat (Beef Controls) (No 2) Regulations 1996, as amended, prohibit the sale for human consumption of any meat from a bovine animal over 30 months of age at the time of slaughter, whether in Great Britain or elsewhere, unless it is from a herd registered under the Beef Assurance Scheme or from one of the 14 countries exempted under the Regulations.

Brandy Butter

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if it is permitted to describe brandy, rum and whisky butters offered for retail sale as butter if they contain less then 34 per cent. milk fat; and if he will make a statement. [44712]

Mr. Rooker: From April 1999, only alcoholic butters (including brandy, rum and whisky butters) containing a minimum of 34 per cent. milk fat will be permitted to be described as such. This results from the adoption of Commission Regulation (EC) No. 623/98, which further amends Commission Regulation (EC) No. 577/97 relating to standards for spreadable fats. During the negotiations in Brussels, the UK did not support this particular rule which arbitrarily limits the milkfat content of products described using the term "butter".

Officials are working with the relevant companies to find ways to minimise the problems for UK manufacturers.

Hemp

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the advantages of hemp as a source for paper; and if it is his policy to promote the growing of hemp for that purpose. [44718]

Mr. Rooker: Hemp is a useful alternative crop, producing renewable raw material for a variety of uses including paper. The paper and hemp industries are best placed to examine and develop the market for hemp as a constituent of paper.

Subsidies

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the total sum spent on subsidies for the sale of food, fruit and vegetables from the EU in the most recent annual period for which figures are available. [44325]

Mr. Rooker: The total sum spent on directly subsidising sales of fruit and vegetables in 1997 through export refunds was 67 mecu (£49m at an average 1997 exchange rate of £1 = 1.3758 ecu). In addition, 6,214 mecu (£4,516m) was spent on directly subsidising the sale of other CAP

commodities through export refunds and aid under subsidised food programmes, although it is not possible to determine what proportion of export sales were for human consumption.

Food Destruction Costs

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the total sum spent by the EU on the destruction of food, fruit and vegetables in the most recent annual period for which figures are available. [44326]

Mr. Rooker: The total sum spent on withdrawals of fruit and vegetables from the market in 1997 was 293 mecu (£213m at an average 1997 exchange rate of £1 = 1.3758 ecu). Statistics on the destination of produce withdrawn in 1997 are not available, but an average 62 per cent. of withdrawn fruit and vegetables was destroyed between the 1989/90 and 1993/94 marketing years. In addition, £1.5m was spent on the disposal of 6,000 tonnes of intervention beef in 1997. This beef was purchased and stored before the restrictions on beef from animals over thirty months old were introduced in March 1996.

Livestock Support

Mr. Paice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give the levels of *(a)* suckler cow, *(b)* ewe premium and *(c)* HLCA payments for beef and sheep per animal in cash prices and at 1997 prices for each of the last five years and his proposals for 1998–99. [23484]

Mr. Rooker *[pursuant to his reply, 19 January 1998, c. 450]:* The information requested is set out in the following table. The proposed rates for 1998–1999 are not yet available.

Payment rates (£ per head)—Sheep Annual Premium Scheme, Suckler Cow Premium Scheme, Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowances

	Cash prices	*1997 prices*
Sheep annual premium:		
Including LFA supplement		
1993	24.41	27.32
1994	22.21	24.28
1995	26.95	28.47
1996	19.04	19.64
1997	n/a	n/a
Excluding LFA supplement		
1993	19.25	21.55
1994	16.96	18.54
1995	21.26	22.46
1996	13.66	14.09
1997	n/a	n/a
Suckler cow premium:		
Including extensification premia		
1993	93.90	105.12
1994	115.12	125.83
1995	143.04	151.10
1996	155.15	160.03
1997	[1]159.48	[1]159.48
1997	[2]146.52	[2]146.52

Payment rates (£ per head)—Sheep Annual Premium Scheme, Suckler Cow Premium Scheme, Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowances

	Cash prices	*1997 prices*
Excluding extensification premia		
1993	65.73	73.58
1994	87.49	95.63
1995	114.43	120.88
1996	124.12	128.02
1997	117.36	117.36
Hill livestock compensatory allowances:		
SDA beef cow		
1993	63.30	70.86
1994	47.50	51.92
1995	47.50	50.18
1996	47.50	48.99
1997	[3]97.50	97.50
DA beef cow		
1993	31.65	35.43
1994	23.75	25.96
1995	23.75	25.09
1996	23.75	24.50
1997	[4]69.75	69.75
SDA high rate ewe		
1993	6.50	7.28
1994	5.75	6.28
1995	5.75	6.07
1996	5.75	5.93
1997	5.75	5.75
SDA lower rate ewe		
1993	3.60	4.03
1994	3.00	3.28
1995	3.00	3.17
1996	3.00	3.09
1997	3.00	3.00
DA ewe rate		
1993	2.86	3.20
1994	2.44	2.67
1995	2.44	2.58
1996	2.65	2.73
1997	2.65	2.65

[1] Rate less than 1 livestock unit per hectare
[2] Rate greater than 1 livestock unit and less 1.4 livestock units per hectare
[3] Includes Beef special aid of £50.00
[4] Includes Beef special aid of £46.00
LFA = Less Favoured Area
SDA = Severely Disadvantaged Area
DA = Disadvantaged Area
Final Sheep Annual Premium rate for 1997 not yet fixed

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Sierra Leone

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Clarke), of 19 May 1998, *Official Report*, column *362*, if the briefings supplied to ministers on Sierra Leone contained information pertaining to the five intelligence reports on the supply of military equipment to Sierra Leone. [44036]

Mr. Robin Cook: I refer to my statement in the House during the debate on 18 May 1998, *Official Report*, columns 604–11, in which I announced the investigation by Sir Thomas Legg KCB QC into allegations about the

Government involvement with the supply of arms to Sierra Leone by UK citizens and firms, and said that the Terms of Reference would be placed in the Library of the House. I intend to publish the report of the investigation.

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if his Department's officials in Canada reported to his Department in London the allegations in the Toronto Globe and Mail of 31 July 1997 referred to by the hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) on 18 May 1998, *Official Report*, column 613. [43617]

Mr. Robin Cook *[holding answer 2 June 1998]:* The High Commission in Ottawa faxed the press article in question to the FCO under a letter summarising its substance in early August. There was no UN arms embargo on Sierra Leone at the time, nor did the article specify the possible supply of arms to that country.

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* parliamentary private secretaries in his Department have spoken to the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee on matters relating to the Committee's First Special report of Session 1997–98 (HC 760), Sierra Leone: Exchange of Correspondence with the Foreign Secretary. [44320]

Mr. Robin Cook *[holding answer 5 June 1998]:* I refer to the written answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister today, *Official Report*, column *425*. I met the Chairman of the Committee on 1 June. Among other issues, we discussed the Committee's request for the release of telegrams relating to Sierra Leone. I wrote to the Chairman of the Committee on this subject later the same day.

Schools Information (European Union)

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the information provided by the Government to schools on *(a)* the EU and *(b)* the euro, seeks to set out both the costs and the benefits of each. [43790]

Mr. Doug Henderson: We do not systematically provide schools with information about the EU or euro, although there are a number of Government publications which individual schools can request and all schools received a pack which included information about our EU Presidency at the start of this year. In general, literature produced by Government departments about the EU takes a factual approach, explaining particular policies and the UK's views rather than weighing up arguments for and against EU action. But the Treasury booklet "The Pros and Cons of EMU" sets out the main potential costs and benefits of the euro.

Cyprus

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the current situation in Cyprus and the initiatives being taken by his Department to resolve the conflicts on that island. [43743]

Mr. Doug Henderson: We continue to lend our full support to the United Nations Secretary-General's search for a settlement to the Cyprus problem, including through regular contacts with the parties and other members of the international community involved in working to end the tragic division of the island of Cyprus.

Colombia

Mr. Fitzpatrick: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what representations he has made to the Colombian Government regarding the assassination of the human rights lawyer, Eduardo Umana Mendoza, on 18 April 1998; [44149]

(2) what representations he has made to the Colombian Government regarding the assassination of the former leader of the Communist Party, Maria Arrango Fonnegra, on 16 April. [44150]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The British Ambassador, representing the EU presidency, made representations to the Colombian Government on 29 April unreservedly condemning the murders of the human rights defenders Eduardo Umana and Maria Arrango.

Mr. Fitzpatrick: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action the United Kingdom is taking to protect human rights workers in Colombia. [44151]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: At a political level, we raise the issue of the safety of human rights workers with the Colombian Government whenever the opportunity arises. At a practical level, officials at the British Embassy in Bogota have a regular dialogue with human rights NGOs, and the Ambassador and his Deputy carry out high-profile visits to areas of conflict to demonstrate their support for the work of human rights workers. These visits, in particular, are highly valued by NGOs. The UK and EU partners are also pressing the Colombian Government to make early and practical use of the US$1.2 million they have earmarked for the protection of human rights workers.

Mr. Fitzpatrick: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received on the links between sections of the Colombian Armed Forces and the paramilitary groups who are responsible for human rights violations in Colombia. [44148]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We have received numerous reports of collaboration between Colombian paramilitary groups and certain units of the Armed forces at local level. The Colombian Government have recently announced the disbanding of a particular Army Unit thought to have been involved in such collaboration.

Human Rights

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those countries which are currently party to the Lomé convention which his Department has assessed as failing in human rights terms. [44228]

Mr. Doug Henderson: No such assessment has been made. But the Government attach great importance to the human rights provisions of the Lomé Convention. We have been working during the UK Presidency to agree an internal procedure allowing the EU to implement the

human rights suspension clause introduced by the Mid Term Review of the fourth Lomé Convention. We hope this procedure will come into force in the autumn.

Bulgaria

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance he is giving to Bulgaria to aid its preparations for eventual membership of the European Union. [44381]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The Luxembourg European Council last December agreed to enhance the pre-accession strategy for the Central European EU applicants to help them prepare for membership. The principal new element of this strategy are the Accession Partnerships, which identify the main priority areas for each candidate where progress is necessary to meet the Copenhagen Criteria for membership. The UK Presidency implemented the remit from Luxembourg to conclude the Accession Partnerships by the end of March.

The EU's Phare programme will target the priorities identified in the Accession Partnerships. Between 1995 and 1999, Phare spending on Bulgaria will be 415 mecu. (UK share approximately £49 million). In addition, the Department for International Development's Know How Fund has provided approximately £15 million of assistance to Bulgaria since 1991. This has been designed to help the transition to democratic pluralism and a market economy, in particular, by supporting the strengthening of civil society and promoting social inclusiveness, paying particular attention to the needs of vulnerable groups.

Mercenaries

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans the Government have to sign the UN convention against the recruitment, use, financing and training of mercenaries; and if he will make a statement. [44560]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We have no plans at present to sign the UN Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries. We have doubts concerning its legal enforceability in the UK. We are looking at options for national domestic regulation of private military companies.

Nigeria

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on United Kingdom policy on the supply of arms to Nigeria. [44617]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The EU agreed a Common Position on Nigeria on 20 November 1995 which includes a full-scope arms embargo. The UK interprets the embargo to include all goods and technology on the Military List (part III of Schedule 1 of the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994). The Government enforce the embargo rigorously.

Algeria

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many visitor's visas have been granted to Algerian citizens in each of the last five years. [44463]

Mr. Fatchett: Information is held centrally on the visas issued by each entry clearance issuing Post, not by nationality.

Because visit visa applications may be made at any visa issuing Post irrespective of applicant's nationality, the figures requested can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Sudan

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to sponsor a resolution against Sudan in the UN Security Council as a result of the recent evidence of genocide in the northern area of Bahr Al Ghazal. [44829]

Mr. Fatchett: We are deeply concerned about the distressing human tragedy in the Sudan, particularly the current crisis in Bahr Al Ghazal region. On hearing of reports of killings in Northern Bahr Al Ghazal, I instructed our Embassy in Khartoum to convene a meeting of EU Ambassadors and arrange for collective EU views and comments. The Sudanese Ambassador was also called by the Foreign Office and asked for the GoS's explanation of what had taken place.

We will look at any proposals for new UNSCRs against the GoS on their merits and in light of the views of other Security Council members.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he plans to make to the Government of Sudan in respect of recent evidence of genocide in the northern area of Bahr Al Ghazal. [44828]

Mr. Fatchett: The Sudanese Ambassador was called on 29 May by a senior Foreign Office official. The official expressed our grave concern at the reports of killings in Northern Bahr Al Ghazal and asked for an explanation from the Government of Suden (GoS).

We will continue to be active in trying to find a solution to problems in the Sudan. As a next step, we have pressed for an early meeting of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development Partnership Forum. I shall represent the UK at a meeting in The Hague on 18 June.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Government of the Sudan in relation to the civil war in that country; and if he will make a statement. [44400]

Mr. Fatchett: The UK has long supported the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) peace process as the best chance to bring an end to the civil war in Sudan through a comprehensive negotiated settlement and this Government are active in promoting and reinvigorating the peace process.

As Presidency we issued an EU Declaration on 1 May which voiced European concerns and called upon all parties to implement an immediate cease-fire. It also urged parties to make every effort to come to a comprehensive negotiated settlement. At the UK's instigation, Sudan was discussed at the United Nations Security Council on 5 May and we have lobbied countries in the region, including the Government in Khartoum, to facilitate a negotiated settlement. In order to maintain the

momentum of the peace process, we pressed for an early meeting of the IGAD Partnership Forum, as a result of which the Netherlands will host a meeting on 17/18 June in The Hague. I will represent the UK. The Sudanese Government and Opposition are well aware of our views and my officials are in touch with all parties.

Afghanistan

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government in Afghanistan regarding human rights in that country; and if he will make a statement. [44397]

Mr. Fatchett: We do not consider there to be an effective government in Afghanistan. We remain deeply concerned by the continuing human rights abuses in Afghanistan. At the instigation of the UK, the EU adopted a Common Position on Afghanistan in January which included calls for an improvement in human rights. We regularly make representations to all the warring factions on the issue. We also urge Afghanistan's neighbours, both bilaterally and in the UN, to use their influence over the warring Afghan factions to bring the fighting and the human rights abuses to an end.

Cardiff Summit Table

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which suppliers of standard conference furniture were asked to submit quotations for the supply of a standard conference table for the European Summit in Cardiff; and what prices they quoted. [44620]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The conference table forms part of the overall event production contract for the European Council. Our event production company established from the major UK conference furniture suppliers that no table which fully met the specification was available for hire, (their researches showed that a conference table which was the right size, not the right configuration, for Cardiff City Hall could be hired, but would still cost more than half as much as having a table made which could be used in Cardiff and subsequently). They put all carpentry involved in the European Council and G8 contracts (for which they were also responsible) out to tender to three companies as a package in order to keep costs to a minimum. The company judged by our event production company to have the capacity to manage this scale of project at lowest cost was awarded the carpentry subcontract. They are making the frame of the table, but have further subcontracted the veneer top and cable management system to a specialist cabinet maker regularly used by them for this type of contract.

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs for what reasons the conference table ordered by his Department for the European Summit in Cardiff is not made of British materials. [44622]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The table for the European Council meeting in Cardiff is being made by a UK company, with a UK sub-contractor, who are responsible for sourcing materials for the table against cost and quality criteria. Of the major materials used, the steel is from the UK. The MDF is from the Republic of Ireland, on grounds of cost and availability. The oak for the veneer top comes from the USA. There are two reasons for using American rather than British oak: it is cheaper (British oak would cost 40 per cent. more); and the knotting grain pattern usually found in British oak would make a consistent veneer finish significantly more difficult to make.

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many designers were invited to submit proposals for the conference table ordered by his Department for the European Summit in Cardiff; how many different designs were costed; and if the cheapest design was selected. [44621]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The overall event production contract for the European Council (of which the conference table forms part) was awarded on the basis of an evaluation of the whole package put forward in the tender, not any single element. Six event production companies were invited to tender. Two declined to bid, and two others merged and submitted a joint bid. The three bids were evaluated against a comprehensive set of criteria, including cost and quality. Of those judged to meet an acceptable standard, the cheapest bidder was appointed.

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was *(a)* the originally quoted price and *(b)* the price paid for the conference table ordered by his Department for the European Summit in Cardiff. [44619]

Mr. Doug Henderson: In the original tender for the overall event production contract for the European Council (which includes the conference table) in August 1997, the company which won the contract quoted £38,640 for the table. We have not yet received a bill for the table, but expect it to cost about £50,000. We understand from the event production company that the cost has risen (i) because specialist advice on the acoustics of the Assembly room in Cardiff City hall has led to a sound system being built into the table (which was not part of the original specification), and (ii) because we asked the company to have the table made in adaptable modular format so as to be usable in different rooms (the original specification applied only to City Hall in Cardiff)—this involved making two extra endpieces.

HEALTH

Emergency Contraception

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Health from what sources emergency contraception can currently be obtained. [43701]

Ms Jowell: The emergency contraceptive pill is classified as a prescription-only medicine under United Kingdom and European Community legislation. It is available from most general practitioners and against a prescription from pharmacies, family planning clinics, some accident and emergency units and many genitourinary clinics.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reasons emergency contraception pills are classified as prescription-only medicines. [43700]

Ms Jowell: The emergency contraceptive pill is classified as a prescription-only medicine under criteria embodied in United Kingdom and European Community legislation. It is considered to be a product which is likely to present a direct or indirect danger to human health, even when used correctly, if used without the supervision of a doctor. There is also concern about the potential for the emergency contraceptive pill to be used incorrectly, if used without medical supervision.

Benzodiazapines

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of harm caused to unborn babies from their mothers taking benzodiazapines during their pregnancy there have been in each of the last five years. [44073]

Ms Jowell: Information on the number of babies born to mothers taking benzodiazepines during pregnancy who have congenital abnormalities or experience complications is not available. The number of congenital anomalies and neonatal complications reported to the Committee on Safety of Medicines through the United Kingdom's spontaneous adverse drug reaction scheme from 1 January 1992 to 31 December 1997 suspected as associated with benzodiazepines is shown in the table.

Year	*Number of suspected adverse reaction reports of congenital anomalies and neonatal complications associated with benzodiazepines*
1993	5
1994	0
1995	0
1996	1
1997	5

A report of a suspected adverse drug reaction does not necessarily mean that it was caused by the drug, as factors such as underlying disease and concomitant medication may be contributory. The level of reporting of adverse drug reactions with particular drugs is influenced by the scale of drug usage, the period of time the drug has been on the market and publicity about the drug.

Private Residential and Nursing Homes

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment he has made of the way in which social services departments interpret the regulations and guidance issued by his Department concerning eligibility for funding elderly people in private residential and nursing homes; [44831]

(2) what plans he has to issue further guidance to all local authority social services departments setting out their responsibilities to ensure a common approach to eligibility for funding of private residential and nursing homes for older people; [44830]

(3) what representations his Department has received concerning elderly people in private residential and nursing homes mistakenly using their own savings to pay for accommodation and treatment which should be funded by local authorities. [44832]

Mr. Boateng: The contribution to be made by people placed by local authorities in residential or nursing homes towards the costs of their care is governed by the National Assistance (Assessment of Resources) Regulations 1992 No. 2977. We update these Regulations annually and issue clarifying guidance which takes account of points raised in representations made to the Department in the course of the year about the operation of the system. The most recent guidance, Local Authority Circular b(98)8, was issued in March 1998, copies of which are available in the Library. In order to receive local authority support, a person must undergo an assessment of their care needs by the local authority to determine the type and level of care needed, and if residential and nursing home care is arranged, a financial assessment to determine their contribution towards the cost. Concerns have been expressed about the way the elderly residents' savings have been treated in residential care and nursing homes. The Community Care (Residential Accommodation) Bill, will ensure that once a person has been assessed as needing residential or nursing home care they will not have to use savings below the capital threshold set out in the Regulations to contribute towards the costs. Subject to this becoming law, we will issue guidance to accompany it.

Cannabis

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make available the research his Department has commissioned into the effects of cannabis. [44970]

Ms Jowell: Reports of literature reviews addressing the following aspects have now been submitted to the Department in their final form following peer review:

Clinical and Pharmacological Aspects—Professor Heather Ashton (Newcastle University)

Psychological and Psychiatric Aspects—Dr. Andrew Johns (Institute of Psychiatry)

Therapeutic Aspects of Cannabis and Cannabinoids—Dr. Philip Robson (Oxford University).

These reviews were commissioned by the Department but intellectual property right lies with the authors. The views are their own, and are not necessarily those of the Department of Health. Copies have been placed in the Library.

Heroin

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the recent Swiss pilot scheme for the provision of injectable heroin to addicts; and if his Department will be represented in the conference on this subject in the USA in June. [44215]

Ms Jowell: There is already experience in the United Kingdom of prescribing the diamorphine (pharmaceutical heroin) albeit only for a small number of people in drug treatment. The Swiss trials indicate that it is feasible to use diamorphine under strictly controlled conditions as part of a comprehensive social and psychological intervention. In the absence of any comparative trials it is difficult to determine the value of the diamorphine provision as distinct from other aspects of the treatment package.

We will look carefully at the outcome of the New York conference on heroin maintenance that took place on 6 June 1998 and will be represented at the United General Assembly Special Session on drugs in New York this month.

Smoking

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to tackle the current increase in smoking amongst young women. [42962]

Ms Jowell: In 1998/99, we are funding a Health Education Authority run adult smoking education campaign costing £5.5 million, which identifies five key target groups—two of these groups are adults in the 16–24 age group and women and pregnant women.

We also fund a teenage smoking campaign costing £1 million which especially focuses on teenage girls (ages 11–15). I recently launched the latest phase of the campaign, the "Respect" roadshow, which aims to reach out to teenagers in settings that are attractive to them and involve them in lively, absorbing presentations which illustrate that life without cigarettes is not only possible but desirable.

We are currently considering possible ways in which to reduce tobacco consumption and our conclusions will form part of the Tobacco Control White Paper, which will be published later this year.

Prescriptions

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if it is his policy to limit NHS prescriptions to cover a maximum period of 28 days; and if he will make a statement. [44714]

Mr. Milburn: No. Prescribers determine the period of a prescription, taking into account the clinical condition of patients and the need to minimise waste.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to review the powers of health authorities to rule out prescribing drugs with proven clinical benefits on the grounds of cost; and if he will make a statement. [44399]

Mr. Milburn: Health authorities are responsible for using their resources to the best effect to meet the health needs of their populations. We are proposing a national, authoritative source of guidance to help the National Health Service assess the clinical and cost effectiveness of new treatments including new medicines.

Primary Care Groups

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance he is giving to health authorities on setting up primary care groups in natural communities which have populations of less than 80,000 people. [44402]

Mr. Milburn: Health Service Circular 1998/065, which we published in April, said that primary care groups will be based on natural geographical communities of people, typically covering around 100,000 population. However, we have made clear that it is the functions which a primary care group will carry out that will determine its size, shape and configuration.

Nurses and Doctors

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many *(a)* nurses and *(b)* doctors were recruited to the National Health Service in (i) 1995–96, (ii) 1996–97 and (iii) 1997–98; [44477]

(2) how many *(a)* nurses and *(b)* doctors were employed in the National Health Service in (i) 1995–96, (ii) 1996–97 and (iii) 1997–98. [44476]

Mr. Milburn: The information requested about the numbers of doctors and nurses employed by the National Health Service can be found in the Department's statistical bulletins: "Hospital, Public Health Medicine and Community Health Service Medical and Dental Staff in England: 1986 to 1996" (the latest year for which information is available) and "NHS Hospital and Community Health Services Non-medical Staff in England: 1987–1997", copies of which are available in the Library. Information about the number of nurses joining the NHS is collected by the Office of Manpower and Economics and published in the annual reports of the Review Body for Nursing staff, Midwives, Health Visitors, copies of which are in the Library. Information about the recruitment of doctors is not collected centrally.

Bed Occupancy

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS beds were occupied by people who were waiting to be transferred to either nursing homes, residential care homes or their own homes in *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97 and *(c)* 1997–98. [44396]

Mr. Boateng: Information on the number of patients aged 75 and over, ready for discharge but still occupying a hospital bed, has been collected through the routine quarterly monitoring system since April 1996. Before then, it was collected at six monthly intervals.

Copies of the information available have been placed in the Library.

NHS Waiting Lists

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if it is his policy to establish targets for the average number of months waited by patients; and if he will make a statement. [44716]

Mr. Milburn: No. Our commitment over the lifetime of the Parliament is to reduce National Health Service waiting lists by 100,000 from the record level we inherited. Bringing down waiting lists—and keeping them down—will in turn bring down waiting times.

As a first step, we have achieved our target of eliminating long waits. At the end of March 1998, for the first time in the history of the National Health Service, no English resident has been waiting more than 18 months for treatment.

We are also committed to ensuring that—by the year 2000—everyone with suspected cancer will be able to see a specialist within 2 weeks of urgent practitioner referral. This guarantee will apply from April 1999 for breast cancer.

SOCIAL SECURITY

New Deal (Lone Parents)

5. **Mr. Letwin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans she has to introduce an element of compulsion into the new deal for lone parents. [42932]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The New Deal for Lone Parents is a voluntary programme. There is no question of us trying to compel lone parents to go out to work rather than looking after their children.

Pensions

6. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will make a statement on the proportion of the population which will be covered by the extension of second-tier pensions. [42933]

Ms Harman: For the second pensions, the Government have two objectives:

All those who could be paying into a second pension do so, and;

when they do pay into a second pension they get good value for money.

Today, we are publishing a draft bill, 'Pension Sharing on Divorce' which will ensure that, on divorce, women will get a fair share of pension rights.

32. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what recent representations he has received from organisations representing pensioners on pension levels. [42959]

Mr. Denham: The Department does not maintain information in the form requested. However, the Pensions Review has received over 2,000 written responses as part of its public consultation exercise; 652 of these responses commented on the uprating of State pensions. In addition, Ministers have personally met Pensioner Groups—such as National Pensions Convention, Public Service Pensioners Council, Pensioners Voice, British—Pensioners Trade Union Action Association, National Association of Retired Police Officers, National Federation of British Telecom and Post Office Pensioners and Southwark Pensioners Action Group—as well as groups representing the interests of pensioners—such as Age Concern and Help the Aged—to listen to their views.

As we promised in our manifesto, we have uprated the basic pension at least in line with prices. From April, the basic pension is £103.40 a week for a couple and £64.70 for a single pensioner. We have also provided additional help of £400 million to help pensioners with their fuel bills for last winter and next winter.

The Government's pensions review is examining the value of the basic State pension including the future uprating of pensions. The Review will report later this year.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the effect on current revenues from employee and employer national insurance contributions if all those currently accruing rights to a SERPS pension were to contract out into an approved personal pension. [44629]

Mr. Denham: The additional revenue forgone in terms of National Insurance rebates for the tax year 1998/99 is estimated to be £4 billion.

Pensioners (Income Support)

20. **Mr. Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will make a statement about the number of pensioners receiving income support. [42947]

Mr. Denham: The latest available figures show there are around 1.7 million pensioners receiving income support. In addition, there are an estimated 1 million pensioners who are entitled to Income Support but not claiming it. These figures represent in total around one in four pensioners.

A key objective of the pensions review is to ensure that pensioners should have an adequate income in retirement; that they should share fairly in rising national prosperity and that public finances should be both sustainable and affordable.

For today's pensioners, we have commissioned research to find out why so many pensioners fail to claim their Income Support entitlement, and we are running pilots in nine areas to find the best ways of getting help to them.

Mr. Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many *(a)* pensioners living alone and *(b)* pensioner households aged (i) between the state retirement age and 75 years, (ii) 75 and 85 years and (iii) above 85 years are dependent on income support. [43801]

Mr. Denham: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the table.

Pensioners claiming income support, November 1997

Marital status	*State retirement age to 74*	*75 to 84*	*Age Group 85 years and over*
Couple	103,000	56,000	18,000
Single	436,000	444,000	250,000
All	539,000	501,000	268,000

Notes:

1. Figures for single claimants are based on claimants without a partner.
2. Pensioners are defined as men aged 65 and over, and women aged 60 and over. The age of a couple is determined by the age of the eldest partner.
3. Numbers are rounded to the nearest thousand cases.
4. Figures are based on a 5 per cent. sample, and are subject to a degree of sampling error.
5. This analysis excludes pensioners in residential care and nursing homes.

Source:

Income Support Statistics Quarterly Inquiry, November 1997.

Benefits Appeals

23. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps she proposes to introduce within her Department to enable benefits appeals to be dealt with more speedily. [42950]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The Social Security Act 1998, which received Royal Assent on 21 May, paves the way for modernising the delivery of social security, including

the handling of appeals. A wide range of measures—some of which we are introducing immediately—will streamline the administration of appeals and ensure appeals are dealt with more speedily. In particular, the Act enables the Secretary of State to assume responsibility for the administration of the appeals system. She will set and publish demanding targets for the administration of appeals and report on the results.

Benefits (Marriage and Illegitimacy)

24. **Mr. Brazier:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment her Department has made of the likely impact on marriage and illegitimacy of her proposed changes in the benefit system. [42951]

Mr. Field: The social implications of all proposed benefit changes are considered carefully. We believe that the family remains the fundamental building block of society and the new welfare system will offer support to families on the basis of the needs of children rather than on family structure or marital status. The Budget announcements of increases to benefits for children, the Childcare Tax Credit and the Working Families Tax Credit are clear evidence of our commitment to supporting families with children.

Pension Schemes

26. **Mr. Flight:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the new guidelines for the calculation of the minimum funding requirement for pension schemes will be published. [42953]

Mr. Denham: The actuarial profession's proposals for a change to the valuation method have been agreed, and their guidance note is being revised. There is an ongoing review of the minimum funding requirement's methodology.

34. **Dr. Julian Lewis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what factors underlay her decision not to initiate a review of the minimum funding requirement immediately after the July Budget. [42961]

Mr. Denham: The methodology and actuarial assumptions in the minimum funding requirement were devised by the Faculty and Institute of Actuaries. We were informed that they would be carrying out a review following the July Budget. We fed into that review a report by the Government Actuary, whose views we had sought on a number of issues.

Disabled People

25. **Mr. Hayes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans the Government have to tax benefits for people with disabilities. [42952]

Mr. Denham: We have made it clear in our Green Paper that Disability Living Allowance and Attendance Allowance will remain national and universal benefits and as such they will not be subject to a means test. Taxation is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, but we have no current plans to tax DLA: there were no such proposals in the Green Paper. Equally, there are no plans to tax Income Support (the income-related benefit paid to many people with disabilities) War Pensions or Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit.

30. **Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will make a statement on the number of people with some level of disability in the United Kingdom; and how many of them receive state benefits. [42957]

Mr. Denham: There is no generally agreed formula for defining disabled people. The Disability Survey suggests that there are some 8.6 million disabled adults in private households. The numbers who receive benefits as a result of their disability are shown in the table.

Benefit	*Recipients*[1,6]	*Date*
Income Support	[2,4,5]892,000	August 1997
Disability Working Allowance	14,813	September 1997
Disability Living Allowance	2,096,000	February 1998
Attendance Allowance	1,279,000	February 1998
Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit	[7]272,000	—
War Disablement Pensions	258,363	April 1998
Severe Disablement Allowance	369,000	November 1997
Incapacity Benefit	1,701,000	November 1997
Jobseeker's Allowance	17,000	August 1997

[1] These figures do not take into account any benefit overlap
[2] Numbers for Income Support, Jobseeker's Allowance, Incapacity Benefit and Severe Disablement Allowance are rounded to the nearest thousand
[3] Figures are taken from a 5 per cent. sample except Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit which is 10 per cent., Disability Working Allowance and War Disablement Pension which are 100 per cent.
[4] The Income Support figure excludes cases who transferred to Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance with effect from October 1996
[5] Income Support and Jobseeker's Allowance are based on claims receiving disability premium when either the claimant or partner is disabled
[6] All figures are for United Kingdom except War Disablement Pensions which is United Kingdom plus Overseas, Severe Disablement Allowance, Incapacity Benefit and Jobseeker's Allowance are for Great Britain
[7] Figures for Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit are for Great Britain at April 1997 and Northern Ireland figures are at February 1998

Disability Living Allowance

27. **Mr. Oaten:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when she will respond to the fourth report of the Social Security Committee on disability living allowance (HC 641). [42954]

Mr. Denham: We will be making a full response to the Social Security Select Committee's report in due course and in doing so we will adhere to the usual conventions set out by the Procedure Committee.

31. **Mr. Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people have been taken off disability benefit in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [42958]

Mr. Denham: The information is not available in the format requested. 269,000 Attendance Allowance awards and 145,000 Disability Living Allowance awards ceased in the 12 months ending April 1998.

Information is not available on the reasons for cessation, but these will include death, absence abroad, and non-renewal of a fixed period award, as well as withdrawal where the benefits agency found that the conditions of entitlement were no longer satisfied.

Note:

Figures based on 100 per cent. data, rounded to the nearest thousand.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment she has made of the percentage of people who, following a review, are denied the care component payments of the disability living allowance; how many of these people are terminally ill; and if she will make a statement. [44398]

Mr. Denham: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the tables.

Disability living allowance review decisions in 1997–98

Decisions	*Amount*
All Decisions	370,054
Review allowed[1]	44,288
Award increased[2]	90,075
Other decisions[3]	235,691

Notes:
[1] Reviews within three months of the original decision determined in the claimant's favour
[2] Reviews where there are relevant changes in circumstances and the rates of either component increased
[3] Cases where benefit is disallowed, decreased or unchanged
Source:
Analytical Services Division: 100 per cent. data

DLA terminally ill cases[1]

Cases	*1996–97*[2]	*[2]1997–98*
Cleared[3]	26,890	23,907
Awarded on initial claim[4]	24,830	22,160
Awarded on review[4]	5,760	4,380

[1] Figures relate to terminally ill cases which are classed as 'special rule'. For these cases the three month qualifying period is not required and processing takes priority over other cases
[2] Figures relate to 12 months ending February
Note:
The cleared figure which relates to initial claims only, includes people awarded benefit, disallowed benefit and also cases withdrawn before being decided. These figures indicate that the success rate for terminal ill claimants is high
Sources:
[3] Analytical Services Division: 100 per cent. data
[4] Analytical Services Division: 5 per cent. data

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what discussions she has had with medical authorities regarding terminally-ill people who are denied the care component element of disability living allowance; and if she will make a statement. [44404]

Mr. Denham: None. When a claim is received and the information contained on the medical condition is not sufficient to determine the claim, advice is sought from Benefits Agency Medical Service doctors. They will consult with the claimant's General Practitioner, Consultant or other health professional to ascertain the nature of the condition and the effects on that person's needs.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans she has to reform the process of awarding the care component element of disability living allowance; and if she will make a statement. [44405]

Mr. Denham: The Green Paper, "New ambitions for our country: A new contract for welfare", published on 26 March makes clear our commitment to the principle of providing special allowances to help with the extra costs of disability. We will maintain Disability Living Allowance and Attendance Allowance as universal national benefits for those who meet the conditions of entitlement. These benefits will not be means tested.

We have also given a clear commitment that, in taking forward any proposals to change these benefits, we will consult disabled people, their organisations and others with an interest. For this reason, we are setting up a new Disability Benefits Forum with organisations of and for disabled people, to discuss how the system can be reformed to ensure that benefits go to those who need them. Details of the Forum will be published shortly.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment she has made of the impact of the review system for terminally ill people receiving the care component of disability living allowance; and if she will make a statement. [44406]

Mr. Denham: Procedures are already in place to fast track initial claims and any subsequent review requests from people who are terminally ill.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what factors are taken into account when assessing whether a claimant is entitled to receive the care component of disability living allowance. [44407]

Mr. Denham: The factors taken into account are the effects of a person's disability on their day to day life as described in their self-reporting claim form. Information provided by a person's General Practitioner and/or hospital consultant or other health professional is also factored into these considerations. Adjudication Officers consult Benefits Agency Medical Services doctors on the nature and effects of disabilities. Information is also available to Adjudication Officers in the Disability Handbook which is compiled by senior doctors of this Department and approved and monitored by the Disability Living Allowance Advisory Board.

Benefit Advisers

28. **Helen Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans she has to increase the number of benefit advisers working in the Benefits Agency. [42955]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Staff throughout the Agency offer a range of advice to customers. In line with Ministers' aims of achieving welfare reform and providing an Active Modern Service, we are developing an integrated approach to provision of advice, both in respect of benefit entitlement and in terms of broader welfare considerations. This approach reflects the principle that customers can be better served by greater co-ordination of services which have traditionally been provided by wholly separate organisations.

We are currently evaluating the ways in which such co-ordination might best be achieved. This may involve the deployment of more caseworkers, not only within the Benefits Agency, but also in partner organisations such as Employment Services, Local Authorities, other DSS Agencies and the wider welfare community including the private sector.

Children

29. **Mr. Derek Twigg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will make a statement on the action the Government have taken to improve the support for children through the social security system. [42956]

Mr. Keith Bradley: In his Budget Statement, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer set out a number of measures for families with children. From November 1998, there will be a £2.50 increase in the under-11 child allowance in Income Support (IS), Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), Housing Benefit (HB), Council Tax Benefit (CTB), Family Credit and Disability Working Allowance. From April 1999, Child Benefit for the eldest child and the family premium in IS, JSA, HB and CTB will be increased by £2.50.

Support for children will also be substantially improved by the introduction of a childcare tax credit which is designed to make support for children through the tax system more generous and more transparent.

In addition to these measures, increases in the childcare disregard for in-work benefits came into force from 1 June. The maximum disregard is now £100 a week for families incurring childcare costs for two or more children of qualifying age and the upper age limit for children has been extended by a year.

Long-term Sick and Disabled People

33. **Mr. Purchase:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps she has taken to help the long-term sick and disabled into work. [42960]

Mr. Denham: The Government are committed to improving opportunities and incentives for disabled people who want to work, whilst providing appropriate support to those who cannot. There are four strands to our strategy for helping people with disabilities or long-term sickness who want to work; taking action to help make work pay; providing the active help and encouragement people with disabilities need to move into work; removing obstacles to work from the benefits system; and promoting radical change in the work place to ensure equality and opportunity.

Specific initiatives include the New Deal for Disabled People, under which we will pilot a new Personal Adviser Service and fund a number of innovative schemes to test ways of helping disabled people who want to work; changes to benefit rules, including a new 52 week linking rule for incapacity benefits to be introduced from this October; the Disabled Persons Tax Credit, which we are developing to replace and enhance Disability Working Allowance; and the Disability Rights Task Force, which we have set up to advise on the best ways to secure civil rights and maximise the benefits of the Disability Discrimination Act (the remaining provisions of which we are committed to implementing). We are also setting up a Disability Rights Commission, to promote, protect and enforce the rights of disabled people.

Ministers for Women

35. **Caroline Flint:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will make a statement on the priorities of the Ministers for Women during the UK presidency of the European Union. [42963]

Ms Harman: The theme of the UK Presidency is employability. We have been clear from the outset that this means the employability of women as well as men. The importance of child care and family friendly employment policies—two of the priorities of the Ministers for Women—are key to this.

On 5–6 May we called a meeting of the EU Ministers for Women to discuss women's employability—at this highly successful conference.

- a consensus was reached on the importance of affordable, accessible and high quality child care and family friendly working policies;
- it was agreed that the Ministers for Women would meet at least once a year in the future to exchange ideas and best practice in these areas; and
- the need to include women's concerns through all employment policies, both at a national and EU level, has been firmly placed on the EU agenda.

Ms Kingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will make a statement on the outcome of the meeting in Belfast on the EU Presidency Conclusions on Women and Employability. [42927]

Ms Harman: The theme of the UK Presidency is employability. We have been clear from the outset that this means the employability of women as well as men. That is why we called the meeting of EU Ministers for Women which we held in Belfast on 5–6 May.

The meeting focused in particular on the importance of child care and family friendly employment policies, and provided a valuable opportunity to share best practice with our EU partners. The meeting reached a consensus on the following key points.

- Affordable, accessible, and high-quality child care, parental and other leave schemes, and family-friendly working policies are essential for women and men to combine work and family responsibilities.
- Equality between women and men must be included in all employment polices, both at national and EU level; so that measures to improve employability and support the unemployed take the rights and needs of women and men fully in account.
- Meetings of Ministers for Women and for Equality provide useful opportunities for the exchange of ideas and best practice and developing strategies. They intend to meet at least once a year in future.

Member states expressed their commitment to drive forward these initiatives and will use proposed future meetings to do so.

Benefits (Young People)

36. **Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many representations she has recently received on the inability of 16 and 17-year-olds to claim benefits; and if she will make a statement. [42964]

Mr. Keith Bradley: As well as informal approaches, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has received 28 letters in the last year relating to the benefit entitlement of 16 and 17-year-olds. Sixteen of these related to Income Support and 12 to Jobseeker's Allowance. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment has received four letters and one Parliamentary Question on this topic in the last year.

Service Delivery

37. **Mr. Caplin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will make a statement on Government actions to improve the quality of service delivery in the social security system during the last year. [42965]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Improved service delivery is central to our approach to welfare reform. Our services must actively help people to move off welfare and into work.

In December 1997, we launched our Active Modern Service programme to transform Social Security by building a system that commands the support and confidence of those who use it, those who administer it and those who fund it, providing a better, simpler, more efficient service to clients.

The focus of our effort will be to provide services that clients need. We will achieve a much better outcome if we include them in the debate. On 18 June 1998, we will be speaking to client representatives to begin to tell them of our plans and consult them about the way forward.

Much has begun to be put in place, enhanced quality of service delivery by improving decision making, closer working initiatives with Local Authorities, pilots to test the automatic delivery of benefit for pensioners and personal advisors for Lone Parents and the Disabled.

Social Security Expenditure

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to her answer of 27 February 1998, *Official Report*, column *380*, if she will provide a breakdown of the figures for non-cyclical social security expenditure between benefits for the *(a)* elderly and *(b)* non-elderly. [44653]

Mr. Field: The information requested is set out in the table.

Non-cyclical social security expenditure

£ million

Year	*Elderly*	*Non-elderly*
1978–79	26,918	16,882
1979–80	26,718	18,277
1980–81	27,025	17,392
1981–82	29,157	18,926
1982–83	30,532	19,626
1983–84	31,627	21,328
1984–85	31,943	22,213
1985–86	33,082	22,694
1986–87	34,453	23,774
1987–88	34,475	24,085
1988–89	33,423	23,802
1989–90	33,958	23,903
1990–91	34,835	25,139
1991–92	36,517	27,735
1992–93	37,673	31,283
1993–94	39,196	34,333
1994–95	39,456	35,661
1995–96	39,826	37,007
1996–97	40,799	38,312
1997–98	41,311	38,740
1998–99	41,820	39,212
1999–2000	42,274	39,819

Notes:

1. Figures have been taken from the 1997 Social Security Departmental Report as well as earlier equivalent publications. The figures exclude the cost of Administration
2. The figures for 1996–97 are estimates of expenditure in that year. Revised figures for the years 1996–97 to 1998–99 have been included in the 1998 Social Security Departmental Report. Figures for subsequent years are not included as they are subject to the findings of the Comprehensive Spending Review, the results of which are expected later this year
3. Benefits have been allocated according to the main reason they are paid in order to provide figures consistent with tables in the Social Security Departmental Report. This means that some benefits, such as Attendance Allowance, have been included in the non-elderly totals shown in the table, even though they may be paid to elderly people.

Family Income

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimates she has made of the level of income required to support a family with children relative to a family with no children. [44630]

Mr. Keith Bradley: There are many factors which affect the financial needs of a family, including the presence of children. These are reflected in the structure of allowances in the income-related benefits.

The new welfare system will provide better support to families with children. That is why we have announced a £2.50 increase in Child Benefit for the eldest child and a £2.50 increase in the family premium in the income-related benefits. We have announced further help for vulnerable families with young children through a £2.50 increase in the under 11 child allowances.

These measures will help families to give every child a better start.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people have lost their entitlement to incapacity benefit because of the all work test since its introduction; and what percentage of those were *(a)* over 50 and *(b)* over 55 years. [43046]

Mr. Denham: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the table.

Incapacity Benefit recipients found capable of work following application of the all work test

	Number
13 April 1995 to 31 August 1996	
Numbers (all ages)	178,000
1 September 1996 to 30 November 1997	
Numbers (all ages)	251,000
Percentage aged 50 and over	31
Percentage aged 55 and over	18

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest thousand
2. Due to initial data collection problems, the proportion of recipients found capable of work broken down by age is not available from 13 April 1995 to 31 August 1996
3. Figures include recipients found capable after initial referral for the all work test and after re-referrals
4. The all work test is not applicable to Incapacity Benefit recipients aged 58 or over on 13 April 1995 who had been in receipt of Invalidity Benefit continuously between 1 December 1993 and 12 April 1995

Source:
13 April 1995 to 31 August 1997. 100 per cent. count of the computer system; excludes a small number of cases not on the system
1 September 1996 to 30 November 1997. 5 per cent. sample of the computer system; excludes a small number of cases not on the system

Domestic Violence

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what support her Department gives to those fleeing domestic violence. [42928]

Ms Ruddock: Income-related benefits are available to women fleeing domestic violence. However, we are aware that women are not always offered the full range of support services they may need.

As Ministers for Women, tackling violence against women is one of out three key priorities. In drawing up our National Strategy, we are consulting with experts in the field of domestic violence, and listening to the views of women who have suffered domestic violence, to build a strategy to help prevent domestic violence; protect those who suffer it; and bring to justice those who perpetrate it.

Pensioners (Scotland)

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people and what proportion of those over 60 years old in Scotland receive *(a)* income support, *(b)* housing benefit, *(c)* council tax benefit and *(d)* income from disability benefits. [43812]

Mr. Denham: The information is set out in the table.

Benefit	*Number*	*Proportion of population per cent.*
Income Support[1]	172,000	16.6
All Housing Benefit[2]	230,000	22.2
All Council Tax Benefit[2]	292,000	28.2
Income Support claimants receiving a disability related premium[1,3]	79,000	7.6
Housing Benefit recipients with income from disability benefits[2,4]	81,000	7.9
Council Tax Benefit recipients with income from disability benefits[2,4]	91,000	8.8
Attendance Allowance[5]	122,000	11.7
Disability Living Allowance[5]	83,000	8.0
War Disablement Pensioners[6]	25,000	2.4
Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit[7]	12,000	1.1
Incapacity Benefit[8]	56,000	5.4
Severe Disablement Allowance[8]	6,000	0.6

[1] Claimants as at November 1997. Number of claimants aged 60 or over is based on benefit units who receive a pensioner premium. It may therefore include some claimants who are under 60 years whose partner is aged 60 or over
[2] Figures as at May 1996. The information refers to benefit units which may be a single person or a couple. The data do not include second adult rebate cases
[3] Claimants with a disability premium are also included in the total of 172,000 IS claimants in Scotland aged 60 or over. Claimants with disability related premiums are claimants aged 60 to 79 with a Higher Pensioner Premium or claimants with Severe Disability Premium
[4] Information for recipients with income from disability benefits refers to benefit units where there is either a disability premium or a higher pensioner premium in payment
[5] Figures relate to November 1997
[6] Figures as at February 1998
[7] Figures as at April 1997
[8] Recipients as at November 1997

Notes:
1. As at October 1997 there were only a negligible number of Disability Working Allowance recipients in Scotland aged 60 or over
2. Figures rounded to the nearest thousand

Sources:
1. Income Support Statistics Quarterly Enquiry—a 5 per cent. sample
2. Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit, Housing Benefit with income from disability benefits and Council Tax Benefit with income from disability benefits are from Housing Benefit Management Information System—a 1 per cent. sample with and without Income Support
3. Attendance Allowance, Disability Allowance figures are based on a 5 per cent. sample of data from the Analytical Services Division
4. War Disablement Pensioner figures are derived from a 5 per cent. sample from the War Pensions Computer System
5. Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit figures are based on a 10 per cent. sample of data from the Analytical Services Division which includes an adjustment for late statistical returns
6. Incapacity Benefit and Severe Disablement Allowance figures are taken from a 5 per cent. sample of the PSCS(INCAP) system which excludes a small number of cases held clerically
7. Population figures are from the Office of National Statistics as at June 1996

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate her Department has made of the number of people of pensionable age in Scotland in each year to 2010. [43809]

Mr. Denham: The information is set out in the table.

Projected numbers of people of pensionable age for Scotland 1998—2010

000s

Year	*Population estimate*
1998	918
1999	920
2000	922
2001	923
2002	925
2003	930
2004	935
2005	938
2006	942
2007	956
2008	968
2009	980
2010	984

Notes:
1. The table is based on population projections for Scotland provided by the Government Actuary's Department based on population estimates for 1996
2. The estimates take account of the equalisation of State Pension Age from 2010
3. All figures are rounded to the nearest thousand

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of people aged (i) 64 to 74 years and (ii) 75 years and over in Scotland live alone. [43813]

Mr. Denham: The proportion of people aged 64 to 74 years and 75 years and over in Scotland who live alone is 32 per cent. and 55 per cent. respectively.

Notes:

1. The figures are based on information from the Family Resources Survey 1995–96.

2. Figures are rounded to the nearest 1 per cent.

3. Calculations for the number of people living alone are based on the number of people who report no other adults or children in their household. For this reason figures may be subject to misreporting.

4. The Family Resources Survey does not cover those pensioners who are in hospital or residential care and therefore these people are not included in the estimates.

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many and what percentage of pensioners in Scotland currently receive the state retirement pension. [43814]

Mr. Denham: The number and percentage of people above State pension age in Scotland currently receiving the State Retirement Pension is 863,500 and 94 per cent. respectively.

Notes:

1. The figures are based on information from the Pensions Strategy Computer System and from the Scottish Registrar's population estimates.

2. Figures for the number in receipt of State Retirement Pension are rounded to the nearest one hundred. Figures are rounded to the nearest 1 per cent.

Housing Benefit Fraud

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will make a statement on the level of fraud in housing benefit. [42941]

Mr. Field: We have made it clear in our Green Paper that rooting out fraud is an essential part of welfare reform. We are undertaking a fundamental review of the Department's counter-fraud strategies to ensure a coherent, well-prioritised programme to reduce overall fraud levels through earlier prevention, more effective deterrence and better detection.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 9 June 1998

NORTHERN IRELAND

European Structural Funds

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the costs were in each year since 1990 of administering European Structural Fund programmes in Northern Ireland. [43842]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The information for the Northern Ireland Office and the Northern Ireland Departments is as follows:

Year	*£000*
1990–91	3,484
1991–92	3,831
1992–93	3,999
1993–94	4,007
1994–95	4,169
1995–96	4,731
1996–97	5,332
1997–98	5,528

Notes:

1. The figures relate to the salary costs of staff who are directly involved in administering the EU Structural Fund Programmes.
2. Information for the Northern Ireland Office and the Department of Health and Social Services was not readily available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.
3. The figure for 1990–91 is not consistent with the following years as some records were not available in that year.

Belfast Agreement

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many copies of the Belfast Agreement were printed in *(a)* the English and *(b)* the Irish language; what was the cost of producing each version (i) in total and (ii) per copy; and what is the sale price. [44094]

Mr. Paul Murphy: A total of 835,000 copies of the Agreement were printed in English and 10,000 in Irish. the production cost of the English version was £563,750 and the Irish version cost £6,550. The English version cost 67.5p per copy and the Irish version 65.5p. The document was made available free of charge to the public.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Vulnerable or Intimidated Witnesses

Angela Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the inter-departmental review of the Treatment of Vulnerable or Intimidated Witnesses announced on 13 June 1997 has now been completed; and if he proposes to publish its findings. [45260]

Mr. Straw: The review of the Treatment of Vulnerable or Intimidated Witnesses has now been completed and copies of the report of the Interdepartmental Working Group, which is being published for consultation purposes, will be placed in the Library tomorrow.

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to reply to the letters dated 18 February, 18 March and 30 April from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mr. R. H. Malik, of 15 The Avenue. [45097]

Mr. Straw: I wrote to my right hon. Friend on 8 June.

Community Sentence Orders

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his estimate of *(a)* the number of warrants issued by magistrates' courts in England and Wales in the last year for which figures are available in respect of breaches of community sentence orders and *(b)* the number of such warrants which remained unexecuted after six months from date of issue. [44123]

Ms Quin: I regret that this information is not available centrally.

Young Offenders

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his most recent estimate of the period he intends to set as a time limit between arrest and first appearance in court for a person under 18 years under section 22A(1) of the Prosecution of Offences Act 1985 as amended by section 41 of the Crime and Disorder Bill. [44348]

Mr. Michael: A decision on the level at which the statutory time limits should be set will be taken after piloting and once we have assessed the impact of new measures contained in the Crime and Disorder Bill [*Lords*] on time taken through the criminal justice system. Our plans for introducing a statutory time limit between arrest and first appearance in court, and for introducing statutory time limits for other stages in proceedings for a person under 18 years, are set out in chapter 10 of the White Paper 'No More Excuses—A New Approach To Tackling Youth Crime in England and Wales' (CM3809: November 1997). We intend first to pilot certain of the procedural changes introduced by the Crime and Disorder Bill, in particular provisions in section 46 (powers of magistrates' courts exercisable by single justice) and section 47 (early administrative hearings). Sites for these 'Narey' pilot areas were announced in the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, North (Mr. Rapson) on 3 June 1998, *Official Report*, column *219*. The six areas are: Tyneside; Croydon; Blackburn and Burnley; Northamptonshire; North Staffordshire; and North Wales. Two of these areas—Blackburn and Northamptonshire—will also operate the final warning scheme and youth offending teams, since these arrangements will have an effect on speed through the system and procedures in young offender cases. We aim to begin the pilots in October this year to run for six months. These will be followed by pilots of statutory time limits which we aim to begin in autumn 1999 and run for 12 months. A decision on the level at which time limits should be set, including the time limit

from arrest and the date of first appearance in court, will be made for pilot purposes in the light of the initial 'Narey' pilots and for national rollout in the light of the statutory time limit pilots.

Ms Keeble: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many juveniles have been held overnight on remand in police custody in police stations in England and Wales, broken down by *(a)* police authority and *(b)* charges, during the last six months. [44671]

Mr. Michael: Information on the remand of juveniles in police custody in police stations is not collected centrally.

Section 38(6) of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 requires arrested juveniles under the age of 17 who are detained by the police to be moved to local authority accommodation unless:

(i) the custody officer certifies that, by reason of such circumstances as are specified in the certificate, it is impractical to move the youth; or

(ii) in the case of a juvenile who has attained the age of 12, no local authority security accommodation is available and holding the juvenile in other local authority accommodation would be inadequate to protect the public from serious harm from him.

Police Complaints and Discipline

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to bring forward proposals to change the internal police complaints and discipline process; and if he will make a statement. [44502]

Mr. Michael: My right hon. Friend announced the Government's response to the Home Affairs Committee report into police disciplinary and complaints procedures in England and Wales on 23 March 1998, *Official Report*, columns 21–37. New arrangements will be brought into effect on 1 April 1999 which will make significant changes to the current arrangements for dealing with misconduct by police officers, as well as providing, for the first time, formal provisions for tackling poor performance by individual officers. As far as complaints by members of the public are concerned, a number of Committee recommendations which have been accepted will require primary legislation. These will be made when suitable opportunities arise, whilst other measures will be taken forward in consultation with interested parties. New discipline arrangements applying to senior officers will be introduced as soon as possible after 1 April 1999 and will mirror, as far as possible, those which will apply to the rest of the police service.

Cardiff and Parc Prisons

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were the running costs in the past two years, and what are the forecast running costs over the next four years, of *(a)* Cardiff Prison and *(b)* Parc Prison, Bridgend. [44009]

Ms Quin: The running costs of Cardiff prison were £10.97m in 1996/97 and £11.079m in 1997/98. In 1998/99 the figure is forecast to be £11.09m. The budget for the following three years will not be set until the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review is known.

Parc prison opened on 15 November 1997. From then until 30 April 1998, payments of nearly £7m plus value added tax were made to the managing contractor. This figure relates to the provision of the whole custodial service, including prison capital and financing costs, and cannot be compared with the running costs of an existing directly managed prison.

Prison Site, Middleton Sands

Miss Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the estimated cost of conversion of the former holiday camp at Middleton Sands, Morecambe, to a temporary prison, separately identifying costs of improvements to the access road and environmental improvements to the site. [43658]

Ms Quin: As at December 1997, the estimated costs for converting the camp to a prison for a three-year period varied between £18.7 million to £25.7 million, the variation depending on the number of prisoners to be held and the level of facilities to be provided.

The estimated costs for works to the access road, £150,000, and for permanent environmental improvements, £815,000, are included in the overall costs.

Figures are subject to inflation and additional costs due to deterioration of the existing buildings since the Prison Service's feasibility study was carried out in December 1997.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Cottage Industries

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make it his policy to issue guidance to local authorities to ensure that rules and regulations affecting the operation of cottage industries are enforced at the least burdensome level possible. [44918]

Mr. Kilfoyle: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Mr. Quinn) on 4 March 1998, *Official Report*, columns *692–94*, announcing the publication of the Enforcement Concordat. I wrote to all local authorities in England on 5 March 1998 to commend the Concordat to them and encourage its adoption.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Magistracy (Ethnic Minorities)

Mrs. Humble: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, what percentage of magistrates are from an ethnic minority; and what percentage of magistrates appointed in the last five years are from an ethnic minority. [45159]

Mr. Hoon: A recent survey (excluding the Duchy of Lancaster) showed that, of the 94 per cent. of magistrates who responded, 4.1 per cent. were from an ethnic

minority. The percentage of magistrates appointed in the last five years (excluding the Duchy of Lancaster) who were from an ethnic minority is:

1993: 5.7 per cent.

1994: 5 per cent.

1995: 6 per cent.

1996: 6.5 per cent.

1997: 6.5 per cent.

Correspondence

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when he expects to give a substantive reply to the letter of 22 December 1997 from the hon. Member for Eastbourne relating to Judge Hasan. [45025]

Mr. Hoon: The Lord Chancellor has today given a substantive letter to the hon. Member.

Fines (Greater Manchester)

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list for each magistrates court in Greater Manchester for the last available 12 month period *(a)* the total amount of fines imposed, *(b)* the percentage of that money collected, *(c)* the amount of fines written off as uncollectible and *(d)* the criteria used for writing that money off; and if he will list for Stockport and Tameside courts (i) the number of attachment of earnings orders issued by each court to collect (1) fines and (2) reparation orders and (ii) the number of orders made by each court to deduct fines and other money from social security payments. [44113]

Mr. Hoon: *(a)* and *(c)*: available figures with explanations are shown in the table. *(b)*: the table shows amounts collected. The percentage figure requested has not been calculated because the amounts collected do not relate directly to the amounts imposed. *(d)*: write off is authorised only when all realistic steps to enforce the sums due have been taken without success, and the circumstances fall within one of those listed in note *(d)* to the table.

(i) attachment of earnings orders issued by Stockport and Tameside are recorded for combinations of fines, compensation orders and costs, and fines cannot be given separately. In Tameside, there were 18 attachment of earnings orders, one of which is for reparation only. In stockport, there were 79 combination orders. (ii) there were 107 deductions from social security payments orders made in Stockport. Tameside do not have a record of deductions from benefit for the financial year, but currently have 264 orders.

Fine enforcement in Greater Manchester, financial year ended 31 March 1998

£

	(a) Fines imposed April 1997–March 1998	*(b) Amounted collected April 1997–March 1998*	*(c) Written off April 1997–March 1998*
Bolton	1,801,383	1,483,528	309,804
Bury	1,537,487	1,735,555	209,364
Wigan	3,353,711	1,931,838	969,962
City of Salford	1,967,127	1,451,724	515,082
Rochdale	1,700,999	1,422,680	165,240

Fine enforcement in Greater Manchester, financial year ended 31 March 1998

£

	(a) Fines imposed April 1997–March 1998	*(b) Amounted collected April 1997–March 1998*	*(c) Written off April 1997–March 1998*
Manchester	5,379,016	2,651,005	3,213,474
Oldham	1,728,821	1,120,522	663,025
Stockport	1,488,313	1,230,576	446,333
Tameside	1,740,336	1,699,110	355,742
Trafford	1,583,768	895,112	798,673
Grand Total	22,281,961	15,621,650	7,646,699

Notes:

(a) Fines imposed includes fines, costs, compensation awards and contributions to Legal Aid. Also included are fines etc. imposed at other courts which have been transferred to this court for enforcement. Fines etc. imposed locally but transferred out to other courts for enforcement have been excluded

(b) Amount collected includes payments against amounts imposed in previous years as well as the current year, and amounts remitted by the courts, but exclude amounts written off

(c) Amounts written off may have been imposed in previous years as well as the current year

(d) Criteria for write off

The defendant's/defaulter's whereabouts are unknown and cannot be traced

The defendant/defaulter is known to have emigrated or gone abroad and there is very little real prospect of return or recovery of the sum

The defendant/defaulter has died. However if a fine was involved and the fine itself was particularly high, the justices clerk may wish to consider whether the estate has benefited from the crime. Only if it is clear that it has, should consideration be given to lodging a claim against the estate and any subsequent request to write off should show this has been done and the outcome of the action

The defendant has been sent to a mental health institution for a period of 12 months or more

The court has despatched a notice to a defendant who was not present in court informing him in error of a lesser fine, contribution to costs order that the court imposed—in such cases the balance would be considered for write off

The sum outstanding is less than £5 and is considered to be not worth pursuing

As a result of subsequent proceedings the defendant is sentenced to imprisonment for a period of 12 months more

The sum was imposed or awarded against a limited company which has subsequently been wound up or, where there are no goods on which to levy distress, the company has ceased trading and it is not considered financially worthwhile for the court to initiate

A serviceman has been sentenced to a period of military corrective training

The defendant has moved permanently to Scotland

Other, where circumstances for write off are not covered by any of the above criteria, and grounds for write off are provided in a separate note

Source:

Magistrates' Courts Management Information System 1997–98.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Sierra Leone

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what facilities for representation and consular services on behalf of Her Majesty's Government operate in Conakry, in Guinea; and if staff or premises were made available to Britain's High Commissioner to Sierra Leone during his evacuation to Conakry. [43691]

Mr. Fatchett: The British Ambassador accredited to Guinea is resident in Senegal. Her Majesty's Government have an Honorary Consul in Conakry, who provided assistance during the evacuation from Sierra Leone. In the absence of official accommodation in Conakry, the British High Commissioner to Sierra Leone operated from a hotel room while in Conakry.

Indonesia

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what support is being provided to Indonesia in 1998–99 under the Assistance to Support Stability with In-Service Training scheme; and at what cost. [44333]

Mr. Fatchett: No expenditure has been authorised so far.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 21 May 1998, *Official Report*, columns *520–22*, on support for police and military forces, if he will provide a breakdown of the 1997–98 expenditure under the United Kingdom Military Training Assistance Scheme in support of the military in Indonesia; and if he will list the training establishments involved and the nature of the training. [44336]

Mr. Fatchett: Half of the £225,000 funding for Indonesia military training for 1997–98 represented carry-over costs from 1996–97.

The remainder represented English language training in Indonesia and the following courses in the UK:

Army: 1 student on a Disaster Management Course (RCMS Shrivenham); 1 student on a Command and Staff Course (Joint Service Command and Staff-College, Bracknell); 2 students on English language training (Defence School of Languages, Beaconsfield).

Navy: 1 Student on an International Anti-Submarine Warfare Course (HMS Dryad); 1 student on an International Navigation Officers Course (HMS Dryad).

Ethnic Minority Employees

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 7 May 1998, *Official Report*, columns *487–88*, if he will place in the Library a copy of the strategy document, "Bridges into the Future"; what organisations and individuals were consulted in its preparation; and what databases he is using under his initiative to inform minority ethnic communities and prospective applicants about the role and activities of the Foreign Office. [44201]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary is delighted to place in the Library a copy of the strategy document "Bridges into the Future".

This document was drawn up by Linbert Spencer, an expert in race and community relations, in consultation with those in the FCO concerned with equal opportunities, recruitment and staff development.

The FCO informs minority ethnic communities and prospective applicants about its role and activities through its website and through contact with all UK University careers advisers and cultural societies, as well as though its database of contacts supplied by Hobsons Publishing, The Windsor Fellowship, Project Fullemploy, the African and Caribbean Finance Forum and the Race Equality Councils.

Ottawa Treaty

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the Government expect to ratify the Ottawa Treaty. [44800]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We intend to ratify the Ottawa Convention as soon as the Parliamentary schedule allows for the legislation necessary to enable us to meet all our commitments under the Convention.

Arms Exports

Mr. Casale: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to discuss with his European Union counterparts a strengthening of the European Code of Conduct on arms exports. [44430]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The EU Code of Conduct on Arms Exports was formally adopted by the General Affairs Council on 8 June. It would be premature to discuss changes to the Code at such an early stage. The Code provides for an annual meeting within the framework of the Common Foreign and Security Policy to review the operation of the Code and identify any improvements which need to be made.

DEFENCE

Pay and Personnel Agency

Lorna Fitzsimons: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what performance targets have been set for the Pay and Personnel Agency for 1998–99. [45261]

Mr. Spellar: The Chief Executive of the Pay and Personnel Agency (PPA) is responsible for providing pay and personnel services for the Ministry of Defence as defined in the Agency Framework Document. During 1998–99, the PPA will be set the following challenging key performance targets:

1. (a) while making 100 per cent. of payments of pay by the due date, the number of errors not to exceed 12 per 1,000 payments of weekly industrial pay;

   (b) while making 100 per cent. of payments of pay by the due date, the number of errors not to exceed 6 per 1,000 payments of monthly non-industrial pay;

   (c) while authorising 100 per cent. of awards of pensions by the due date, the number of errors not to exceed 20 per 1,000 awards;

   (d) while making 100 per cent. payments of expenses within 10 days of receipt, the numbers of errors not to exceed 15 per 1,000 payments;

   (e) to pay 100 per cent. of claims for fees and personal payments within 9 working days of receipt.

2. By 31 March 1999, to adopt the use of the Business Excellence Model as a means of benchmarking the Agency.

3. By 31 March 1999, to achieve efficiency savings to meet the Departmental target of 2 per cent. efficiency savings of annual operating costs.

4. By 31 December 1998, to ensure that all IT systems are millennium compliant.

5. To gain IIP accreditation before 31 March 1999.

Arms Tactical Training Centre

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future role of the new arms tactical training centre in Germany. [45030]

Dr. Reid: The role of the Combined Arms Tactical Trainer (CATT) simulation system is primarily to assist in the training of an armoured Battle Group (BG). It will allow a BG to practice both its tactical and command procedures without having to deploy onto a training area. CATT will realistically simulate a warfighting environment with its inherent friction. All training will be closely monitored, thus allowing mistakes to be immediately rectified and thereby more fully preparing the BG for the culmination of its training at BATUS in Canada and in Poland. Additionally, like all simulation systems, CATT should reduce the costs of BG deployments as a result of reduced track mileage and equipment support, whilst alleviating environmental pressure on training areas. Due to the flexibility of the system, as well as current main equipments being simulated, there is scope for equipments such as helicopters and future equipments such as the Multi-Roled Armoured Vehicle to be incorporated into the system. Ultimately, with the ability to network with CATT UK, there will also be the opportunity for an armoured brigade HQ to train two BGs simultaneously, thus practising another level of command.

Territorial Army

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the TA infantry units which were committed to a role in Germany prior to the fall of the Berlin Wall; and if he will state the Field Force, Brigade or Division of 1 BR Corps to which they were assigned. [44839]

Dr. Reid: The Territorial Army infantry units committed to a role in Germany in 1989, prior to the fall of the Berlin Wall, are shown in the table.

Territorial Army Infantry Unit	*Formation*
4RGJ	1 Armd Div (7 Armd Bde)
4 Para	1 Armd Div (Div tps)
10 Para	1 Armd Div (Div tps)
15 Para	1 Armd Div (Div tps)
1/51 Highland	4 Armd Div (11 Armd Bde)
2/51 Highland (Milan Pln)	4 Armd Div (11 Armd Bde)
1/52 Lowland (Milan Pln)	4 Armd Div (11 Armd Bde)
5 Queens	4 Armd Div (20 Armd Bde)
5/8 Kings (Milan Pln)	4 Armd Div (20 Armd Bde)
3 RRW (Milan Pln)	4 Armd Div (20 Armd Bde)
6 RRF	2 Inf Div (15 Inf Bde)
1 Y&C	2 Inf Div (15 Inf Bde)
2 Yorks	2 Inf Div (15 Inf Bde)
7 Li	2 Inf Div (15 Inf Bde)
8 Li	2 Inf Div (15 Inf Bde)
5 R Anglian	2 Inf Div (49 Inf Bde)
7 R Anglian	2 Inf Div (49 Inf Bde)
3 Staffords	2 Inf Div (49 Inf Bde)
5 Li	2 Inf Div (49 Inf Bde)
5 RRF	2 Inf Div (49 Inf Bde)
5 RGJ	2 Inf Div tps/Corps tps
4 R Irish (Milan Pln)	2 Inf Div tps
5 R Irish (Milan Pln)	2 Inf Div tps
4 QLR	2 Inf Div tps/Corps tps
4 WFR	Corps tps

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the cost of each Territorial Army battalion in 1997–98. [43643]

Dr. Reid: The 33 Territorial Army infantry battalions are set out in the following list, together with their identifiable costs for the year 1997–98. The figures given are manpower costs only, and include the costs of TA, Regular and Civilian staff employed at the units; other costs incurred are not separated from wider Army financial provision and cannot therefore be directly attributed to particular TA units.

Cost of territorial army infantry battalions 1997–98

£ million

Unit	*1997–98*
3rd (Volunteer) Battalion The Royal Welsh Fusiliers	0.994
3rd (Volunteer) Battalion The Duke of Wellington's Regiment (West Riding)	1.06
3rd (Volunteer) Battalion The Prince of Wales's Own Regiment of Yorkshire	1.091
4/5th Battalion The Green Howards (Alexandra Princess of Wales's Own Yorkshire Regiment) (Yorkshire Volunteer)	0.796
4th (Volunteer) Battalion The Parachute Regiment	1.393
6th (Volunteer) Battalion The Royal Anglian Regiment	0.992
6th Northumberland Battalion The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers	1.207
7th Battalion The (Durham) Light Infantry	0.976
7th (Volunteer) Battalion The Royal Anglian Regiment	0.991
4th (Volunteer) Battalion The Devonshire and Dorset Regiment	2.301
6th Battalion the Light Infantry (Volunteer)	2.435
2nd (Volunteer) Battalion The Royal Gloucester Berkshire and Wiltshire Regiment	1.43
5th (Volunteer) Battalion The Royal Green Jackets	1.793
5th (Volunteer) Battalion The Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment	1.82
6/7th (Volunteer) Battalion The Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment	2.087
3rd (Volunteer) Battalion The Staffordshire Regiment (The Prince of Wales's)	2.027
4th (Volunteer) Battalion The Queen's Lancashire Regiment	2.078
4th (Volunteer) Battalion The Kings Own Border Regiment	1.213
5/8th (Volunteer) Battalion the King's Regiment	2.225
5th (Volunteer) Battalion The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers	2.003
5th Battalion The Light Infantry (Volunteer)	2.126
3rd (Volunteer) Battalion The Cheshire Regiment	1.992
2nd (Volunteer) Battalion The Royal Regiment of Wales	2.208

Cost of territorial army infantry battalions 1997–98

Unit	*£ million 1997–98*
3rd (Volunteer) Battalion The Royal Welsh Fusiliers	2.044
4th (Volunteer) Battalion The Royal Green Jackets	2.067
10th (Volunteer) Battalion The Parachute Regiment	2.206
The London Regiment	2.143
3rd (Volunteer) Battalion The Highlanders (Seaforths Gordons and Camerons)	2.173
3rd (Volunteer) Battalion The Royal Highland Fusiliers (Princess Margaret's Own Glasgow and Ayrshire Regiment)	2.053
3rd (Volunteer) Battalion The Black Watch Regiment (The Royal Highland Regiment)	1.851
7/8th (Volunteer) Battalion The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders (Princes Louise's)	2.034
The Lowland Volunteers	2.148
4/5th (Volunteer) Battalion The Royal Irish Rangers	2.504

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what evaluation he has made of the role assigned to TA infantry units operating alongside regular units in the BAOR prior to the collapse of the Berlin Wall. [44840]

Dr. Reid: The Strategic Defence Review has examined the current and future strategic situation, seeking to identify our future defence tasks and the necessary force mix of both Regular and Reserve Armed Forces to meet those tasks. It would be of only limited value to review a historical allocation of roles and units within a setting which is no longer relevant.

Armed Service Personnel (Germany)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many British armed service personnel are currently stationed in Germany. [44118]

Dr. Reid: As at 31 May 1998, some 28,100 posts were directly administered or associated with the garrison in Germany. This excludes the various NATO headquarters and other posts distinct from the garrison itself but includes those troops who are based in Germany and deployed elsewhere, for example, in the Former Yugoslavia.

Land Disposal

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the disposal of land at RAF 14MU. [44893]

Mr. Spellar: The disposal of the core sites of 14MU RAF Carlisle jointly to Cumbria and Carlisle is ongoing. While land quality issues remain a sensitive matter, it is our aim to conclude contract terms shortly.

A separate marketing campaign for the open market sale of the four outlying sites is to be initiated this month.

Reserve Forces

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what evaluation he has made of the current (i) use, (ii) deployment and (iii) role of reserve infantry forces amongst the United Kingdom's NATO allies. [44896]

Dr. Reid: We are in regular contact with our NATO Allies on Reserve issues. Most NATO nations rely on conscript Reserves or are undergoing a period of change in their Reserve force structures. In the context of the Strategic Defence Review, we have, in particular, consulted the United States of America on a range of Reserve issues, including matters relevant to the role, use and deployment of infantry.

Departmental Energy Use

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 1 June 1998, *Official Report*, column *107*, what recognised performance indicators are used at each site for which an energy manager has been appointed; and, for each, what practical savings have been achieved in respect of each indicator in each of the last five years. [44899]

Mr. Spellar: The performance indicators used across the services are the published Government Energy Consumption Targets. MOD's Energy Consumption is reported to DETR by energy focal points and Departmental results are announced annually, usually in January/February. Last year's figures have recently been announced and indicate that MOD are ahead of the Government targets.

Employees (Wales)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his current estimate of the number employed in defence establishments in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [45004]

Mr. Spellar: The most recent date for which comprehensive figures are available is 1 July 1997. At that time, the number employed in defence establishment in Wales was 8,450. Of these, 3,350 were service personnel and 5,100 were civilians.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

BBC

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will require the BBC to distinguish between its public service broadcasting and its commercial ventures in its accounts. [44214]

Mr. Fisher *[holding answer 8 June 1998]:* The BBC's accounts, in its forthcoming Annual Report, due to be laid before Parliament on 15 July, will incorporate a number of measures to increase their transparency, including showing clearly the £90 million cash flow benefit of BBC

Worldwide to the licence fee payer. The financial statements will also include BBC Worldwide's statutory accounts and a segmental analysis of its activities.

We welcome these measures and in the light of them have no plans to impose further accounting requirements.

Departmental Energy Use

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what proportion of the Department's energy usage was from *(a)* renewable energy and *(b)* combined heating in each year since 1989–90. [44084]

Mr. Tom Clarke: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 5 May 1998, *Official Report*, column *262*.

English Tourist Board

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans he has to abolish the English Tourist Board. [44623]

Mr. Tom Clarke *[holding answer 8 June 1998]:* As part of the Government's Comprehensive Spending Review, we are looking at all aspects of the Department's work and its related bodies, but no final decisions have yet been made.

Tourism (National Lottery)

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to his oral answer to the right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke) on 1 June 1998, *Official Report*, column 11, when he expects to conclude discussions about National Lottery funding for English tourism; and what representations he has received on this subject. [44631]

Mr. Tom Clarke *[holding answer 8 June 1998]:* Discussions on all subjects relating to the comprehensive spending review will be completed in the summer.

The National Lottery has provided, and will continue to provide, significant funding for projects in England which will benefit tourism. We received responses from several organisations in the tourism industry to our proposals to reform the Lottery, which were set out in the White Paper, The People's Lottery.

TREASURY

Quarrying Tax

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has for a quarrying tax. [43250]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the Financial Statement and Budget Report (HC 620), paragraph 5.59.

Government-guaranteed Loans

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will set out the Treasury's guidelines on whether loans guaranteed by the Government form part of the PSBR. [44965]

Mr. Darling: Borrowing by the public sector forms part of the PSBR whether guaranteed or not. Market borrowing by the private sector guaranteed by the Government does not form part of the PSBR. The guarantee is a contingent liability. Only if the guarantee is called in would there be any public expenditure and thus an impact on the PSBR.

International Debt

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the value of loans including unpaid interest to developing countries made or guaranteed by the British Government which have been forgiven or written off since 1979 broken down by *(a)* country, *(b)* year and *(c)* type of debt; and what has been the total value of loans forgiven or written off since (i) 1979 and (ii) 5 May 1997. [42043]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 14 May 1998]: (a)* The table shows the value (in millions of pounds) of the principal of export credit loans which has been written off by ECGD, broken down by year and by country. The value of unpaid interest forgiven or written off is not available.

£ million

Country	*1992–3*	*1993–4*	*1994–56*	*1995–6*	*1996–7*	*1997–8*	*Total*
Benin	3.77	—	3.83	—	—	—	7.6
Bolivia	3.56	—	3.74	5.79	—	—	13.09
Burkina Faso	—	—	0.57	—	0.56	—	1.13
Egypt	—	—	70.79	—	96.23	4.22	171.24
Ethiopia	—	—	—	—	—	2.32	2.32
Guyana	—	—	—	—	—	72.25	72.25
Mali	—	—	—	—	7.06	—	7.06
Mauritania	—	—	—	0.39	0.08	—	0.47
Mozambique	—	—	—	—	—	0.79	0.79
Nicaragua	0.4	—	0.4	—	—	—	0.8
Niger	—	—	—	—	0.06	0.13	0.18
Poland	—	—	346.24	—	—	—	346.24
Senegal	0.03	—	0.18	0.08	0.03	—	0.33
Tanzania	17.6	—	19.01	—	—	0.76	37.36
Togo	—	—	—	1.76	1.98	0.49	4.23
Uganda	—	—	—	6.05	—	—	6.05
Vietnam	—	—	5.84	—	—	—	5.84
Yemen	—	—	—	—	6.26	—	6.26
Zambia	—	—	—	—	6.65	0.28	6.93
Total	25.36	0	450.59	14.07	118.9	81.24	690.16

No export credit loans were written off before 1991/2, making the total written off since 1979 £690.16 million. The total written off in the financial year 1997/8 (ie including April 1997) is £81.24 million.

(b) The table shows the value (in millions of pounds) of aid loans, including unpaid interest, which has been written off by DFID, broken down by year and by country.

£ million

Country	*Year Granted*	*Amount*
Botswana	1979	20.68
Lesotho	1979	0.4
Malawi	1979	30.7
Sierra Leone	1979	10.35
Sudan	1979	9.87
Tanzania	1979	3.4
The Gambia	1979	5.15
Egypt	1979	17.57
Afghanistan	1979	0.98
Bangladesh	1979	15.36
India[2]	1979	564.16
Indonesia	1979	39.85
Nepal	1979	1.97
Pakistan	1979	76.03
Sir Lanka	1979	25.21
West. Samoa	1979	0.2
Zimbabwe[1]	1980	22.9
Uganda	1981	16.45
Uganda[1]	1981	5.64
Mozambique	1983	21.81
EAC[3]	1984	2.33
Ethiopia	1984	2.5
Ghana	1985	50.85
Senegal	1988	1.07
Egypt	1991	7.02
Guyana[1]	1991	5.46
Bolivia	1992	0.14
Honduras	1992	5
Jamaica[1]	1992	6.1
Zambia	1993	55.91
Guyana	1993	53.43
Jordan	1994	43.79
Jordan[1]	1994	2.35
Nicaragua	1995	0.53
Nicaragua[1]	1995	0.05
Peru	1995	1.63
Peru[1]	1995	3.46
Cote d'Ivoire	1996	3.45
Laos	1997	0.03
Tonga	1997	0.46
Dominica	1997	6.6
Grenada	1997	3.31
St. Lucia	1997	2.83
Mauritius	1998	1.1
Barbados	1998	0.23
Jamaica	1998	7.3
TCI[4]	1998	1.88
Total	1979–98	1,157.5

[1] These countries received Special Debt Cancellation (SDC) rather than Retrospective Terms Adjustment (RTA). However, both mechanisms operate in the same manner.

[2] For India, an equivalent amount of cost aid was granted instead of normal RTA

[3] East African Community

[4] Turks and Caicos Islands

The total value of aid loans that has been written off since 1979 is £1,157.5 million. Of this amount, £23.74 million has so far been written off since the beginning of 1997.

Economic and Monetary Union

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if Her Majesty's Government will treat the euro as a medium of exchange having value or as a unit of account. [44505]

Mrs. Liddell: The euro will be the currency of participating Member States and will be treated as such in the United Kingdom, in the same way as any other foreign currency.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how lender of last resort operations will be co-ordinated during Stage Three of Economic and Monetary Union; and which individuals or bodies will be responsible for this. [44454]

Mrs. Liddell: The Treaty of Maastricht does not cover lender of last resort responsibilities. Under the Treaty, Member States and their national authorities therefore remain solely responsible for such matters.

EU Contributions

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide a breakdown of the United Kingdom's contributions to the European Union for *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 1997–98, and the estimated contributions for (i) 1998–99 and (ii) 1999–2000. [44022]

Mrs. Liddell: Details of the United Kingdom's gross and net contributions in 1996–97 and 1997–98 together with the Government's estimate of the trended net contribution for 1998–99 were set out in the Departmental Report of the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Department's published in April. These figures are reproduced in the following table:

£ million

Year	*Gross contribution*	*Abatement*	*Public sector receipts*	*Net contribution*
1996–97	9,278	–2,418	–4,567	2,293
1997–98	8,523	–1,582	–4,636	2,305
				Trended net contribution
1998–99	—	—	—	3,025

The Government are, in the light of latest information, currently assessing the trended net contribution for 1999–2000 and more detailed cash flow figures for 1998–99. These will be published as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review.

Low Pay

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women working (i) full-time and (ii) part-time in (1) Pendle and (2) Lancashire earn less than (x) £3 per hour, (y) £3.60 per hour, and (z) £4 per hour; and, in each case, what is the percentage of the total number employed. [44380]

Mrs. Liddell: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Gordon Prentice, dated 9 June 1998:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your parliamentary question on earnings.

As with my reply on 22 May 1997, *Official Report*, column *117*, I can give estimates of the percentage of employees in Pendle and Lancashire earning less than the hourly rates you mention, but not the number.

The latest information, from the New Earnings Survey 1997, is contained in the attached table:

Employees on adult rates, whose pay for the survey pay-period was unaffected by absence—New Earnings Survey—April 1997

	£3.00	£3.60	£4.00
Pendle[1]			
Full-time men	0.0	1.3	1.3
Part-time men	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
Full-time women	2.2	13.0	19.6
Part-time women	3.7	33.3	48.1
All employees	1.3	10.9	16.0
Lancashire			
Full-time men	0.5	3.7	6.7
Part-time men	6.1	32.3	37.4
Full-time women	1.4	7.9	12.2
Part-time women	6.0	26.3	41.6
All employees	1.9	9.9	15.5

[1] Parliamentary constituency

[2] denotes an estimate which is unavailable because the sample size is too small

Education Qualifications

Yvette Cooper: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what are the percentages of those in each occupational classification whose highest educational attainment is *(a)* post-graduate, *(b)* higher education (excluding post-graduate), *(c)* further education and *(d)* GSCE; [44289]

(2) what were the rates of unemployment according to educational attainment at the most recent available date. [44290]

Mrs. Liddell: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Yvette Cooper, dated 9 June 1998:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your parliamentary questions about occupation by highest qualification and unemployment rates by highest qualification.

The information requested, using estimates from the Labour Force Survey, is shown in the attached tables.

ILO Unemployment rate of working age[1] people by highest qualification United Kingdom, winter 1997/98, not seasonally adjusted

Highest qualification	ILO unemployment rate per cent.
Post-graduate	2.8
Higher education	3.3
Further education	4.9
GCSE grades A-C or equivalent	6.8
Below GCSE grades A-C	8.1
Other—level unknown	4.7
No qualifications	12.0
All[2]	6.4

[1] Working age is men aged 16–64 and women aged 16–59

[2] Unemployment rate for all those of working age includes those who did not state their highest qualification

Source:

Labour Force Survey; ONS

People of working age[1] in employment by occupational group and highest qualification United Kingdom, winter 1997/98, not seasonally adjusted

Percentage

	Post-graduate	Higher Education	Further Education	GCSE grades A-C or equivalent	Below GCSE grades A-C	Other-level unknown	No qualifications	Total	Total in employment[2] (thousand)
1. Managers and administrators	4.6	28.8	28.1	20.9	3.3	7.0	7.3	100.0	4,207
2. Professional occupations	23.5	59.5	9.1	4.1	0.4	3.0	0.4	100.0	2,705
3. Associate professional & technical occupations	5.5	50.4	21.5	14.2	1.9	4.5	1.9	100.0	2,623
4. Clerical, secretarial occupations	0.7	12.3	22.2	40.2	9.3	6.3	9.1	100.0	3,883
5. Craft and related occupations	0.3	6.4	52.8	14.7	6.3	5.4	14.0	100.0	3,251
6. Personal, protective occupations	0.4	9.3	23.7	31.0	8.2	12.0	15.4	100.0	2,794
7. Sales occupations	0.6	8.9	22.8	36.1	8.2	6.6	16.8	100.0	2,102
8. Plant and machine operatives	[4]—	3.3	22.2	20.7	10.0	20.6	23.0	100.0	2,489
9. Other occupations	[4]—	2.5	14.5	23.6	11.1	12.5	35.7	100.0	2,010
All in employment[3]	4.0	20.8	25.1	23.1	6.3	8.2	12.5	100.0	26,143

[1] Working age is men aged 16–64 and women aged 16–59

[2] Totals include a few people who did not state their highest qualification, but percentages calculated using valid responses only

[3] Includes those who did not specify their occupation

[4] Sample size too small for reliable estimate

Source:

Labour Force Survey; ONS

Breast Cancer

Ms Perham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give a breakdown by age range of the incidence of breast cancer in women in England in each of the last five years. [44936]

Mrs. Liddell: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Fox to Ms Linda Perham, dated 9 June 1998:

In the absence of the Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your recent question on breast cancer in England.

The numbers of newly diagnosed cases and incidence rates per 100,000 females of breast cancer (International Classification of Diseases 9th Revision, ICD9, 174) in England, 1989–1993 (the last five years for which data are available), are shown in the table.

Incidence of breast cancer, England, 1989–1993

	Number of newly diagnosed cases					*Rate per 100,000*				
	1989	*1990*	*1991*	*1992* [1]	*1993* [1]	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992* [1]	*1993* [1]
Under 1	1	1	0	0	4	0.3	0.3	0.0	0.0	1.3
1–4	0	0	0	0	0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
5–9	0	0	0	0	0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
10–14	0	0	0	0	0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
15–19	2	1	2	1	3	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.2
20–24	29	26	24	18	20	1.5	1.4	1.3	1.0	1.1
25–29	145	148	129	152	141	7.6	7.6	6.5	7.7	7.2
30–34	407	398	440	486	460	24.6	23.3	25.0	26.8	24.7
35–39	945	873	921	945	882	59.5	55.4	58.3	59.0	54.1
40–44	1,867	1,720	1,829	1,744	1,577	109.0	99.2	105.0	105.2	97.9
45–49	2,272	2,246	2,432	2,797	2,707	166.4	159.6	165.4	174.9	162.0
50–54	2,393	2,694	2,995	3,093	2,946	186.6	208.9	234.6	241.2	225.2
55–59	2,754	3,081	3,468	3,313	2,984	221.2	251.0	285.1	271.9	242.0
60–64	3,259	3,801	3,976	3,855	3,447	259.1	304.5	320.8	314.2	284.7
65–69	3,431	3,343	3,128	3,047	2,698	255.6	260.1	251.7	251.5	226.8
70–74	2,584	2,647	2,863	3,033	3,006	259.6	255.1	265.2	270.8	257.5
75–79	2,693	2,618	2,697	2,611	2,336	278.9	271.2	282.6	281.5	265.7
80–84	2,055	1,998	2,154	2,258	2,052	292.6	281.4	300.9	315.1	286.0
85+	1,936	1,915	2,092	2,204	2,129	360.2	343.7	360.8	364.7	337.0
All ages	26,773	27,510	29,150	29,557	27,392	109.5	112.2	118.4	119.7	110.7
DAS[2]	—	—	—	—	—	95.2	98.9	105.2	105.7	97.2

[1] Provisional data
[2] Directly age standardised using the European standard population to take account of the changing age structure of the population

SCOTLAND

Towns (City Status)

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what criteria are used in Scotland to award city status to towns; and if he will make it his policy to create a new city by 2000. [44683]

Mr. McLeish: There are no settled criteria for the award of city status to towns in Scotland. Such an award has not been made since Dundee was awarded city status in 1889. Any further award would be a matter for Her Majesty The Queen acting under the Royal Prerogative on the advice of the Government of the day. There are no plans to recommend such an award in Scotland at present.

Procurator Fiscal Service

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the procurator fiscal posts in respect of which decisions have been taken not to replace an existing fiscal since 1 May 1997; and if he will state the reason for this decision in each case. [44818]

Mr. McLeish: The Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service is an independent Government Department under the direction of my noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate.

The only Procurator Fiscal post in respect of which a decision has been taken not to replace an existing fiscal since 1 May 1997 is at Alloa. This decision was taken in May 1998.

The reason for this decision was to ensure good management and operational effectiveness.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the total number of working days and cost thereof in *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 1997–98 in respect of which ad hoc deputies were engaged by the Procurator Fiscal Service in each regional area of the service. [44812]

Mr. McLeish: The Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal service is an independent Government Department under the direction of my noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate.

The total number of working days and cost of ad hoc Procurator Fiscal deputies by region for 1996–97 and 1997–98 were:

	1996–97		*1997–98*	
	Days	*Cost (£)*	*Days*	*Cost (£)*
Grampian	242	31,509	81	10,575
Tayside	890	115,678	113	14,681
Lothian	67	8,752	164	21,337
Glasgow	556	72,359	605	78,727
N. Strathclyde	291	37,887	194	25,272
S. Strathclyde	121	15,755	52	6,836

The number of days are approximate and have been derived by dividing the known total cost by an average daily cost.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what expenditure was incurred in 1997–98 in respect of the operational running costs of the Procurator Fiscal Service. [44814]

Mr. McLeish: The Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal service is an independent Government Department under the direction of my noble and learned friend the Lord Advocate.

Departmental running costs in 1997–98 were £44,237,000, of which £36,064,000 represented the operational costs of the Procurator Fiscal Service.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many legally-qualified members of staff were employed in each regional area of the Procurator Fiscal Service on 31 March in *(a)* 1996, *(b)* 1997 and *(c)* 1998; and what was the agreed complement of such staff for each area on these dates. [44811]

Mr. McLeish: The Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service is an independent Government Department under the direction of my noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate.

The numbers of legally qualified staff employed in each regional area of the Procurator Fiscal Service are as follows:

Region	*Date*	*Legal staff employed*
Grampian, Highland Island	31 March 1996	30
	31 March 1997	32
	31 March 1998	30
Tayside, Central and Fife	31 March 1996	39.3
	31 March 1997	46.1
	31 March 1998	44.5
Lothian and Borders	31 March 1996	38.5
	31 March 1997	36.9
	31 March 1998	40.7
Glasgow	31 March 1996	62.7
	31 March 1997	66.5
	31 March 1998	63.9
North Strathclyde	31 March 1996	34.4
	31 March 1997	37
	31 March 1998	36.5
South Strathclyde	31 March 1996	39.2
	31 March 1997	41.9
	31 March 1998	42.7

There is no fixed complement staff.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the case-related expenditure in each regional area of the Procurator Fiscal Service in *(a)* the financial year immediately prior to the implementation of the Criminal Procedure (Scotland) Act 1995 and *(b)* each complete financial year since its implementation in respect of (i) solemn proceedings in the High Court, (ii) solemn proceedings in the Sheriff Court and (iii) summary proceedings. [44815]

Mr. McLeish: The Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal service is an independent Government Department under the direction of my noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate.

The case-related expenditure in each region prior to the implementation of the Criminal Procedure (Scotland) Act 1995 and then subsequent to the Act was:

£000

	Prior 1995–96	*Subsequent 1996–97*	*1997–98*
Grampian	746	754	711
Tayside	1,476	1,705	1,517
Lothian	1,113	1,115	1,282
Glasgow	1,682	1,391	1,174
North Strathclyde	973	849	802
South Strathclyde	1,104	1,124	949

The specific information requested on solemn and summary proceedings is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Further details of operations and costs are contained in the Department's Annual Report, a copy of which is in the House Library.

School Books

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will state in respect of each local education authority area in Scotland the average amount allocated for the purchase of books in each *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary school in 1996–97 and 1997–98. [44817]

Mr. Wilson: The information is not collected centrally.

Legal Aid

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much was spent on *(a)* criminal legal aid and *(b)* the administration of the Scottish criminal legal aid scheme in 1997–98. [44813]

Mr. Dewar: The Scottish Legal Aid Board will shortly be publishing its full accounts on an accruals basis in its Annual Report and the hon. and learned Member will be sent a copy. In cash terms, the provisional expenditure on criminal legal aid in 1997–98 was £82.054 million. The Board also spent £7.583 million on advice and assistance in criminal matters and £2.438 million on Advice by Way of Representation (ABWOR), most of which was spent on criminal cases. The estimated cost, in cash terms, of administering criminal legal aid in 1997–98 was £2.340 million and that of the criminal elements of advice and assistance and ABWOR was £0.841 million.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Seaward Petroleum Licensing

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when the 18th round of seaward petroleum licensing will take place. [45364]

Mr. Battle: The 18th Seaward Petroleum Licensing Round has opened with the publication of the formal offer notice in the Official Journal of the European Communities.

The notice invites applications for unlicensed acreage in the northern, central, and southern North Sea and in the northern half of the Irish Sea, Liverpool Bay, and Morecambe Bay. These are established oil and gas provinces where licences were last offered in 1994.

Interest is expected, in particular, from companies keen to use new data acquisition and processing techniques to locate structures similar to recent finds in other sectors of the North Sea or elsewhere in the world, or to identify new resources close to producing fields which may extend the life of their existing offshore infrastructure.

The offer includes blocks relinquished by previous licencees in response to the fallow blocks initiative, which has encouraged companies to hand back acreage for which they have no current exploration or development plans, and so to make it available for others to explore and exploit where possible.

A number of unlicensed blocks in the broad areas covered by the round have been excluded from this round, either for environmental protection reasons on the advice of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, or to protect the interests of other sea users.

Drilling and development activity under licences awarded in this round will be subject to the requirements of regulations to implement the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive (85/337/EEC) as it applies to the offshore oil and gas industry which came into effect on 30 April 1998. The regulations apply to all relevant projects, irrespective of the date of the licence under which they are carried out, and will give the public access to project Environmental Statements on which they can comment to the Government.

The closing dates for the receipt of applications will be 10 and 11 September. I hope the industry will take full advantage of the licensing opportunities available to them.

Parcel Services

Mr. Boswell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what complaints she has received about arrangements which provide for transatlantic carriage of parcels by the Post Office to United States destinations at a lower rate than those destinations can be served by United States domestic services. [43805]

Mr. Ian McCartney: None. If the hon. Member provides details I will look into the issue.

Electricity

Mr. Caplin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what measures she will take to ensure that poorer families gain from the benefits of competition in the electricity industry, with particular reference to those using prepayment keys. [43057]

Mr. Stunell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to her answer of 11 June 1997, *Official Report*, column *466*, what steps she proposes to take to reduce the cost of electricity charges for small consumers on low incomes. [43149]

Mr. Battle: In our Green Paper, A Fair Deal for Customers, the Government have asked the gas and electricity regulators to prepare an action plan on ways to ensure that the regulatory regime works to the benefit of all domestic customers including those who are less well off financially. The plan should enable progress in assisting such customers to be judged against measurable targets.

The Government are considering the case for legislation to require the gas and electricity networks to make differential charges to supply companies in favour of prepayment meter customers. As part of the regulators' plan, therefore, the regulators should advise on whether and how such a proposal might operate and the appropriate level for such charges.

The arrangements currently being put in place for electricity supply competition by OFFER and the electricity industry are designed to ensure that prepayment meter customers will be able to switch supplier like any other electricity customer.

Arms Exhibitions

Ann Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which officials from her Department attended the Eurosatory arms fair in Paris in June; what were the costs of their attendance; and what funding her Department provided to defence companies attending this event. [44507]

Mrs. Roche: The DTI provided support for twenty UK firms exhibiting at Eurosatory in the form of grants towards the cost of participation. A preliminary grant has been paid to the Defence Manufacturers Association who were managing the UK group. Remaining payments are subject to claims not yet received, but the overall budget for the event has been set at £85,000. Two more firms were part of the UK group but are ineligible for grant. I have been informed that no DTI officials attended the event.

Export Credits

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what percentage of export credits to each country in each year since 1970–71 was allocated to defence contracts; [43404]

(2) what estimate she has made of how much in *(a)* cash terms and *(b)* real terms, in 1998–99 prices, each country receiving export credits will receive in (i) 1999–2000 and (ii) 2000–2001; [43405]

(3) how much in *(a)* cash terms and *(b)* real terms, in 1998–99 prices, each country receiving export credits (i) paid back and (ii) had written off in each year since 1970–71; [43406]

(4) if she will list the countries which have been recipients of export credits from the Exports Credits Guarantee Department since 1970–71; [43407]

(5) how much in *(a)* cash terms and *(b)* real terms, in 1998–99 prices, each country receiving export credits accepted in each year since 1970–71. [43408]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 3 June 1998]:* The information requested is in large part either no longer available or could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

I am however sending today by way of reply a report that details new ECGD-supported business broken down

by country for each year since 1986, which sets out the element of defence-related business for each year and each market.

I am placing a copy of the report in the library of the House.

Miners

Caroline Flint: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many interim payments have been made to ex-miners suffering from respiratory disease; and if she will make a statement. [45366]

Mr. Battle: To date, 259 payments have been made.

At the High Court hearing on 27 March, solicitors acting for the plaintiffs were granted a three-month adjournment to allow for further discussions to take place with the Department's agents to seek to agree arrangements for the administration of outstanding claims.

Given this further delay, we undertook to make interim payments of £2,000 to a minimum of 5,000 elderly claimants currently in receipt of Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit for chronic bronchitis and emphysema. We have now extended this offer to all claimants currently in receipt of this benefit, as well as to the widows of those previously in receipt of the benefit. We estimate that this could be as many as 13,000. The speed at which offers can be made is still reliant on the co-operation of the claimants' solicitors who need to submit evidence of receipt of benefit.

Discussions are continuing between the Department's representatives and the plaintiffs solicitors on suitable arrangements for assessing and compensating valid claims. To help facilitate speedy resolution of these discussions, we have agreed that Small Airways Disease (SAD) compensation should be paid even though no clear finding was made in relation to it in the High Court judgment.

Tobacco Products

Mr. Flynn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the total value of sales of tobacco products sold in the United Kingdom by each category of tobacco product in the last year for which figures are available. [44076]

Mrs. Roche: Statistics on the UK market for tobacco products are available in the Office for National Statistics publication "Product Sales & Trade PRA13, Tobacco Products". A copy of the latest publication, with data for 1993 to 1996, can be found in the Library of the House. These figures exclude Excise duties and Value Added Tax.

UK Investors (Russia)

Mr. Fraser: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what advice her Department currently offers to United Kingdom investors seeking to investigate commercial opportunities in *(a)* Russia and *(b)* other countries formerly part of the USSR. [44803]

Mrs. Roche: We point out to UK investors seeking to investigate commercial opportunities in Russia that there are now a large number of successful UK investments. However, companies wishing to invest continue to face many obstacles, primarily resulting from the lack of transparency in the legal and fiscal framework for doing business and, therefore, good preparation is essential. As far as the remainder of the old USSR is concerned, the investment situation is very variable. As a general rule, at the present time, we would not encourage UK companies to seek out investment opportunities in Belarus, Moldova or Ukraine. The countries of Central Asia and Transcaucasia (with the exception of Tadjikistan) do present investment opportunities in a limited range of sectors but, again, the overall lack of transparency means good preparation is essential. The situation in the three Baltic States is different as the investment framework is now much more amenable to doing business.

Internet Watch Foundation

Ms Beverley Hughes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what firm of consultants has been appointed to undertake the review of the Internet Watch Foundation; and how they intend to seek views from interested parties. [43932]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 8 June 1998]:* Work is well under way in preparing to appoint consultants to undertake the review. Discussions have been held with interested parties over detailed terms of reference and expressions of interest will be invited shortly. We will expect the winners of that tender to use a variety of research methods to obtain views from interested parties, including inviting written representations. In the meantime, anyone wishing to offer views should address them to officials in the Communications and Information Industries Directorate of my Department who are commissioning the review.

Wind Farming

Mr. Oaten: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans she has further to develop wind farming in the United Kingdom. [43550]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 1 June 1998]:* The Government consider that wind energy is one of the most promising renewables and has the prospect to contribute substantially to UK energy supplies.

In line with the Government's manifesto commitment to a new and strong drive to develop renewable energy sources, in June 1997, I initiated a review of new and renewable energy policy including what would be necessary and practicable to achieve 10 per cent. of UK's electricity needs from renewables by the year 2010 and what contribution new and renewables could make to the Government's target of a 20 per cent. reduction in CO_2 emissions by 2010. The Review is considering all forms of New and Renewable Energy including the prospects for onshore and offshore wind energy.

In November 1997, I announced outline policy proposals for the fifth Non-Fossil Fuel Obligation Renewables Order in England and Wales (NFFO-5), and which included provision for onshore wind energy with new separate technology bands for small and larger scale windfarms. The purpose of these Orders is to secure

additional generating capacity from renewables in order to help them enter the commercial generating market. There are currently fifty-five NFFO wind energy projects generating electricity with a combined capacity of 132.28 MW and I look forward to seeing this contribution grow in coming years.

Gas-fired Power Stations

Mr. Pound: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what assessment she has made of the impact on investment in the United Kingdom of a five-year moratorium on building gas-fired power stations; [44635]

(2) if she will publish the Government's estimates of the level of emissions of sulphur dioxide, carbon dioxide, nitrogen oxide and particulates from power stations over the period 1999 to 2008 on the assumption that *(a)* a five-year moratorium on building gas-fired power stations is introduced and *(b)* that the current moratorium on building gas-fired power stations ends forthwith; [44638]

(3) what will be the impact on the National Air Quality Strategy targets of a five-year moratorium on gas-fired power stations; and what additional measures would be required to meet these targets following the introduction of such a moratorium; [44637]

(4) what assessment she has made of the economic impact of a five-year moratorium on building gas-fired power stations on those generators which own coal-fired power stations; [44636]

(5) what assessment she has made of the impact on employment, by sector, of a five-year moratorium on the building of gas-fired power stations. [44625]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 8 June 1998]:* The Government are engaged in a review of energy sources for power generation. An announcement will be made when a conclusion has been reached.

Renewables

Mr. Stunell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment she has made of the impact of measures set out in the EU White Paper on Renewables on job creation in the United Kingdom; and if she will make a statement. [43667]

Mr. Battle: The Commissioner's White Paper recognises that net employment figures in the renewable energy sector are difficult to predict and calculate. It would be very difficult to disaggregate the various estimates for EU as a whole to determine a UK figure. The White Paper envisages a capital investment in renewable energy of around ecu 165 billion by 2010 and estimates that this might create between 500,000 and 900,000 jobs across Europe. Clearly this presents a significant business opportunity for UK companies.

European Structural Funds

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1), pursuant to the answer of 1 June 1998, *Official Report*, column *4*, what discussions the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions has had with *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials in other departments relating to the review of EU structural funds in respect of Wales; and what was the nature and scope of such discussions; [44393]

(2), pursuant to her answer of 21 May 1998, *Official Report*, columns *543–44*, what has been the nature and content of her discussions with Welsh Office *(a)* officials and *(b)* Ministers on the subject of (i) Objective One funding for Wales and (ii) other aspects of Agenda 2000. [44394]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answers 5 June 1998]:* Since the Department co-ordinates UK policy on the Structural Funds, both I and other DTI Ministers have frequently discussed the Structural Funds aspects of Agenda 2000 with colleagues, including those in the Welsh Office. Officials from the relevant departments are also in regular touch.

Mrs. Betty Williams: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when she expects the review of European Structural Funds to be completed. [43253]

Mrs. Roche: As part of the Agenda 2000 package, the Commission published their proposed draft regulations for the Structural and Cohesion Fund policies for the years 2000 to 2006 on 18 March 1998.

The proposals will have to be agreed by the Council of Ministers and, where appropriate, approved by the European Parliament. We do not expect the regulations for the Structural and Cohesion Funds to be adopted until early 1999.

Crown Post Office, Watford

Ms Ward: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement on the provision of a Crown Post Office in Watford. [44667]

Mr. Ian McCartney: I understand from the Post Office that the Crown post office in Watford was converted to a franchise office in February 1997 under a five-year contract. The franchise office continues to provide the full range of services previously provided at the Crown post office. In May 1997, at my request, the Post Office suspended its Crown office conversion programme, except where irreversible contractual commitments existed, until decisions on this programme could be made on an informed basis in the wider context of our review of the Post Office.

Printing, Packaging and Graphics Communications Industry

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps her Department has taken to encourage workforce flexibility to create and sustain jobs in the United Kingdom printing, packaging and graphic communications industry. [43445]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The Government recognise the benefits for competitiveness and employment of workforce flexibility, and encourage generally the spread of flexible working practices such as varying patterns of work, multi-skilling, and teleworking. Workforce flexibility will be amongst the issues to be addressed in a forthcoming joint industry/union/DTI study on the competitiveness of the industry.

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Reviews

Mr. Allan: To ask the President of the Council if she will list, for each of the last four years, the departmental inquiries and reviews instigated by Ministers which have been chaired by individuals outside her Department; and in each case if she will give the date of establishment and the name of the chairman. [44362]

Mrs. Ann Taylor: No such inquiries or reviews have been instigated by Ministers in the Privy Council Office.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Regional Development Agencies

10. **Mr. Hancock:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the progress made towards setting up the boards of the new regional development agencies. [43235]

Angela Eagle: We are currently considering applications for chairmen or chairwomen, and board members of Regional Development Agencies. We cannot formally make appointments to boards until the Regional Development Agencies Bill has received Royal Assent but hope to identify the prospective chairs as advisers before then to help with the preparation for the RDAs.

20. **Maria Eagle:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will site the north-west regional development agency office in Liverpool. [43246]

Angela Eagle: Decisions about the locations of Regional Development Agency offices will be for the RDAs. They will need to take account of all relevant factors, including the requirement on non-departmental public bodies to secure best value for money.

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if there will be a net increase in resources going to the South West Region after the setting up of the Regional Development Agency. [43243]

Angela Eagle: It is too early to say what resources the South West will receive once the Regional Development Agencies are up and running next April. Plans for expenditure in 1999–2000 will depend on the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review. However, RDAs will provide a more cohesive approach, which will lead to more effective use of the available funding.

Council Tax (Second Homes)

11. **Mr. Andrew George:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact of providing a 50 per cent. discount on council tax for second homes. [43236]

Ms Armstrong: Around 500,000 households in England qualify for the 50 per cent. council tax discount at a cost of some £170 million. Not all of the dwellings which receive the discount are second or holiday homes. The 50 per cent. discount applies to all unoccupied dwellings and to certain occupied dwellings such as those where all of the residents are disregarded, for example, households consisting of someone who is severely mentally impaired and their carer.

Inland Waterways

12. **Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to improve planning and co-ordination of responsibilities for navigation rights as part of overall management of inland waterways. [43237]

Angela Eagle: The country's inland waterways are managed by over 30 navigation authorities. The Association of Inland Navigation Authorities enables them to share information and co-ordinate navigation issues.

Brown-field Sites

13. **Dr. Gibson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects to publish the locations of identified brown-field sites in the United Kingdom. [43238]

Mr. Caborn: Work starts this summer to gather information about previously developed land in England which may be available for redevelopment. My Department is working on this with the Local Government Management Board, English Partnerships, Ordnance Survey and Local Authorities. English Partnerships intends to publish information on an initial set of sites suitable for redevelopment, by the end of the year; summary results for all sites should be available by March 1999.

19. **Mr. John M. Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what recent representations he has received on his current target for development on brown-field sites. [43245]

Mr. Caborn: The Government expect local authorities to be able to raise the national proportion of new homes to be built on previously developed land, including conversions of existing buildings, to 60 per cent. over the next 10 years. We also expect the regional conferences of local authorities to bring forward regional recycling targets.

24. **Mr. Harvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what progress he has made in his review of policy concerning new housing numbers and development on green-field and brown-field sites. [43251]

Mr. Caborn: We are taking forward the further action outlined in *Planning for the Communities of the Future*. In particular, the Urban Task Force has started its work and we have started work on the development of a National Land Use Database.

Social Housing

14. **Mr. Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the number of social houses to be built in each of next three years. [43239]

Mr. Raynsford: We expect over 53,000 new social lettings to be created during 1998/99 through a mixture of new build, renovation, conversion and assisted exit from the social rented sector. Future levels of social housing provision are dependent on the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review.

Local Government Finance

15. **Mr. Gray:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to reform local government finance; and if he will make a statement. [43240]

Ms Armstrong: On 30 March, the Government published three consultation papers:

Improving local financial accountability;

Business rates; and

Capital finance.

The consultation period closed on 1 June and we are currently considering the responses. A White Paper on Modernising Local Government will be published in the summer.

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list for each council which has set a budget above its capping limit since the introduction of the capping regime *(a)* its provisional capping limit, *(b)* the budget set by the council, *(c)* the confirmed capping limit and *(d)* the final budget following appeal. [44462]

Ms Armstrong: Copies of the information requested have been placed in the Library of the House.

Housing Benefit

16. **Dr. Lynne Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what action he is taking to equalise the arrangements for paying housing benefit to council tenants with that for other tenants. [43241]

Mr. Raynsford: We are currently reviewing all aspects of housing finance including personal subsidies to tenants.

Sports Grounds (Housing Development)

17. **Mr. Pearson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received concerning the loss of sports grounds to housing development. [43242]

Mr. Raynsford: We consulted local authorities on the 12 February on our proposals to tighten planning controls in respect of development on all local authority-owned playing fields where the English Sports Council advises against the proposals. We received 100 responses. We continue to receive correspondence about our "Planning for the Communities of the Future" policy document some of which has raised this matter.

Greenhouse Gases

18. **Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what measures he will introduce to meet the Kyoto target for reductions in emissions of greenhouse gases. [43244]

Mr. Meacher: We intend to issue a consultation paper in the summer on measures to deliver our climate change targets. This will largely focus on delivering our legally binding commitment from Kyoto as well as considering how we might move towards our 20 per cent. domestic aim. We will be looking at the scope for savings from improved energy efficiency by business and in the home; lower transport emissions; and an increase in the electricity generated from renewables and combined heat and power.

23. **Mr. Brake:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on progress towards meeting the Government's target for reduction in carbon dioxide emissions by 2010. [43249]

Mr. Meacher: The United Kingdom is one of only a few countries on target to meet its Rio commitment to return greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by the year 2000. In fact, for carbon dioxide, the UK is projected to be more than 5 per cent. below 1990 levels and for all greenhouse gases we expect to be 10 per cent. below 1990 levels by 2000.

We intend to issue a consultation paper in the summer on measures to deliver our climate change targets. This will largely focus on delivering our legally binding commitment from Kyoto as well as considering how we might move towards our 20 per cent. domestic aim. We will be looking at the scope for savings from improved energy efficiency by business and in the home; lower transport emissions; and an increase in the electricity generated from renewables and combined heat and power.

Heathrow Airport

21. **Mr. Vaz:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the timetable for the Heathrow terminal 5 inquiry. [43247]

Mr. Caborn: The public inquiry into the proposed Terminal 5 at Heathrow Airport began in May 1995 and is currently expected to end in November 1998. The timetable for the inquiry is a matter for the Inspector.

Standard Spending Assessment

22. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the level of SSA in Leicestershire. [43248]

Ms Armstrong: Leicestershire's SSA for 1998–99 is £352.825 million, an increase of £10.960 million or 3.2 per cent. on the equivalent figure for 1997–98. The SSA per head figure is £590.71.

26. **Mrs. Laing:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the expected level of change in SSAs for shire counties between 1997–98 and 1998–99. [43254]

Ms Armstrong: Details of the 1998–99 Local Government Finance Settlement were announced in February. The overall change in SSAs for shire counties is a 2.9 per cent. increase compared with the equivalent figure for 1997–98. Figures for individual authorities are available in the Library.

Greater London Authority

25. **Sir Paul Beresford:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what role the proposed Greater London authority will play in influencing planning decisions; and if he will make a statement. [43252]

Mr. Raynsford: The Mayor will be responsible for ensuring that planning decisions on matters of importance to London as a whole take account of the broader strategic interest. He or she will do this through informal advice to the boroughs and through two formal mechanisms:

(i) Strategic planning—The Mayor will be required to draw up a Spatial Development Strategy in place of the current guidance issued by the Secretary of State. The London boroughs will continue to produce detailed Unitary Development Plans for their areas, but these must be "in general conformity" with the Mayor's strategy.

(ii) Development Control—London boroughs will remain the primary planning authorities for their areas. For a limited number of classes of development with significant strategic implications, the borough will have to consult the Mayor before reaching its decision. In the last resort the Mayor will be able to direct a borough to refuse permission where this is necessary on genuine strategic grounds. The applicant would have the right of appeal to the Secretary of State in the normal way. The criteria for applications falling into this category will be strictly drawn and the Government will be consulting on these in due course.

Rail Fares

35. **Mr. Baker:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what discussions he has had with the regulatory bodies in respect of the level of rail fares. [43263]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Ministers meet with the Franchising Director on a regular basis and with the Rail Regulator from time to time to discuss a range of railways issues. The regulation of fares is a statutory responsibility of the Franchising Director. He has prescribed that annual increases in the price of key fares rise by no more than increases in the Retail Prices Index (RPI) based on June 1995 fare levels. From January 1999, these fares will be pegged to one per cent below the increase in the RPI.

Rail Performance Standards

37. **Mr. Rhodri Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what consultations he has had with the rail regulators in relation to new performance standards for rail operating companies. [43265]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Franchising Director is responsible for setting performance standards for train operators. Ministers meet regularly with the Franchising Director to discuss a range of passenger railway issues.

National Rail Inquiry Service

38. **Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received about the service provided by the national rail inquiry service. [43266]

Ms Glenda Jackson: My Department and the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising have received 127 representations about the service provided by the National Rail Inquiry Scheme.

Bicycling

39. **Mr. Bradshaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to mark National Bike Week. [43268]

Ms Glenda Jackson: We welcome National Bike Week and we are encouraged by the number of events in which people are taking part up and down the country. The week offers an excellent opportunity for raising awareness and drawing attention to the value of cycling. Making it easier for people to cycle will be a key element of our Integrated Transport White Paper.

The Department is planning a Bike Breakfast at its main London headquarters for staff who cycle to work on National Bike to Work Day on 10 June. Ministers took part in the Great Parliamentary Bike Ride on 9 June and are supporting other events during the week.

48. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the role of bicycling in his transport policy. [43277]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Government fully recognise the value of cycling as a means of transport. We have already announced that cycling will have an important role in our integrated transport policy, details of which will be announced in the White Paper we plan to publish later this month.

Bus Companies

40. **Dr. Whitehead:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to encourage the benchmarking of environmental performance by bus companies. [43269]

Dr. Strang: The Government are already introducing tax changes to encourage greener buses; and progressively higher emission standards have been required across the EU. I welcome voluntary benchmarking by the bus industry.

Leeds-Harrogate-York Line

41. **Mr. Willis:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to ensure an improvement in the quality of service on the Leeds-Harrogate-York line. [43270]

Ms Glenda Jackson: On 6 November 1997, the Minister for Transport issued to the Franchising Director new objectives, instructions and guidance which require him to manage the existing railway franchise contracts in the interest of passengers and to secure a progressive improvement in the quality of services. In the case of Leeds suburban services, the Franchising Director works with the West Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive (PTE), which is also a signatory to the franchise contract, to achieve that. I understand that Railtrack is undertaking a project to increase a capacity on the western approaches to Leeds station and that Railtrack and the PTE regularly review available station capacity for peak services at Leeds. We propose to strengthen the powers available for the regulation of the railway to ensure the improvements in performance and service quality which we want to see.

British Road Federation

43. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he last met representatives from the British Road Federation to discuss road expenditure and motoring taxation. [43272]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The British Road Federation met my noble Friend the Minister for Roads in July 1997 at which the subject of road expenditure and motoring taxation was one of a number of subjects discussed. In addition, my right hon. Friend the Minister of Transport gave the keynote speech at the BRF's conference on 25 September 1997.

The British Road Federation have made a full contribution to the consultation exercise which is informing our current fundamental review of transport policy.

M74 Motorway

44. **Mr. Martlew:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received on the start date for construction of the M74 between Carlisle and the Scottish borders. [43273]

Dr. Strang: Since the start of the Roads Review consultation exercise, I have received seven representations regarding the proposed construction of the extension of the M6/M74 between Carlisle and the Scottish Border, all of them in support.

Car Parking

45. **Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to regulate privately owned car parking facilities. [43274]

49. **Mrs. Spelman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to discourage parking in urban areas. [43279]

Dr. Strang: The Government's views on the use of parking controls and charges as part of an integrated transport policy will be set out in the forthcoming Transport White Paper.

London Underground

46. **Mr. Brake:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the progress towards establishing a public-private partnership for London Underground. [43275]

Ms Glenda Jackson: We are working closely with London Transport to ensure that the Public/Private Partnership is progressed as quickly and efficiently as possible, and in a way which delivers the best result for taxpayers, passengers and staff.

Changes have been made to the London Transport Board to provide the new structure needed to meet the challenging agenda we have set for the next two years. Denis Tunnicliffe has been appointed London Transport Chief Executive with effect from 1 June, and recruitment of a new part-time Chairman (and a new Managing Director for London Underground) is under way.

Price Waterhouse and Freshfields have been selected to provide, respectively, financial and legal advice jointly to the Government and London Transport. Competitions for other advisers are at an advanced stage.

London Transport are also close to finalising an enhanced investment programme for the next two years incorporating the additional funding my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister announced on 20 March as part of our Public/Private Partnership proposals.

Vintage Motor Vehicles

47. **Mr. Illsley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what action he is taking to ensure that effective additives are available for older and vintage motor vehicles following the withdrawal of leaded petrol. [43276]

Dr. Strang: Effective substitutes for lead are available that can provide adequate protection from engine wear in older vehicles. With a significant residual market demand for leaded petrol, estimated at 18 per cent. of total petrol sales when the ban comes into effect on 1 January 2000, most major oil companies are actively planning to market a special grade of unleaded petrol containing these lead substitute additives from the middle of 1999. Availability of this fuel will continue for as long as there is a market demand.

Trunk Roads

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received regarding spending on trunk roads. [43271]

Dr. Strang: I have received many representations on spending on trunk roads, including some 14,000 representations as a result of the Roads Review.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the current levels of investment in Britain's motorway and trunk road network; and when he plans to complete his review of Britain's road programme. [43267]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the right hon. Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith), on 5 May 1998, *Official Report*, column *313*.

Stray Dogs

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the number of stray dogs in the United Kingdom; and what monitoring his Department undertakes of the number *(a)* recovered and *(b)* put down and the cost to public funds of dealing with stray dogs. [44409]

Angela Eagle: These figures are not collected centrally. The National Dog Wardens' Association has estimated that about 139,000 strays were handled by local

authorities in 1995–96, of which 16,000 were put down. Where the owner is known, local authorities are able to recover the costs.

Sewage Treatment

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects to announce his decision on the need for secondary treatment of sewage; and if it will be in time to allow water companies to comply with the deadline set in the EU Urban Waste Water Directive. [44392]

Angela Eagle: My Department is considering the Government's policy options in relation to implementation of the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive. Decisions will be made in the context of the current Periodic Review of water prices, which aims to strike a proper balance between the need for environmental improvement and the resulting impact on water bills. An announcement will be made as soon as possible.

The Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive contains a number of deadlines for different levels of sewage treatment according to both the size of the discharge and the nature of the receiving waters. The vast majority of work necessary to meet these deadlines will not be influenced by decisions whether to allow primary treatment at comparatively few coastal locations.

Chrysolite

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what account he will take of the French ban on the use and import of chrysolite when determining UK policy. [44422]

Angela Eagle: The UK has taken into account the bans in nine EU Member States, including France, when formulating our own policy. Any decision by the UK Government to proceed with further restrictions on the importation, supply and use of chrysolite will be based on robust scientific evidence, thereby fulfilling obligations under World Trade Agreement.

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the French ban on the use and import of chrysolite. [44424]

Angela Eagle: The UK has considered the bans in nine EU Member States, including France, especially their effectiveness, when formulating our own policy.

Hammersmith Bridge

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what consultations his Department has undertaken over the possible reopening of Hammersmith Bridge; with which bodies; and what representations he has received on this subject. [44566]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Consultations on the future of Hammersmith Bridge are a matter for the London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham, as bridge owner and local highway authority. Representations so far received amount to 11 Parliamentary Questions, 24 letters from hon. Members and Lords, and 51 letters from members of the public. Within these representations there have been straightforward requests for information, along with expressions of view for or against re-opening the bridge. Members of the public with views on the subject have been encouraged to make them known to the local highway authority.

New Forest

Dr. Whitehead: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what plans he has to award national park status to the New Forest under the terms of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949; and what would be the impact of these plans on existing New Forest legislation; [44460]

(2) what plans he has to designate the New Forest a national park authority under the terms of the Environment Act 1995; and what would be the impact of these plans on existing New Forest legislation. [44466]

Angela Eagle: The Countryside Commission has been considering the most appropriate arrangements for the continued protection of the New Forest. The Commission intends to present its formal advice to Ministers on this and a number of other issues relating to the protection of nationally important landscapes later this month. We will need to look at the Commission's recommendations very carefully, together with all the information available, before taking any final decisions. Any plans for the New Forest will need to take into account any possible impact on existing New Forest legislation. We hope to be able to announce our conclusions in the autumn.

National Parks

Dr. Whitehead: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions under what statutory authority a national parks authority designated under the terms of the Environment Act 1995 could delegate its planning functions to a relevant local authority. [44465]

Angela Eagle: Under sections 101–102 of the Local Government Act 1972, as applied to National Park Authorities by Schedule 7(13)(1) of the Environment Act 1995.

Walkers

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what changes to the law he plans following the recent court case in which a walker injured by cattle successfully sued the farmer for damages. [44446]

Angela Eagle: The Government are not proposing to make any changes to legislation following this incident. Present law is adequate, both in terms of protecting members of the public and enabling farmers to operate effectively.

Fuel Storage Tanks

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what advice the HSE gives concerning the maintenance of liquid petroleum gas and other fuel storage tanks located underground at domestic properties. [44379]

Angela Eagle: HSE has published guidance covering maintenance of underground tanks for the storage of liquefied petroleum gas, petrol and other flammable fuels. While primarily aimed at industrial installations, the guidance is also applicable to the storage of these fuels at domestic premises.

Carlisle Airport

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received on the development of Carlisle airport. [44838]

Ms Glenda Jackson: None. I am however aware of proposals for the development of the airport by a private sector consortium.

Motorway Service Areas

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the Government's review of the 15-mile rule for the siting of motorway service areas, including details of the timetable for the review and for publication of its results. [44670]

Ms Glenda Jackson: There are several aspects of Government policy on motorway service areas (MSAs) which we have said we wish to review. On spacing, we will want to consider in particular whether existing policy, which allows MSAs at roughly fifteen mile intervals, strikes the right balance between the needs of motorway users and other considerations including the need to avoid unnecessary development in the countryside. We hope to make a further announcement later this year.

Motor Cycles

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to permit powered two-wheel vehicles to use taxi and bus lanes. [44804]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Hemel Hempstead (Mr. McWalter) on 19 May 1998, *Official Report*, column *299*.

District Council Wards (Northamptonshire)

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he will announce his conclusions on the implementation of the recent report on district council wards for Northamptonshire. [44958]

Mr. Raynsford: We have concluded our consultation on a draft Order implementing the Local Government Commission's recommendations on Daventry and intend shortly to begin a similar consultation for Northampton. For all other districts in Northamptonshire, we are currently in the process of consulting on draft Orders. At present, it is intended that the new arrangements will be established in time for the elections in May 1999.

Special Needs Transport

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what measures he is taking to protect the provision of special needs transport in *(a)* the West Midlands and *(b)* Coventry. [44401]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Department is conducting a review of voluntary and community transport operators across the country to assess their needs and problems. The review, which will be completed this autumn, will include recommendations on both the protection and development of these important transport services. Specific schemes, such as those in the West Midlands and Coventry, are a matter for the local authority concerned.

Threatened Plants

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to the oral answer from the President of the Council of 18 May 1998, *Official Report*, column 593, on threatened plants, if he will make a statement on the steps which have been taken to ensure co-operation between Government departments on matters relating to the International Unit for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources. [43342]

Angela Eagle: The Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions holds the UK State Membership of IUCN. In this capacity, we disseminate information and advice from IUCN Headquarters to other Government Departments, and consult them about particular IUCN issues which impinge on their interests. The Departments concerned are: Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland, Department for International Development, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Ministry of Defence, the Welsh Office and the Scottish Office. IUCN matters are also addressed whenever appropriate in wider discussions on biodiversity issues within the Department and in relevant inter-Departmental fora.

West Coast Main Line

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received on investment levels on the West Coast main line. [43343]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The development of the West Coast Main Line modernisation and upgrade programme continues to generate considerable interest and I met the West Coast Rail 250 group on 20 May. We have had no representations recently on the level of investment on the line. However, I understand that Railtrack has invested £200 million on the route modernisation since 1995, mainly on repairs and renewals.

Respirable Quartz

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions on how many occasions in each year since a maximum exposure limit was assigned to respirable quartz the Health and Safety Executive has instigated formal enforcement actions against employers who have controlled personal exposures to respirable quartz to below the maximum exposure limits but where exposures were not as low as reasonably practicable and exceeded 0.1 mg/m^3; and if he will make a statement. [43714]

Angela Eagle: The Health and Safety Executive can take formal enforcement action against employers by Prosecution, Prohibition and Improvement Notices.

It is not possible to relate HSE's formal enforcement actions to improve the control of respirable quartz (silica) to specific personal exposures. Action to improve the control of silica is not dependent on exposure measurements. Nevertheless in 1995 there was one prosecution where the Maximum Exposure Limit (MEL) was exceeded.

In 1996–97, there were 25 Improvement Notices and in 1997–98, there were 24 Improvement Notices in relation to the inadequate control of silica.

In 1996, ACTS reviewed the effect of the MEL on industry, and HSE will publish a report shortly.

Asbestos

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) how many *(a)* mesotheliomas and *(b)* lung cancers in (i) smokers and (ii) non-smokers per million persons exposed are assumed to result from environmental exposures to amosite asbestos at airborne fibre concentrations of *(a)* 0.01, *(b)* 0.005 and *(c)* 0.001 fibres/millilitre for 40 hours per week for 20 years; and if he will make a statement; [43715]

(2) what health consequences, expressed in terms of numbers of mesotheliomas or lung cancers in smokers and non-smokers per million persons exposed are assumed to result from environmental exposures to crocidolite asbestos at airborne fibre concentrations of *(a)* 0.01, *(b)* 0.005, *(c)* 0.001 and *(d)* 0.0001 fibres/millilitre for 40 hours per week for 20 years; and if he will make a statement; [43716]

(3) what health consequences, expressed in terms of numbers of mesotheliomas or lung cancers in smokers and non-smokers per million persons exposed are assumed to result from occupational exposures to crocidolite asbestos at airborne fibre concentrations of *(a)* 0.2, *(b)* 0.1, *(c)* 0.05 and *(d)* 0.005 fibres/millilitre for 40 hours per week for 20 years; and if he will make a statement; [43718]

(4) what health consequences, expressed in terms of numbers of mesotheliomas or lung cancers in smokers and non-smokers per million persons exposed are assumed to result from occupational exposures to *(a)* amosite asbestos at airborne fibre concentrations of *(a)* 0.2, *(b)* 0.1 and *(c)* 0.05 fibres/millilitre for 40 hours per week for 20 years; and if he will make a statement. [43722]

Angela Eagle: The available evidence is insufficient to make a precisely quantified estimate of the risks presented by exposure to amosite and crocidolite. In a written answer to my hon. Friend on 2 April 1998, *Official Report*, columns *599–601*, I indicated a range of quantified risk estimates for chrysotile. The risks presented by exposure to amosite and crocidolite appear to lie above this range, moderately so for lung cancer, substantially so for mesothelioma. The HSE is preparing a review of the relevant evidence, and will publish this before the end of the year. A copy will be placed in the Library of the House of Commons.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) on how many occasions in each year between 1975 and 1 March 1998 the Health and Safety Executive instigated formal enforcement actions against employers who had controlled personal exposures to asbestos primarily by the use of respiratory protective equipment contrary to the requirements of Regulation 7 of the Asbestos Regulations 1969; and if he will make a statement; [43719]

(2) on how many occasions in each year since 1988 the Health and Safety Executive has investigated whether manufacturers or importers have *(a)* produced and *(b)* imported products incorporating asbestos to assess compliance with the requirements of Regulation 8(1A) of the Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations 1987; and if he will make a statement; [43720]

(3) on how many occasions in each year since 1988 the Health and Safety Executive instigated formal enforcement actions against employers who had controlled personal exposures to asbestos primarily by the use of respiratory protective equipment contrary to the requirements of Regulation 8(1b) of the Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations 1987; and if he will make a statement; [43721]

(4) on how many occasions in each year since 1990 the Health and Safety Executive instigated formal enforcement actions against employers who had controlled personal exposures to below *(a)* the relevant maximum exposure limits and *(b)* the relevant control limits but where exposures have not been as low as reasonably practical; and if he will make a statement. [43723]

Angela Eagle: The information requested is not readily available at the level of detail required and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

This Government, the Health and Safety Commission and the Health and Safety Executive are committed to ensuring the risks from asbestos and hazardous substances are controlled.

The Commission published a Consultative Document in April 1998 proposing amendments to the asbestos regulations and supporting Approved Codes of Practice to strengthen the approach to the use of, and work with, asbestos.

This Government and the Health and Safety Commission are committed to the advancement of further restrictions on the importation and use of asbestos as soon as the scientific evidence on the safety of substitutes has become clear.

Hazardous Substances

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what health consequences, expressed in terms of deaths per million persons exposed are assumed to result from occupational exposures to *(a)* kaolin, *(b)* respirable quartz, *(c)* welding fume, *(d)* cement dust, *(e)* styrene, *(f)* isocyanates and *(g)* xylene at the current relevant occupational exposure limits for 40 hours per week for 20 years; and if he will make a statement. [43717]

Angela Eagle: Occupational Exposure Standards have been set under the control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations (1994) (COSHH) for kaolin, welding

fume, cement dust and xylene, such that repeated exposure by inhalation at that level should not cause any adverse health effects.

For respirable quartz, isocyanates and styrene, a level of exposure which is both safe and reasonably practicable to achieve cannot be identified and Maximum Exposure Limits (MEL) have been set under COSHH. Employers are required to ensure that exposure is kept as far below the MEL as is reasonably practicable. For isocyanates and styrene, there is no evidence to suggest that death could result from exposures at these levels.

The Health and Safety Executive has published statistics on the incidence of silicosis, which is the key health effect from exposure to respirable quartz. However, there are no precise data on the numbers of deaths which result from silicosis; nor is it possible to determine how many deaths might result from exposure to respirable quartz at the level of the MEL, although we expect the figure to be small (Health & Safety Commission Health and Safety Statistics 1996/1997).

Train Services

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the adequacy of passenger compensation for late trains. [45028]

Ms Glenda Jackson: This is a matter for the Franchising Director. He is required by his objectives, Instructions and Guidance from the Government to require each franchisee to publish a Passenger's Charter which includes payment of compensation to passengers in the event of poor performance. The Franchising Director requires that the compensation offered under each franchisees' Charter is no less than that offered under the former British Rail Passenger's Charter. Some operators offer significantly more than BR. The Franchising Director continues to look for improvements in Passenger Charters when suitable opportunities arise.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the current levels of passenger complaints relating to train services. [45027]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I understand that the Central Rail Users' Consultative Committee (CRUCC) has reported an increase of 94% in the number of complaints received in the first three months of 1998 compared with the same period 1997. It is clear that passengers are still not getting the best deal from the privatised railway and we are determined to put that right, starting with our forthcoming White Paper. In the meantime, I expect train operators to listen to what their passengers are telling them and act on it. Poor performance has undoubtedly contributed to the increase and the House will know of my determination to see the Franchising Director act over that.

Air Traffic Control

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what assessment he has made of the effect on the safety of air travellers of the delay to the opening of the new en-route air traffic control centre at Swanwick; and if he will make a statement; [44919]

(2) if he will make a statement on the severe overload which occurred on the Blackton Sector of the Area Control Operations Room at the London area and terminal control centre, Air Traffic Control, West Drayton, on Thursday 23 April. [44920]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given by my noble Friend the Minister for Roads in another place on 4 February 1998, *Official Report, House of Lords*, column *118*.

The Civil Aviation Authority is not aware of any incidents on 23 April but is aware of the overload that occurred on the Clacton Sector of the London Area and Terminal Control Centre on 28 April 1998.

An independent investigation by the Air Traffic Services Investigation Section of the Authority's Safety Regulation Group into the circumstances surrounding the occurrence is continuing. An interim report addressing the causes and making recommendations aimed at avoiding a recurrence is now being considered by the Chairman of the Authority. The final results will be published to the Industry in due course.

In addition, National Air Traffic Services Ltd. are carrying out their own internal investigation.

Housing (South Devon)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he plans to send a reply to the letter dated 8 May from the hon. Member for Totnes requesting a meeting with him, the hon. Member for South-West Devon (Mr. Streeter), South Hams district councillors, South Devon county councillors and the South Hams Amenity Federation to discuss the effect on South Hams, of the projected new housing requirement for South Devon to the year 2001. [44981]

Mr. Caborn: I replied yesterday to the hon. Member's letter of 8 May addressed to the Deputy Prime Minister's Parliamentary Private Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale).

Connex South Central

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on his policy with regard to Connex South Central exercising their option to extend their franchise from seven years to 15. [43278]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The franchising agreement for Connex South Central provides for the Company and the Franchising Director to agree an extension of the term up to a maximum of fifteen years. I understand that the Company has presented a proposal to the Franchising Director and that he is presently evaluating it. He is under no obligation to accept the proposal on any particular terms or at all.

Genetically Modified Organisms

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what compensation will be offered to Riverford Farm, Staverton Bridge, as a result of loss of trade resulting from the consent by his Department to a test site for

herbicide-resistant maize; and if he will withdraw his consent for the growing of herbicide-resistant maize in the proximity of Riverford Farm. [45121]

Angela Eagle: It has not been established that any loss of trade will occur from the proximity of the GM maize trial to Riverford Farm and in view of this it is inappropriate to consider compensation. I hope the matter will be resolved satisfactorily.

Regarding the request to withdraw the consent for the GM maize trial I refer the hon. Member to the answer given recently to the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Baker) on 14 May 1998, *Official Report*, column *156*.

Tritium Waste

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how much tritium waste was released into the River Thames by Aldermaston Weapons Establishment in each of the last 10 years. [44138]

Mr. Spellar: I have been asked to reply.

Discharges of appropriate treated tritium waste from the Atomic Weapons Establishment at Aldermaston to the River Thames are made in line with specific authorisations issued by the Environment Agency. Annual discharge levels for the last 10 years are as follows:

Discharges of Tritium waste from AWE Aldermaston to the River Thames 1987–1997

Year	*GigaBequerels (GBq)*
1987	60
1988	10
1989	21
1990	599
1991	17
1992	27
1993	32
1994	28
1995	10
1996	2
1997	2

Since 1993, this information has been published annually in the Atomic Weapons Establishment's "Environment, Safety and Health Report", copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

Marine Dredging

Mr. Ennis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement about the procedures for authorising marine dredging. [45262]

Mr. Caborn: I have today announced the introduction of new non-statutory procedures for authorising marine dredging. They are intended to address concerns raised previously by the Crown Estate, environmental organisations and the dredging industry about the present arrangements and are intended as an interim arrangement until such time as statutory procedures can be introduced. The interim procedures, copies of which have been placed in the House Library, will apply in England and Wales and have been developed following extensive consultation with Government Departments, the Crown Estate, the dredging industry and environmental organisations. I hope that they will lead to more open and quicker consideration of applications for dredging licences, whilst still enabling full public consultation and protection of the environment.

I also announced that the Government intend to introduce statutory procedures for authorising the extraction of minerals by marine dredging by March 1999. These will implement the requirements of EEC Directive 85/337/EEC (as amended by EEC Directive 11/97/EEC) on Environmental Impact Assessment insofar as it applies to the extraction of minerals by marine dredging. There will be appropriate consultation on the provisions.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Staff Car Mileage Allowance

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the total real terms value of *(a)* staff car mileage claims paid and *(b)* staff rail fares paid; and what was the amount of staff car mileage for which reimbursement was made and the percentage change year on year, for each year since 1989–90. [44082]

Mr. Morley: The total real terms value of *(a)* staff car mileage claims paid and *(b)* staff rail fares paid for each year since 1989–90 is as detailed in the tables. The amount of staff car mileage for each of these years could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Staff car mileage

Year	*Historic cost (£)*	*Index factor*	*Current cost (£)*
1989–90	3,173,007	1.35	4,273,986
1990–91	3,253,215	1.25	4,066,518
1991–92	3,049,895	1.18	3,603,373
1992–93	3,257,575	1.13	3,665,139
1993–94	3,555,068	1.09	3,867,567
1994–95	3,709,999	1.07	3,984,105
1995–96	3,444,990	1.05	3,624,779
1996–97	3,222,498	1.02	3,285,581
1997–98	3,370,115	1.00	3,370,115

Staff rail fares

Year	*Historic cost (£)*	*Index factor*	*Current cost (£)*
1989–90	[1]—	1.35	[1]—
1990–91	231,216	1.25	289,020
1991–92	400,336	1.18	472,986
1992–93	522,874	1.13	588,292
1993–94	623,886	1.09	678,727
1994–95	669,498	1.07	718,963
1995–96	768,559	1.05	808,669
1996–97	687,747	1.02	701,210
1997–98	796,485	1.00	796,485

[1] Figures for Rail Fares for this Financial Year are not available as this item was not accounted for separately until 1990–91

Departmental Energy Use

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proportion of the Department's energy usage was from *(a)* renewable energy and *(b)* combined heating in each year since 1989–90. [44079]

Mr. Morley: The Department's energy is purchased in the main through The Buying Agency, whose terms represent good value for money for the tax payer. We do not know what proportion of the energy is from renewable sources.

Over the years we have looked at a number of schemes to provide combined heat and power but so far none has been implemented, either because it did not represent value for money or because of physical constraints. We are, however, now looking at a combined heat and power scheme to serve part of the Central Veterinary Laboratory at Weybridge. We have recently introduced at the Central Veterinary Laboratory a system whereby a waste heat boiler is linked to the main incinerator to provide a large proportion of the heating and hot water for the site.

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much *(a)* oil, *(b)* gas and *(c)* electricity was purchased for the heating, lighting and powering of accommodation occupied by the Department within the United Kingdom in each year since 1989–90; and what was the total cost in real terms of each in each year. [44087]

Mr. Morley: Information for 1989–90 is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The information for subsequent years, which brings together energy consumption for the Department's main estate and its agencies, is as follows.

	1990–91	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*
Consumption:							
Electricity (kWh)	34,249,049	38,883,236	43,058,478	42,986,112	43,655,007	45,527,009	37,786,870
Gas (kWh)	51,983,258	51,058,770	42,337,530	45,116,093	47,822,314	57,660,765	59,623,879
Oil (kWh)	44,188,474	41,769,240	42,364,511	46,799,010	47,085,226	24,623,842	9,093,363
Total (kWh)	130,420,781	131,711,246	127,760,519	134,901,215	138,562,547	127,811,616	106,504,112
Expenditure (in cash terms):							
Electricity (£)	2,138,870	2,517,250	2,824,110	2,907,650	2,785,872	2,821,752	2,196,843
Gas (£)	598,808	619,560	579,910	559,460	542,057	519,646	463,989
Oil (£)	506,370	491,690	509,620	596,400	514,188	320,243	141,628
Total (£)	3,244,048	3,628,500	3,913,640	4,063,510	3,842,117	3,661,641	2,802,460

Figures for 1997–98 have not yet been collated.

Agricultural Gangmasters

Mrs. Fiona Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action is being taken to combat exploitative activities by agricultural gangmasters. [45123]

Mr. Rooker: The Government have been very concerned about the activities of certain agricultural gangmasters who exploit workers, defraud the Government and undermine the businesses of those gangmasters who work fairly within the law providing an essential service to the agricultural industry and ultimately the consumer. We therefore set up an interdepartmental working party to investigate the issue. Its report has now been placed in the Library of the House.

In light of the findings and recommendations of the interdepartmental working party and discussions with the industry we are putting in place a set of measures to tackle the abuses by a significant minority of gangmasters of workers' rights and of non-compliance and fraud against taxation, National Insurance, benefit and immigration systems.

The Government are launching "Operation Gangmaster". This cross-departmental initiative will bring together the work of up to 8 different enforcement agencies. The core of this pilot operation will be joint visits concentrating initially on illegal practices in Lincolnshire and East Anglia. Such visits have already occurred this season and one is in train today. This will be supported by general co-operation between enforcement officers alerting other departments to possible illegal activities. Departments will also co-operate in in-depth investigations into illegal gangmaster activities.

In addition, enforcement officers in all relevant Government departments throughout the country are being briefed on the legislative framework applicable to gangmasters; this will greatly assist strong enforcement and further cement co-operation between departments.

Additional support to Operation Gangmaster will be provided through the Government's Business Anti-Fraud Hot Line. Here the drive to identify fraudulent employers will be helpful in identifying those gangmasters who knowingly employ benefit claimants. Other measures being taken by the Government, including implementing the Working Time Directive and the National Minimum Wage, will contribute to improving the position of casual workers.

Importantly, for the first time, gangmasters, farmers and workers will be informed of their rights and obligations through leaflets which are being issued widely today. These provide a comprehensive picture of all the relevant aspects of law relevant to gangmasters and the people they employ, covering responsibilities of several different government departments. No one should be in doubt as to their rights or obligations under the law, or be able to claim ignorance of the law, if caught abusing their workers.

I am delighted also that the agricultural and horticultural industries are taking their responsibilities seriously too. The Code of Practice being launched by the National Farmers' Union and the Fresh Produce Consortium today is an important step. It will be of great assistance to all farmers, growers and pack house operators in understanding the relevant law and best practice to be adopted. I very much welcome that the retail sector have given their support to this code as an initial stage towards controlling gangmasters.

For the longer term, the Government are continuing to examine the scope for registration of agricultural gangmasters and ways to assist the unemployed to take up seasonable agricultural employment more easily, reducing the temptation to work while on benefit and laying individuals open to exploitation by gangmasters.

This comprehensive approach combining the strength of the several enforcement agencies, providing full information on rights and obligations to workers and employers and the role the industry themselves are playing to tackle the problem of abuse by gangmasters, is breaking new ground.

Countryside Stewardship Scheme

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many sites of special scientific interest are covered by the countryside stewardship scheme. [44115]

Mr. Morley: Based on the data currently readily available, all or part of the land in at least 400 Sites of Special Scientific Interest is subject to a Countryside Stewardship agreement. However, this figure does not include some early Countryside Stewardship agreements or agreements established in 1997 in Devon and Cornwall, for which information cannot readily be aggregated at present.

Tuberculosis

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action he is taking in respect of developing a vaccine to protect badgers and cattle from TB. [44796]

Mr. Rooker: The Krebs report concluded that the development of a vaccine for cattle was the best long-term prospect for the control of bovine TB, but saw a badger vaccine as an alternative option if cattle vaccine requirements cannot be met. Following the publication of the report, we have reviewed our research requirements for bovine TB, and in April published a document inviting proposals. These include work to develop a cattle vaccine and to take forward work on a badger vaccine which started in 1994. If suitable proposals are forthcoming, contracts will be awarded for work to start in April 1999.

Bees

Dr. Cable: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the value of pollination activity by bees to British agriculture. [44147]

Mr. Rooker: Over the years, the Government have funded work on the role and benefits of honey bees on crops. More recently, the Ministry asked ADAS for a report on the impact of varroa on the pollination of horticultural crops. The report was produced in September 1996 and revised in January 1998. Copies of both reports have been placed in the Library of the House.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to *(a)* promote training in apiculture and *(b)* extend the role of his Department's Bee Unit to reflect the agricultural importance of the bee and the threat of disease to the bee population. [44158]

Mr. Rooker: The Government support the beekeeping sector through the bee health programme which is delivered in England and Wales by the National Bee Unit, part of the Central Science Laboratory. The total UK programme is costing around £1.5 million this year in addition to the cost of research into bee diseases. Education and training are already important elements of the programme and the emphasis is on helping beekeepers to become more self-reliant.

The work of the National Bee Unit was included within the Comprehensive Spending Review, the conclusions of which are to be made public shortly.

Milk Quotas

Mr. Todd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is HM Government's policy on the continuance or otherwise of milk quotas; and what is their response to the European Commission's proposal published on 18 March on the extension of, and increase in, quotas. [44499]

Mr. Rooker: The Government broadly welcome the Commission's proposals for reforming the dairy sector as a step in the right direction. However, we are pressing for a clear date for the removal of milk quotas. Whilst welcoming, in principle, an increase in milk quotas in line with the price cuts, we do not accept the proposed discriminatory allocation of additional quota in favour of producers in mountain areas.

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if the proposed scheme to increase some milk quotas will apply to the Peak District. [44355]

Mr. Rooker: Part of the Commission's proposals would involve a 1 per cent. quota increase for each Member State with priority to be given to young farmers and 1 per cent. for producers in mountain areas. The UK would not benefit from the latter allocation but the former would in principle apply to the Peak District just as to any other part of the UK.

Dogs (Worming)

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to extend the standards of worming required in respect of dogs kept on meat-producing farms to other dogs in rural areas. [44444]

Mr. Rooker: I have no plans to require dogs kept in rural areas to be wormed. Effective wormers are available for dogs either under veterinary prescription or from registered agricultural merchants, saddlers or other outlets, and it is good practice for them to be used on a regular basis.

Tobacco

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to secure a reduction in the EU subsidy on tobacco crops. [44356]

Mr. Rooker: My Ministerial colleagues and I, and our officials, continue to raise our concerns about the tobacco regime at every opportunity in meetings with the Commission and other Member States.

The Commission's proposal for reform of the EU tobacco regime is scheduled to be discussed again in the Agriculture Council later this month. Medium and long-term savings are likely if the Commission's proposal can be agreed largely in its current form.

Sheep

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will assess the advantages of moving sheep head counts for EU purposes from spring to autumn to minimise the risk of ewes becoming separated from their lambs by the process. [44445]

Mr. Rooker: Flock counts are needed for a minimum 10 per cent. of claims under the Sheep Annual Premium (SAP) scheme and the Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowances (HLCA) scheme. At present, these counts must all be carried out during the scheme retention period, which for SAP and HLCA has been combined and fixed at 4 February to 15 May in consultation with the industry. The scope for changing these arrangements is currently limited. In particular, EU rules do not permit an autumn retention period for SAP.

They do allow for a proportion of flock inspections to be undertaken outside the retention period, if the general standard of on-farm record keeping is satisfactory. Unfortunately this is not yet the case in the UK. It is recognised that a spring retention period is not ideal from the welfare point of view but in practice it has not led to major difficulties. In carrying out their duties, the field staff are sensitive to potential welfare concerns and every effort is made to schedule inspections to minimise the disruption that may be caused to normal flock management.

Ecu

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the advantages to United Kingdom agriculture of the recent revaluation of the ecu. [44354]

Mr. Rooker: It is difficult to assess precisely the impact of changes in the green rates used to convert Common Agricultural Policy support payments into sterling. The Government are well aware of the ways in which movements in sterling may influence UK farming.

Tallow

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the prospects for the lifting of current EU restrictions on the non-food use of British tallow. [44359]

Mr. Rooker: Conditions for the export of tallow derived from bovine animals slaughtered in the UK for use in human food, animal feed, cosmetics and medical and pharmaceutical products are laid down in Council Decision 98/256/EC. However, exports may not recommence until the European Commission has inspected the implementation in the UK of the controls laid down in the Decision and set a date for this, after consulting the Standing Veterinary Committee. We invited the Commission to carry out the required inspection as far back as October 1997. We hope they will do so soon.

Tallow derived from bovine animals slaughtered in the UK can already be exported for uses other than in human food, animal feed, cosmetics and medical and pharmaceutical products.

Beef Export Ban

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the consequences for the British beef market if the ban on the export of British beef has not been lifted by the time the current calf slaughter programme ends in November. [44353]

Mr. Rooker: In the 12 months ending 31 May, 608,666 calves were slaughtered under the Calf Processing Aid Scheme. It is by no means evident that, in the absence of a scheme, all these calves would have been reared for beef. If the Scheme were terminated, we would expect UK beef production to increase some 18 months to 2 years after termination and the absolute upper limit of that increase would be of the order of 200 thousand tonnes per annum. The Government are confident that the ban on the export of British beef will have been lifted for animals born after the end of the current slaughter programme, before they are ready for slaughter as finished animals. The ban on the export of live calves is however likely to remain in place for the foreseeable future because of concerns about maternal transmission.

Barley

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations the EU has received from the US authorities about the subsidised sale of barley in the US; what is the total amount of barley involved; what is the sale price; what is the amount of subsidy offered per tonne; and if he will make a statement. [44324]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 8 June 1998]:* I understand that the EU has received a number of representations from the US authorities about this sale, which involved the sale of Finnish barley to a buyer in California. The total amount of barley involved was 31,570 tonnes, of which 31,520 tonnes received an EU export subsidy of 47 ecus/tonne and the remaining 50 tonnes a subsidy of 21.96 ecus/tonne. The sale price was a matter of private commercial contract. The transaction concerned did not infringe WTO rules.

Slaughterhouses

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many of the slaughterhouses in Great Britain have full-time veterinary supervision during their hours of operation. [44237]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 8 June 1998]:* The Meat Hygiene Service (an Executive Agency of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food) is responsible for the enforcement of meat hygiene, inspection and animal-welfare-at-slaughter legislation in slaughterhouses licensed under the meat hygiene regulations in Great Britain.

In most slaughterhouses, an MHI or OVS is present during the slaughterhouse operating hours, although in some small slaughterhouses this will not always be the case. The precise length of time spent in slaughterhouses

by an OVS will depend on several factors including the size and throughput of the premises, the complexity and standard of hygiene of operations, and the type of animal being slaughtered. However, no meat intended for sale for human consumption may leave any licensed slaughterhouse until it has been subjected to a *post mortem* inspection by an MHI, under the supervision of the OVS, has been passed as fit for human consumption, and been duly heath marked.

There are 31 full-throughput and 7 low-throughput licensed slaughterhouses in Great Britain with full-time veterinary supervision (ie full-time presence of a qualified veterinarian during *ante mortem* and *post mortem* inspections).

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many slaughterhouse operators were prosecuted in 1997 for failure to observe the statutory provisions about welfare at slaughter; and how many official warnings were given in 1997 about failure to comply with those statutory provisions. [44238]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 8 June 1998]:* Three slaughterhouse operators were prosecuted in 1997 in respect of offences under the Welfare of Animals (Slaughter or Killing) Regulations 1995. These Regulations do not provide for the issue of statutory warning notices and enforcement action may be verbal or written. Information on enforcement other than prosecution is not held centrally. Where possible, Official Veterinary Surgeons will act on the spot to correct problems. Evidence of cruelty or persistent disregard of welfare will result in prosecution action being taken.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if it is the policy of the Government to permit the export of slaughter pigs to Spain only where the authorities in Spain have confirmed that the slaughterhouse of destination complies fully with EU provisions relating to the welfare of animals at slaughter; and if he will make a statement. [44297]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 8 June 1998]:* The Department has maintained the list, first established at the beginning of 1993, of slaughterhouses confirmed by the Spanish authorities as meeting Community welfare requirements. This would enable us to consider the position carefully if slaughter animals of any species were shown on a route plan as destined for a slaughterhouse not on the list.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Broxtowe (Dr. Palmer) of 5 May 1998, *Official Report*, columns *303–04*, concerning live animal exports, if all the sheep exported to Spain for slaughter in 1997 were subsequently declared on the route plans as being transported to slaughterhouses notified to him by the Spanish authorities as complying with EU provisions on welfare at slaughter; and if he will make a statement. [44298]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 8 June 1998]:* Yes, save in two instances where failure to return a route plan was recorded for future consideration in relation to the exporter's authorisation to operate. Once route plans have been returned, they are available to help establish whether a false declaration has been made in the event that evidence emerges from any source that the journey details may have been other than as declared.

Live Animal Transport

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent assessment he has made of the animal welfare implications of the provisions within the Welfare of Animals (Transport) Order 1997 which allows animal hauliers to assess themselves as competent to transport farm animals and horses over eight hours. [44239]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 8 June 1998]:* When we made the 1997 Order five weeks after 1 May 1997, in fulfilment of a Community obligation which had previously been neglected, we made clear that we would review its provisions after they had been in force for a year. We will do this, thoroughly, after 1 July 1998.

The provisions regarding the assessment of transport staff are among those I shall wish to consider very carefully in the review. There was no practical alternative to allowing employers to assess their own staff (which can mean the self-employed assessing themselves) given the Order requires the assessments to be done by 1 July 1998. However, I shall be very happy to improve these arrangements if our planned public consultation indicates a practical way of doing this.

Pig Farms

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many *(a)* official warnings were issued to pig farmers by his Department, *(b)* prosecutions of pig farmers were made by his Department, *(c)* complaints about poor welfare on pig farms were investigated by his veterinary staff and *(d)* welfare inspections were made to pig farms by his Department, in respect of breaches of statutory welfare provisions in 1997, or the most recent period for which figures are available. [44235]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 8 June 1998]:* During 1997, veterinary staff of the Department's State Veterinary Service carried out 649 welfare inspections of pig farms, 145 of which followed complaints about poor welfare. Violations of legislation were found during 56 inspections and, in each case, warnings were given that legal action would be considered if improvements were not made. Prosecutions against pig farmers for welfare offences were initiated by the Department in 7 cases. The State Veterinary Service also co-operated closely with local authorities and other bodies over prosecutions they initiated against pig farmers for welfare offences.

Goat's Milk

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he will take to prevent the gold-plating of EU rules and regulations covering the production of goat's milk in cottage industries. [45017]

Mr. Rooker: The production of goat's milk is governed by the terms of the European Community's milk and milk products hygiene directive, which is implemented and enforced in England and Wales through the Dairy Products (Hygiene) Regulations 1995 (as amended). Enforcement should be proportionate to the public health risks, and there is no intention to gold-plate.

Food Poisoning

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will seek to establish an inquiry into food production methods in each European country to examine trends in the incidence of food poisoning across the EU. [45021]

Mr. Rooker: The Department has invited applications for research on the variations in prevalence of food poisoning both between and within countries with a view to identifying whether there are specific factors responsible. More detail can be found in MAFF's Food Research Requirements Document 1999–2000.

Genetically Modified Organisms

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what public opinion surveys he has evaluated into public attitudes towards genetically modified crops. [45122]

Mr. Rooker: The Department has evaluated a wide range of surveys on public attitudes to genetically modified crops. Many of these surveys show that the public wish to decide for themselves whether to purchase foods containing genetically modified material. I am delighted that the recent agreement in Brussels on genetically modified soya and maize labelling will enable consumers to do just this.

Food and Drink Regulations

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will instruct his inspectors involved with enforcing rules and regulations in relation to food or drink to do so in the least burdensome manner. [44917]

Mr. Rooker: MAFF Inspectorates and Agencies are already working to incorporate the Enforcement Concordat, launched by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service on 4 March 1998, *Official Report*, columns *692–94*, into their Codes of Enforcement or Service Standards to achieve better, and *inter alia* proportionate, enforcement which is nevertheless consistent with protecting consumers. Further, in the light of the voluntary approach to good enforcement which the Concordat promotes, we are reviewing enforcement procedures made under section 5 of the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994 and applied through legislation to section 10 of the Food Safety Act 1990 as this has been found to be burdensome.

Artificial Insemination

Mr. Walter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what consultation he has had with the cattle breeding industry regarding artificial insemination; and when he proposes to bring forward new regulations. [45026]

Mr. Rooker: A draft of new Artificial Insemination of Cattle Regulations was issued on 6 November 1997 for public consultation. A meeting to discuss responses to the consultation was held with interested parties on 20 March 1998. I regret, however, that the Department had to suspend work on the draft Regulations in April in order to allow the redeployment of staff to work connected with the relaxation of the EC beef export ban. I should emphasise that this is only a temporary step: the aim is to resume work on the draft Regulations in the autumn, subject to priorities at that time.

Sheep Dips

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the impact of charging for the inspection and licensing of sheep dips on *(a)* sheep farmers and *(b)* the environment. [44442]

Angela Eagle: I have been asked to reply.

The Government have no plans to license sheep dipping. However we have recently published draft Groundwater Regulations which are designed to enhance protection of groundwater from a number of dangerous substances, including sheep dips. The outcome of public consultation, including the costs involved, is currently under consideration.

HEALTH

Chiropody Services

Angela Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what response he has made to the recommendations of Age Concern's report, On Your Feet, published in March 1998. [44004]

Mr. Boateng: On 8 May 1998, I wrote to Evelyn McEwan, Director of Age Concern England. The report provides valuable information about National Health Service chiropody services and the perceptions of its users and providers.

Officials in the NHS Executive are looking at ways in which chiropody services might be further developed and will be consulting Age Concern during this process.

Emergency Contraception

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to publicise the availability of emergency contraception. [43703]

Ms Jowell: The Health Education Authority ran a major public awareness campaign on emergency contraception in 1995 and 1996. The campaign was co-ordinated by the Contraceptive Education Service (CES), which is funded by the Department. CES continues to promote awareness of emergency contraception and made this its focus during contraceptive awareness week in February. Earlier this year, CES launched a new information pack containing leaflets, posters and "credit cards" giving key information, plus guidance for professionals providing an emergency contraceptive service.

NHS Frameworks (User Input)

Mr. Healey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will announce what input users will have into the new National Health Service frameworks. [43866]

Mr. Milburn: National Service Frameworks will be developed with the assistance of an expert reference group which will bring together health professionals, service users and carers, health service managers, partner

agencies, and others. The reference groups will adopt an inclusive process to engage a full range of views. Membership is currently under consideration and will be announced shortly.

Epilepsy

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to *(a)* support research into ways of mitigating the effects of epilepsy and *(b)* meet representatives of groups representing epilepsy sufferers. [44110]

Ms Jowell: The main agency through which we support bio-medical and clinical research is the Medical Research Council (MRC). The MRC is an independent body which receives its grant-in-aid from the Office of Science and Technology, which is part of the Department of Trade and Industry. The MRC funds a good deal of research into epilepsy, which amounted to some £600,000 in 1996/97. However, the MRC does not currently support any research specifically and exclusively into mitigating the effects of epilepsy.

The Department's policy research programme (PRP) and the central National Health Service research and development programmes are not currently supporting any research into epilepsy, due to pressure of other priorities. However, records are not held centrally of all research carried out in the NHS.

The Department is currently supporting several epilepsy organisations through its section 64 scheme of grants. Recently, it also contributed £10,000 to the costs of the annual conference of the British Epilepsy Organisation. We have met recently with one of the epilepsy organisations and officials from the Department are in regular contact with the main epilepsy organisations and the Joint Epilepsy Council, an umbrella organisation for epilepsy organisations.

Ambulance Response Times

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 20 May 1998, *Official Report*, column *431*, on the Ambulance Service, if he will make it his policy for response times of ambulances to be monitored from the time the emergency service is called. [44329]

Mr. Milburn: No. This would not be sensible. The new requirements were developed by an expert advisory group and were widely supported in consultation.

Community Pharmacists

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he has taken to ensure that community pharmacists are fully represented and involved in the work of the proposed primary care groups. [44146]

Mr. Milburn: No final decisions on the proposed governance arrangements of primary care groups or primary care trusts have been made.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many and what proportion of Primary Care Group proposals currently under consideration incorporate community pharmacists. [44140]

Mr. Milburn: Proposals for establishing primary care groups are currently under discussion locally. We have made it clear in guidance that primary care groups, as well as involving general practitioners, community nurses and social services, should also ensure that they involve other health professionals, primary care contractors (including pharmacists), and secondary care clinicians on issues affecting their delivery of care.

Complementary Medicine

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the research projects on alternative and complementary medicine included in the current NHS research and development programmes. [44347]

Ms Jowell: The following research has been prioritised for funding through the National Health Service research and development programme:

complementary therapies in the management of back pain,

acupuncture for the management of pain in primary care,

the effectiveness of different psychosocial interventions for patients and their families following cancer diagnosis and treatment,

evaluating the effectiveness of acupuncture in defined aspects of stroke recovery,

multi-centre study of acupuncture for episodic tension headaches,

a double blind, randomised, parallel group, study evaluating the efficacy of a homoeopathic remedy in asthma,

the use of complementary therapies by women with breast cancer in South Thames region,

art therapy as an adjunctive treatment in severe mental illness,

non-pharmacological approaches to the management of irritable bowel syndrome (IBS),

the efficacy of acupuncture versus local anaesthetic injection in the treatment of myofascial pain in the jaw muscles,

assessing the effectiveness of hypnotherapy for pain relief in patients with chronic low back pain,

the effect of abdominal massage on the bowel habit of adults with cerebral palsy,

Tea Tree oil as an aid to fighting infection,

reflexology in the treatment of IBS in a primary care setting.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance is being given to health authorities and primary care groups on the inclusion of alternative and complementary therapies in the treatments that may be provided within the NHS. [44369]

Ms Jowell: The Department has issued no guidance to health authorities or primary care groups on the National Health Service provision of alternative and complementary therapies.

Availability of alternative and complementary therapies within the NHS reflects the decisions taken locally by health authorities and general practitioners about the clinical and cost effectiveness of such services and the priority to be given to their provision in the light of other competing demands for the resources made available for local health needs.

Primary Pharmacy Groups

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to introduce primary pharmacy groups. [44504]

Mr. Milburn: None.

Learning Disabilities

Ms Southworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many health authorities with a database detailing information on those people within their area who have learning disabilities make aggregated data available to his Department for planning and evaluation purposes; and how many of them hold that database jointly with their social services department; [44350]

(2) how many health authorities hold a database detailing information on those people within their area who have learning disabilities; and how many of them are structured to provide information on incidence of different types of learning disability; [44349]

(3) how many health authorities hold a database detailing information on those people who have autism within their local area; how many such databases are held jointly with the local social services department; and how many such health authorities make aggregate data available to his Department for planning and evaluation purposes. [44351]

Mr. Boateng: The information requested is not held centrally. However, analysis of population needs, and the prevalence and incidence of different types of disability, are important aspects of the commissioning functions of local authorities and health authorities. In "Signposts for Success in Commissioning and Providing Health Services for People with Learning Disabilities", published by the Department in January this year and distributed to health and local authorities, commissioners are advised to have arrangements in place to use both local and national information to build up a picture of the health needs of people with learning disabilities and people with autism in their locality. We also encourage health authorities to work together closely with local authorities in profiling both the volume, and needs, of people with learning disabilities and people with autism.

Health Trusts

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals he has to change the current responsibilities of health trusts for paying their own bills. [44425]

Mr. Milburn: None.

MRSA

Ms Jenny Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many methicillin resistant staphylococcus aureus incidents have occurred in hospitals in the *(a)* West Midlands and *(b)* London region in each of the past five years. [44438]

Ms Jowell: Information on the total number of cases of infection or colonisation with methicillin resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) is not collected centrally.

National epidemiological data on MRSA are compiled by the Public Health Laboratory service (PHLS) from isolates submitted voluntarily by hospitals in England and Wales for specialist microbiological tests. From these data, the number of incidents of MRSA—three or more patients infected or colonised by the same strain MRSA in a month from the same hospital—is recorded. The numbers of incidents for the years 199–1997 are in the table.

Year	*West Midlands*	*London Region*[2]
1992	35	216
1993	68	348
1994	169	649
1995	128	943
1996	121	960
1997[1]	[1]55	[1]491

[1] Data for six months only

[2] North Thames, North West Thames, South East Thames and South West Thames.

The Department is currently discussing with the PHLS ways of improving surveillance systems so as to provide more complete data on MRSA.

Hospital Beds (Liverpool)

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many beds were available in *(a)* Liverpool Royal, *(b)* Broadgreen, *(c)* Walton and *(d)* Fazakerley hospitals in each year from 1990–91 to 1997–98; and what were the cumulative bed losses to Liverpool over that period. [44441]

Mr. Milburn: Information on bed availability has been collected at National Health Service trust level since 1991–92 and the data are published in the book "Bed Availability and Occupancy for England", copies of which are available in the Library. The latest available data are for 1996–97. Information for 1997–98 will be available in the autumn. A breakdown of the information between the hospitals is not available centrally, but may be available from the chief executives of the trusts.

Dental Services (Cumbria)

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS dentists practise in North Cumbria; and what is the average number of patients registered with each dental practitioner *(a)* in North Cumbria and *(b)* nationally. [44797]

Mr. Milburn: The table shows the number of general dental service dentists and the average number of patients registered with each dentist in North Cumbria Health Authority and in England at 31 March 1998.

General dental service: number of dentists[1] and average number of registered patients per dentist at 31 March 1998

	Number of dentists	*Average number of registered patients per dentist*
England	16,830	1,477
North Cumbria	104	1,494

[1] Figures include principals, assistants and vocational trainees and exclude salaried, hospital and community dentists.

Bournewood Judgment

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will take steps, following the Bournewood judgment, to allow sufferers from Alzheimer's disease to continue to be admitted voluntarily to mental hospitals for respite care; [44585]

(2) if he will make a statement on the Bournewood judgment. [44584]

Mr. Boateng: Following the Court of Appeal's judgment in the case of L v Bournewood Community and Mental Health National Health Service Trust, the Department advised the NHS about the Court of Appeal ruling and issued guidance to the NHS on its practical application.

The trust was granted leave to appeal to the House of Lords, and the hearing took place on 2–8 June. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State was given leave to intervene in the case in the light of the wider implications of the Court of Appeal's judgment on the NHS and partner agencies. Further guidance will be issued once the House of Lords' judgment is known, and we will consider then what, if any, further action is needed.

Insulin Injection Pen Needles

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the outcome of his consideration as to whether general practitioners should be allowed to prescribe insulin injection pen needles on the NHS; and if he will make a statement. [45104]

Mr. Milburn: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Campbell) on 28 April 1998, *Official Report*, column *121*.

Health Authorities (Greater Manchester)

Lorna Fitzsimons: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has for consultation on the possible reconfiguration of health authority boundaries in the Greater Manchester area; and if he will make a statement. [45343]

Mr. Dobson: Having considered this issue and taken advice from those responsible for the management of health services across Greater Manchester, I have decided that no such re-organisation should take place. There is already a complex management agenda arising from the National Health Service White Paper, which includes the development of Primary Care Groups/Trusts and the Manchester, Salford and Trafford Health Action Zone, which must remain the key priorities for all concerned.

Waiting Lists (York)

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department has taken to reduce waiting lists in respect of the York NHS Trust. [45024]

Mr. Milburn: For 1998–99, we have allocated £4.009 million to North Yorkshire Health Authority specifically to ensure that more elective patients are treated and that waiting lists for the health authority and local trusts are reduced significantly. The regional waiting list task force is providing expert advice and support to the trust in effective waiting list management.

NHS Pension Scheme

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will ensure that the staff of GPs working in co-operatives have access to the NHS pension scheme. [45023]

Mr. Milburn: We have no plans to open the National Health Service pension scheme to staff who are not directly employed by general practitioners, including staff employed by GP co-operatives.

Millennium Compliance

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the likelihood of litigation arising as a result of failures in the millennium compliance of NHS computer systems. [45022]

Mr. Milburn: There is no difference between liability resulting from year 2000 problems and liabilities resulting from ordinary day-to-day work of the National Health Service. As with ordinary day-to-day work however, the NHS intends to avoid potential liability by taking all reasonable steps to avoid problems in millennium compliance.

Sight Tests

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the alterations to entitlement conditions for free annual sight tests since 1 March. [45032]

Mr. Milburn: There have been no legislative changes but, in advice issued to health authorities and opticians in November 1997, we indicated that patients who have been advised by a consultant ophthalmologist to have regular sight tests because high intra-ocular pressures put them at risk of glaucoma, are eligible for a free National Health Service sight test in the same way as patients diagnosed with glaucoma.

NHS Executive Regions

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the cost of the reorganisation of the NHS Executive regions to make their boundaries coterminous with those of the Government Offices for the Regions. [44223]

Mr. Milburn: Any costs arising from the reorganisation of the National Health Service Executive regions will be managed within existing running costs.

West Kent Health Authority

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 1 June 1998, *Official Report*, column *136*, if he will make a statement on how the national weighted capitation formula operates; in what ways the formula has changed since 1995–96; and how each of these changes has affected the funding of the West Kent Health Authority. [44640]

Mr. Milburn: The information requested has been placed in the Library.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

New Deal (Disabled People)

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment under what circumstances support from the access to work scheme will be available to disabled people taking part in the New Deal programme for disabled people. [44410]

Mr. Alan Howarth: Access to Work will be available for disabled people taking part in the New Deal for Disabled People in the same way and under the same conditions as for any other disabled people. Where an application is made before taking up employment or within 6 weeks of starting employment there will, of course, be no cost sharing.

New Deal

Sir Paul Beresford: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to his answer of 6 April 1998, *Official Report*, column *92*, which parliamentary constituencies are included in the Guildford unit of delivery for the New Deal; and, for each constituency, what is *(a)* the adult population, *(b)* the number of young persons aged 18 to 24 years unemployed, *(c)* the number of young persons aged 18 to 24 years unemployed who could be eligible to join the New Deal, *(d)* the number who have signed up under the New Deal, *(e)* the number placed in jobs under the New Deal since the scheme's commencement, *(f)* the number placed in unsubsidised jobs under the New Deal in the same period, *(g)* the number of young persons aged 18 to 24 years unemployed who found employment in 1997 and 1998, *(h)* the number of employers who have signed up to the New Deal and *(i)* the number of unemployed people who found employment in 1997 and 1998. [42568]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The parliamentary constituencies included in the Guildford unit of delivery are Aldershot; South-West Surrey; Surrey Heath; Bracknell; North-East Hampshire; Guildford; Mole Valley; Epsom and Ewell; Runnymede and Weybridge; Esher and Walton; and Woking. However, the information requested is not available by parliamentary constituency and so it is given for the Guildford New Deal unit of delivery or, where this is not possible, Guildford Local Authority district.

(a) According to the Census of Population, there were circa 100,000 people, aged 16 or over, resident in the Guildford local authority district in 1991. Figures for the adult population are not currently available by New Deal delivery unit. *(b)* As at April 1998, there are 941 18–24 year olds registered as unemployed in the Guildford New Deal delivery unit. *(c)* I refer the hon. Member to 25 February 1998, *Official Report*, column *292*, which provides a list of indicative planning assumptions for Gateway entrants, by unit of delivery, in 1998–99. The table shows that the planning assumption for Guildford unit of delivery is that 543 young people could be eligible to join New Deal, however this should not be seen as a precise estimate or forecast. *(d)* New Deal for 18–24 year olds was launched in Guildford on 6 April. Since then, 132 young people have joined New Deal. *(e)* and *(f)* After only a month of the Gateway period, the individual difficulties and problems faced by young people in this unit of delivery are still being addressed by referral to Gateway providers and the other three options. It is vital to the success of New Deal that participants are 'job-ready' before referral to jobs. *(g)* In 1997, around 3,650 young people aged 18–24 were recorded as having left claimant unemployment for a job in the Guildford unit of delivery area. In addition, there will have been others, whose destination is recorded as unknown, some of whom would have left the register to take up a job. In the year to April 1998, the latest date for which figures are available, around 3,300 18–24 year olds left claimant unemployment for a job. *(h)* In the Guildford unit of delivery, 78 employers have signed Employer Agreements (i) In 1997, around 13,700 unemployed people of all ages left claimant unemployment for a job. The equivalent figure for the year to April 1998 is 12,300. As with answer *(g)* these figures will not include those whose destination is recorded as unknown.

Disability Discrimination Act

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when he will implement the remaining provisions of Part III of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995; and if he will make a statement. [45367]

Mr. Alan Howarth: We have decided to implement the remaining provisions of Part III of the Disability Discrimination Act in two stages.

From October 1999, service providers will have to take reasonable steps to change practices, policies or procedures which make it impossible or unreasonably difficult for disabled people to use a service; provide auxiliary aids or services which would enable disabled people to use a service; and overcome physical barriers by providing a service by a reasonable alternative method.

From 2004, service providers will have to take reasonable steps to remove, alter, or provide reasonable means of avoiding physical features that make it impossible or unreasonably difficult for disabled people to use a service.

In reaching our decision on the timetable for implementation, we have taken full account of advice from the National Disability Council, from organisations of and for disabled people and from business. We have also considered the responses to the 1996 consultation exercise.

I have today written to the National Disability Council asking them to review the Code of Practice in order to take account of the new duties on service providers. I anticipate that public consultation on the Council's revised Code of Practice and the Government's proposals for a small number of regulations under the Act will begin no later than the beginning of August 1998 and last for 3 months.

We are also publishing today the analysis of the responses to the 1996 consultation exercise on the timetable for implementation. Copies have been placed in the Library.

WALES

Cardiff Bay

Mr. Rhodri Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what rent is being paid by occupants of the Scott Harbour office project under the rent guarantee scheme operated between Cardiff Bay Development Corporation and Grosvenor Waterside. [45117]

Mr. Ron Davies: Rent paid by the occupants of buildings in Scott Harbour under the rental guarantee scheme is a commercial matter for Associated British Ports. The grant payable to ABP under the scheme is up to a maximum of £1.4 million.

Prescription Drugs

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will estimate the total of *(a)* benzodiazapines, *(b)* prozac, *(c)* neuroleptic drugs and *(d)* sleeping pills which were prescribed in Wales in each of the past 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [44074]

Mr. Win Griffiths: I will write to my hon. Friend as soon as the data have been compiled and will place a copy of my reply in the Library of the House.

Directors of Social Services

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many directors of social services there were in Wales in *(a)* 1988 and *(b)* 1998; and if he will make a statement. [45007]

Mr. Win Griffiths: In 1988, there were 8 directors of social services in Wales. In 1998, there were 22 directors of social services in Wales.

This increase was due to local government re-organisation in 1996. There is one director in each authority.

Local Government Reform

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his current estimate of the cost of the local government reforms in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [45008]

Mr. Win Griffiths: Estimates of the costs of my proposals for modernising local government in Wales are not yet available. I am currently in the process of consulting on the proposals. The closing date for comments on the final two consultation papers—Improving Services Through Best Value and the New Ethical Framework—is 12 June. While there may be additional costs, these would need to be set against the savings resulting from the more efficient and effective operation of local government.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Benefit Integrity Project

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, (1) pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Swinney) of 5 May 1998, *Official Report*, columns *376–77*, concerning the Benefit Integrity Project, what timescale the review is working to; and when she will be in a position to report its outcome; [45116]

(2) if she will list the operational and legal issues that have prevented a review of Benefit Integrity Project cases prior to 9 February. [45115]

Mr. Denham: The purpose of the Benefit Integrity Project is to collect up to date information from claimants receiving the higher rate of the mobility component, with either the highest or middle rate of the care component, to ensure they are receiving their correct entitlement. On 9 February, an additional safeguard was introduced to ensure that there is always independent evidence to support a decision to reduce or remove benefit. From that date, the new safeguard has been applied to all initial Project decisions and to cases where a review has been requested.

The safeguard was introduced because of concerns that some disabled people may not have understood fully what was required of them and, as a result, had not provided a complete picture of the help they need with personal care and mobility.

Representations have been received from the All Party Disablement Group and others that all decisions made without the benefit of the new procedures introduced on 9 February should be reviewed. We have already made it clear to the House that we are currently considering how to examine those cases where the claimant has not asked for a review of a decision, made before 9 February, to reduce or remove benefit and no independent additional evidence was submitted. We are considering what action should be taken on the 2,400 or so such cases.

Uprating

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to her answer of 13 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *394*, if she will update the estimated costs of uprating the basic pension and linked benefits given in that answer. [44821]

Mr. Denham: The information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Working Benefits (Advertising)

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the total cost of the advertising campaign for working benefits launched on 1 June. [44573]

Mr. Keith Bradley *[holding answer 5 June 1998]:* The Working Benefits campaign is part of the Government's welfare to work initiative. It is designed to help families beat the poverty trap by letting them know which benefits they can access when they get into work. It targets chiefly lone parents on Income Support, and couples with children who are either out of work, or on a low income. A lot of help exists in the form of in-work benefits, such as Family Credit, Council Tax Benefit and Housing Benefit—these make work affordable. The Working Benefits campaign should alert those in greatest need to the help available to facilitate the move from benefit into work. Lone parents moving off Income Support and into work not only means that they—and their children—can enjoy a better standard of living than they ever could

on benefit, but can also help to reduce Social Security expenditure on lone parents—currently £10.5 billion a year.

Total cost of the advertising campaign is £2.15 million, which includes TV and radio production and airtime; design and production of print material; telephone response handling and fulfilment; direct mail to 580,000 lone parents; campaign website; campaign development research; and pre and post campaign effectiveness research.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much money was spent on housing benefit in each district council in Scotland in the 1996–97 financial year. [44204]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The information is set out in the table:

Housing benefit expenditure in Scotland 1996–97

Authority	*£000*
Aberdeen	[1]24,000
Aberdeenshire	16,200
Angus	10,400
Argyll-Bute	13,100
Clackmannanshire	6,900
Dumfries and Galloway	21,500
Dundee	42,100
East Ayrshire	[1]18,500
East Dunbartonshire	[1]7,700
East Lothian	[1]12,200
East Renfrewshire	[1]6,200
Edinburgh	98,900
Falkirk	[1]19,400
Fife	51,800
Glasgow	238,000
Highland	[1]29,100
Inverclyde	17,500
Midlothian	9,000
Moray	8,800
North Ayrshire	[1]22,800
North Lanarkshire	[1]56,700
Orkney	1,900
Perth and Kinross	13,700
Renfrewshire	30,300
Scottish Borders	11,700
Shetland	1,800
South Ayrshire	[1]18,300
South Lanarkshire	48,600
Stirling	12,100
West Dunbartonshire	[1]19,900
West Lothian	20,000
Western Isles	3,200

[1] Non audited figures

Source:

DSS Planning and Finance Division

Disability Living Allowance

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security over the last five years, and in the current year so far, how many recipients of disability living allowance have *(a)* had their eligibility reviewed by a medical examiner, *(b)* had allowance withdrawn as a result of the review, *(c)* taken the review to appeal and *(d)* won appeals. [44142]

Mr. Denham: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the table.

Entitlement to Disability Living Allowance is decided by adjudication officers, who take account of reports from medical practitioners.

Results of disability living allowance reviews and appeals

	Reviews decided		*Appeals decided*	
Year	*All decisions*	*Decided in favour of customer*[1]	*All decisions*	*Decided in favour of customer*[1]
1993–94	293,199	135,187	18,459	10,132
1994–95	316,589	153,594	26,225	16,516
1995–96	332,961	146,766	28,225	17,822
1996–97	359,334	143,755	35,551	21,064
1997–98	370,054	134,363	38,194	19,683
1998–99	24,587	8,229	3,381	1,663

[1] Cases where an existing award is increased or an award is made following a review of a disallowance

Note:

Figures are for April 1998

Source:

Analytical Services Division: 100 per cent. data

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people aged *(a)* 65 years or over, *(b)* 75 years or over and *(c)* 85 years or over are claiming disability living allowance (i) at the higher level and (ii) at the intermediate level in, (1) North Staffordshire health authority area, (2) the West Midlands health authority area and (3) nationally; and in each case what these figures are as a percentage of the total population. [44328]

Mr. Denham: The information is set out in the table.

Disability Living Allowance comprises three rates of care component and two rates of mobility component.

Age	*65 and over*	*75 and over*	*85 and over*
North Staffordshire			
Total population[1]	76,143	32,516	7,784
Numbers and percentage who receive DLA[2]			
Highest rate care	940 (1.2%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Middle rate care	860 (1.1%)	40 (0.1%)	0 (0.0%)
Higher rate mobility[3]	4,740 (6.2%)	480 (1.5%)	0 (0.0%)
West Midlands			
Total Population[1]	741,622	496,476	111,715
Numbers and percentage who receive DLA[2]			
Highest rate care	5,520 (0.7%)	220 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Middle rate care	7,420 (1.0%)	440 (0.1%)	0 (0.0%)
Higher rate mobility[3]	32,400 (4.4%)	3,380 (0.7%)	40 (0.0%)
Great Britain			
Total population[1]	7,990,121	5,408,847	1,273,204
Numbers and percentage who receive DLA[2]			
Highest rate care	58,440 (0.7%)	3,340 (0.1%)	40 (0.0%)
Middle rate care	85,880 (1.1%)	5,940 (0.1%)	60 (0.0%)
Higher rate mobility[3]	360,440 (4.5%)	41,020 (0.8%)	440 (0.0%)

[1] Source: Office of National Statistics and Scottish Registrar, June 1996 estimates

[2] Source: Analytical Services Division 5 per cent. data relating to 28 February 1998

[3] Some awards comprise both care and mobility components and figures may overlap.

Mr. Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many households of non-pensionable age are dependent on the higher rate of disability living allowance. [43802]

Mr. Denham: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the table.

People under pension age in receipt of the higher rate of Disability Living Allowance

Disability Living Allowance	*Numbers in receipt*
Highest rate care and higher rate mobility	943,000
Highest rate care and lower rate mobility	192,000
Highest rate care only	35,000
Higher rate mobility and middle rate care	187,000
Higher rate mobility and lower rate care	172,000
Higher rate mobility only	294,000

Notes:
1. The table includes women under 60 and men under 65
2. Disability Living Allowance comprises two components. The care component may be awarded at one of three rates and the mobility component may be awarded at one of two rates. Depending on the circumstances of the individual, awards may include either or both component paid at the appropriate rate
3. Figures rounded to the nearest thousand

Source:
Analytical Services Division. Provisional numbers at 28 February 1998, based on 5 per cent. data

Ms Hewitt: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what information material is provided on disability living allowance in *(a)* braille *(b)* audio type and *(c)* other formats accessible to people with visual impairments; [43462]

(2) what steps she is taking to ensure that *(a)* information, *(b)* claim forms and *(c)* other material relating to disability living allowance are provided in (i) braille, (ii) audio tapes and (iii) other formats that meet the needs of people with sensory disabilities. [43463]

Mr. Denham: The administration of Disability Living Allowance is a matter for Mr. Peter Mathison, the Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Ms Patricia Hewitt, dated 8 June 1998:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions asking what information material is provided on Disability Living allowance (DLA) in (a) braille, (b) audio type and (c) other formats accessible to people with visual impairments, and what steps she is taking to ensure that (a) information, (b) claim forms and (c) other material relating to DLA are provided in (i) braille, (ii) audio tapes and (iii) other formats that meet the needs of people with sensory disabilities.

The Disability Claim Pack, Charter Standard Statement and all other correspondence or forms issued to customers about DLA can be converted into braille via the Transcription Service provided by the Benefits Agency (BA)'s Benefit Enquiry Line (BEL). The Charter Standard Statement is also available on cassette tape. Further information about the Transcription service and copies of the Charter Standard Statement cassette can be obtained from the Disability Benefits Unit (DBU) Customer Services Team at Warbreck House, Blackpool, telephone 01253 337240.

Customers with hearing or speech difficulties, who have the use of a text phone and require information on DLA can use the Text Phone service which is provided by the Disability Benefits Directorate Customer Care Helpline. The contact number is 0345 224433. Minicom facilities and LOOP systems are also available at the BA's regional Disability Benefit Centre's and the DBU. A video incorporating British Sign language and subtitles, entitled DV3 (Sickness & Disabled), is currently available by contacting the British Deaf Association or the Royal National Institute for the Deaf Helpline. This provides information on DLA and other Sickness Benefits.

In addition to providing forms and correspondence in braille, the Transcription Service can also provide any information required in large print for those customers with a visual impairment. Information on DLA is not currently available on audiotape, however I have asked the DBU to actively consider whether this is possible and the Manager will write to you with the result of these deliberations. The BA is continually seeking to improve the service it offers to its customers in order to ensure that the needs of people with sensory disabilities are met in full.

You may also wish to know that the BA has an Internet site on the World Wide Web. This is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week at WWW.DSS.GOV.UK.

I hope that this is helpful.

Benefit Recovery

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total amount of state benefits recovered from successful claimants who were in receipt of legal aid to fight personal injury cases in *(a)* 1994–95, *(b)* 1995–96 and *(c)* 1996–97. [44501]

Mr. Denham: The information requested is not available as there is no requirement for claimants who are awarded compensation for personal injury to tell this Department whether or not they were in receipt of legal aid.

National Insurance Fund

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the expected difference between the income and expenditure of the National Insurance Fund for (1) 1999–2000 and (2) 2000–01 *(a)* before and *(b)* after taking into account the changes in NI contributions announced in the Budget and assuming that the basic pension and linked benefits are uprated in line with (i) prices and (ii) average earnings. [44836]

Mr. Denham: The information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Vaccine Damage

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security which options she considered with regard to the scope of the Vaccine Damage Payments Scheme following representations from the Association of Parents of Vaccine Damaged Children; and if she will make a statement. [44054]

Mr. Denham: We are considering the Vaccine Damage Payment Scheme as part of the overall review of welfare, which includes disability benefits, in consultation with the Department of Health and groups representing the interests of vaccine damaged children and their families.

Pensioners

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the proportion of pensioner households in the lowest quintile of income distribution in Scotland. [43810]

Mr. Denham: It is estimated that in 1995–96, a quarter of pensioner households in Scotland were in the bottom quintile of the income distribution of households in Scotland before housing costs (BHC) and a fifth were in the bottom quintile after housing costs (AHC).

It is also estimated that just over a third of households in the bottom quintile of the Scottish income distribution BHC were pensioner households. On the AHC measure, this reduces to just over a quarter. By comparison, pensioner households make up 28 per cent. of all households in Scotland.

Notes:

1. The data are taken from Households Below Average Income (HBAI) based on the Family Resources Survey (FRS). The 1995–96 financial year is the latest period for which data are available.

2. The income measure used is weekly net (disposable) equivalised income. The figures are given both before and after housing costs in line with usual HBAI practice. However, these figures count households whereas HBAI normally counts individuals. The results are sensitive to the choice of equivalence scale used to adjust household income for the size and composition of the household.

3. A household is defined as one person living alone or a group of people living at the same address, who either share one meal a day together or share the living accommodation. A household will consist of one or more benefit units, where a benefit unit is a single adult or couple, together with any dependent children.

4. A pensioner household is defined as a single person over State Pension Age (SPA) or a couple where the man, defined as the head, is over SPA. The estimates are based upon the income and benefits of the pensioner unit, and do not include the income of any other household members.

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many pensioner units in Scotland currently receive payments from occupational pensions. [43811]

Mr. Denham: The information requested is not available.

Council Tax Benefit

Mr. Rhodri Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when her Department notified local authorities in Wales that the imposition of a limit on the amount of council tax benefit awarded to persons residing in council tax band E and above would not be applied to existing recipients of council tax benefits in such properties; and if she will make a statement. [45094]

Mr. Keith Bradley: From 1 April 1998, Council Tax Benefit (CTB) for new CTB claimants living in band F, G or H properties was restricted to the maximum available in band E properties. As an integral part of implementation regulations to protect existing recipients of CTB in properties valued in bands F, G and H were laid on 30 March. On the same day the Department issued guidance to all Local Authorities notifying and explaining the change.

This ensured that some 66,000 CTB recipients were protected at the point of change.

Pensions

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she expects to publish the green paper on pensions before the summer adjournment. [44835]

Mr. Denham: As set out in the Green Paper, "New Ambitions for our Country: A New Contract for Welfare" (Cm 3805), we will publish a Green Paper on pensions later this year. The precise timing is still to be determined. There will then be a period of further consultation before final proposals are developed.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when she received or expects to receive the report of the Pensions Committee chaired by Mr. Tom Ross; and when she will publish it. [44833]

Mr. Denham: The Report of the Pension Provision Group was published on Thursday 4 June. A copy has been placed in the Library. Copies can be obtained from The Stationery Office Bookshop, telephone 0171–873 9090, fax 0171–873 8200, priced £25 ISBN No. 0–11–762607–4.

A Summary of the Group's Report is available free of charge from: DSS Pensions, Freepost, BS 5555/1, Bristol, BS99 1BL. Telephone number 0345 31 32 33.

The Summary is also available on the Internet at: http://www.dss.gov.uk/hq/pubs/ppg/index.html.

The Report and Summary will be published in Welsh shortly.

Pensions Education Working Group

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when she received or expects to receive the report of the Pensions Education Working Group; and when she will publish it. [44834]

Mr. Denham: We have just received the final version of the Pensions Education Working Group Report. We will be publishing it shortly.

Correspondence

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people, in term of full-time equivalents, are engaged in preparing replies to letters from members of the public in her Department's Correspondence Unit; and what is the average number of replies sent per working day. [44819]

Mr. Field: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out

In 1997–98, 49,319 letters from members of the public were received in the correspondence section attached to Minsters' offices. Replies to 32,168 of these were prepared by the Policy Correspondence Unit (which also prepares draft replies to letters from MPs) which had 38 staff at 1 June 1998. The remainder, together with an unquantified number of letters sent to Departmental officials, were dealt with across the Department mainly by officials for who replying to correspondence is only part of their duties.

Note:

Staffing figures are based on whole time equivalents.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what is the current rate of non-compliance with payment of maintenance assessments by the CSA for each region within the United Kingdom; [44567]

(2) what is the current backlog of cases at the CSA; how many of those have been outstanding for over one year; when the backlog is expected to be cleared for each region within the United Kingdom; [44568]

(3) what are the levels of outstanding debt in the CSA; and what percentage of that debt is unrecoverable for each region within the United Kingdom; [44569]

(4) what are the current levels of accuracy of settlements for the CSA for each region within the United Kingdom; [44570]

(5) what percentage of payments by absent parents are for wrong amounts; and what percentage of debt balances calculated by the CSA contain errors, for each region within the United Kingdom. [44571]

Mr. Keith Bradley: One of our key aims for the Child Support Agency is to ensure that more non-resident parents pay the maintenance they owe. We are looking closely at all aspects of the Child Support scheme to see where improvements can be made and we aim to bring forward a consultation document on our proposals later this year.

The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mrs. Faith Boardman. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Mrs. Faith Boardman to Mr. David Rendel, dated 5 June 1998:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Questions to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the Child Support Agency.

I cannot provide precisely all the information that you have requested, but have provided as much as possible from the most recent information available.

The Department of Social Security Analytical Services Division publish quarterly a summary of statistics relating to child support; the last report was published on 14 May 1998 and showed that nationally, 41% of non-resident parents were fully compliant, 29% were partially compliant and 30% were nil compliant. The full report is available in the House of Commons library. Analytical Services Division have provided details on a regional basis for Great Britain in relation to nil compliant cases and this information is shown in the table attached.

Where the Agency has taken-on cases, the length of time taken to complete a maintenance assessment is measured, and cases which exceed 52 weeks are considered to be a backlog; this backlog currently stands at approximately 110,000 down from 225,000 at 31 March 1997.

The Agency has developed and implemented a strategy for meeting its undertaking to clear this backlog. All Business Units have put in place operational plans which will guide them towards the achievement of our objective of clearing the backlog by 31 March 1999.

The amount of child support maintenance debt outstanding at the 31 May 1998, was £731,620,185.51. The Agency undertakes a Debt Analysis exercise at the end of each financial year. The analysis is performed at Agency level and cannot be broken down into regions within the United Kingdom. The Debt Analysis exercise for 1996/97 indicated that the percentage of full maintenance assessment debt regarded as probably uncollectable was 38%. Similar analysis is being carried out for 1997/98 and the results will be published in the Agency's 1997/98 Annual Report and Accounts in July 1998, in a format which will satisfy the Committee of Public Accounts recommendation that the Agency ". . . examine the scope for eliminating a significant amount of this debt, since it is unlikely ever to be collected . . . ".

The Agency measures the accuracy of maintenance assessments against targets set by the Secretary of State. For 1997/98, the target was for the cash value of all maintenance assessments checked in the year to be correct in at least 85% of cases. The Agency met this target scoring an accuracy rate of 86%.

In 1998–99, the Agency is measuring the accuracy more stringently be examining the last full assessment rather than just the last work carried out, which could have been a simplified review not requiring a full assessment. The revised methodology is similar to that used by the National Audit Office. The checks will be more reliable, measuring accuracy of assessments in earlier years as well as more recent changes to assessments. However, this may result in a larger number of inaccurate assessments being identified in the short term and as a result the accuracy target is lower for 1998–99, and requires the cash value of all assessments checked in the year to be correct in at least 75% of cases. The Agency will be looking to improve on the accuracy target in 1999–2000 and beyond.

The report of the Comptroller and Auditor General to the House of Commons which was published as part of the Agency's Annual Report for 1996/97 noted that when examining non-resident parents' maintenance balances, National Audit Office staff had identified errors in 85% of the cases examined. I am not able to update this assessment which was based on a sample of cases going back to the start of the Agency, but it is a matter of public record that during its first two years the Agency frequently made errors when assessing maintenance. We recognise the legacy of this problem and aim to tackle this by getting cases right first time and will review older cases as the opportunity arises, for example when a periodic review is being carried out. We estimate that by the end of 1998/99 we will have had the chance in our normal course of work and through periodic reviews to look at many of those individual accounts which stem from the start of the Agency.

I hope this is helpful.

Rates of nil compliance in the quarter to 28 February 1998, for Full Maintenance Assessment cases by region of the Parent with Care (Information taken from ASD 5% scan of Child Support Computer System at 28 February 1998)

Region	*Percentage*
North-east	22.8
North-west	27.2
Merseyside	26.6
Yorks & Humberside	32.6
East Midlands	31.8
West Midlands	31.8
Eastern	31.2
London	31.4
South-east	28.1
South-west	28.7
Wales	25.0
Scotland	26.9
Great Britain	30.3

Winter Fuel Payments

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many complaints the Benefits Agency has received regarding *(a)* over payment and *(b)* underpayment of Winter Fuel Payment since the scheme came into operation. [44901]

Mr. Michael J. Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what sums were paid to residents in Worcester as winter fuel payments in 1997–98. [43677]

Mr. Denham: Winter Fuel payments are one of a number of initiatives the Government have taken to help vulnerable people, especially the elderly, keep warm in the winter. A total of £400 million has been committed for two years (97/98 and 98/99), to help pensioners with fuel bills to pay. This is the first time any Government

have provided additional help with heating costs to all pensioners living in the United Kingdom who receive a Retirement Pension or one of a number of other qualifying benefits.

The making of this year's payments has been an enormous and unprecedented exercise. In order to establish all eligible pensioners, correctly identify pensioner households, and determine the amount each should receive, it was necessary to correlate data in around 15 million computer records, involving 15 qualifying benefits, across nine computer systems. Overall, almost ten million pensioners, in over seven million households, have received a payment.

The administration of winter fuel payments is a matter for Peter Mathison, Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Gentleman and my hon. Friend.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Mark Oaten, dated 8 June 1998:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many complaints the Benefits Agency (BA) has received regarding over and underpayments of Winter Fuel Payments since the scheme came into operation.

The making of Winter Fuel Payments to almost ten million eligible pensioners in over seven million households, before the end of March 1998, has been a challenging task for the BA. This was achieved whilst maintaining normal benefit business.

Individual representations from customers are dealt with by each of the BA's 109 Districts. Information is not available relating to complaints about either over or underpayments of Winter Fuel Payments.

We are aware of 649 eligible pensioners who received two £50 payments. This includes 211 who erroneously received two payments due to being in receipt of both Income Support and income-based Jobseeker's Allowance for at least one day in the qualifying week. In accordance with legislation, only one payment should have been made. Also, due to a computer operator error, 40,801 invalid girocheques were sent out with an incorrect date of issue. The error was quickly identified and all the invalid payments were replaced within 72 hours. The letter which accompanied the replacement payment apologised for the error and advised the recipient to destroy the invalid girocheque or if they had encashed it, to return the replacement to the nearest Benefits Agency office. It appears that in 438 instances both the invalid and replacement girocheque were cashed.

In addition we are aware that 9,357 £50 payments have been made to customers who were not entitled to them. All other payments have been made in accordance with legislation which states that the amount payable will be based on official records and therefore are not regarded as overpayments.

I hope that this is helpful.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Michael J. Foster, dated 8 June 1998:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent parliamentary question asking what sums were paid to residents in Worcester as winter fuel payments in 1997/98.

The making of winter fuel payments to almost 10 million pensioners, in over seven million households, before the end of March 1998 has been a challenging task for the Benefits Agency (BA). This has been achieved whilst maintaining normal benefit business.

Around one and a half million of the poorest pensioners, those receiving Income Support (IS) or income-based Jobseeker's (JSA), received their payment of £50 during January. Other eligible pensioners were entitled to a payment of £20 where they lived alone or were the only eligible pensioner in a household, otherwise, they were entitled to £10 if they were in receipt of a qualifying benefit (including each person in a pensioner couple).

Not all of the information requested is available as the BA collates IS and JSA statistics by BA District Office. These Districts do not correspond to constituency boundaries. Such information as is available relates to the number of pensioners in the Worcester BA District who received a £50 IS payment.

Following a scan of the computer systems in January, 5,156 £50 payments totalling £257,800 were issued. It is likely that a small number of additional payments will also have been made locally because details for the eligible pensioner were not held on the computer system at the time the scans were completed.

The information relating to other pensioners who received payments of £20 or £10 could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

I hope that this is helpful.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 10 June 1998

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Secondary Legislation

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the President of the Council if she will make a statement on trends in the use of secondary legislation. [43512]

Mrs. Ann Taylor: In the ten years to 1996–97 an average of 185 instruments have been laid each session under the affirmative procedure and 1,127 under the negative procedure. While there has been a slight growth in the number of instruments laid under the negative procedure, the number of affirmatives has not altered significantly and the total (including instruments not requiring parliamentary procedure) has declined slightly. No information is yet complete for the sessions since May 1997 but I have no reason to suppose there have been any significant changes. Although the Delegated Powers and Deregulation Committee in the House of Lords examines the order-making powers in legislation laid before Parliament, no statistics are compiled on the incidence of such order-making powers in primary legislation.

Spending Review

Ms Squire: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, what plans the Commission has to commission a fundamental spending review of the departments of the House. [44583]

Mr. Kirkwood: The Commission will be reviewing the House's administrative spending plans for the coming three years shortly. In doing so, the Commission will seek to keep expenditure to a minimum, consistent with providing the quality of services required by Members. But the Commission has no plans for a separate review exercise.

Portcullis House

Ms Squire: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee if he will estimate the *(a)* capital and *(b)* revenue expenditure on Portcullis House (i) for 1997–98 and (ii) in total to date. [44590]

Sir Sydney Chapman: Up to the end of 1997–98, a total of £98.3 million has been spent on Portcullis House, including £39.9 million in 1997–98, all of which is capital expenditure. In addition some £29,000 was spent in 1997–98 on electrical power supplies for the construction work classified as revenue expenditure.

Recycling Sacks

Mr. Brake: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee, pursuant to her answer of 18 May 1998, *Official Report*, column *246*, on recycling sacks, how many sacks were sent to be recycled in 1997–98. [45416]

Mrs. Roe: Records of the number of sacks sent for recycling are not maintained. However, in the year ending 31 December 1997, 737 tonnes of mixed paper and cardboard were sent for recycling.

Government Announcements

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the President of the Council what steps she is taking to ensure that Government initiatives are announced in the House before being released to the Press. [25364]

Mrs. Ann Taylor: Due to the administrative error following the transfer of this Parliamentary Question, this answer is unacceptably late and apologies have been conveyed for this.

I can assure the hon. Member that I regularly remind Ministers that, as set out in the Ministerial Code (July 1997), they should bear in mind the desire of Parliament that the most important announcements of Government policy should be made in the first instance in Parliament.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Departmental Energy Use

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much *(a)* oil, *(b)* gas and *(c)* electricity was purchased for the heating, lighting and powering of accommodation occupied by his Department within the United Kingdom in each year since 1989–90; and what was the total cost in real terms of each in each year. [44085]

Mr. Tom Clarke: My Department was created in April 1992 by transferring certain areas of responsibility from six Departments. However, the following details of energy consumption and costs are only available from 1993 when the Department commenced occupation of its own buildings:

	Oil		*Gas*		*Electricity*	
	KWH	*Cost*	*KWH*	*Cost (£)*	*KWH*	*Cost (£)*
1993–94[1]	Nil	Nil	221,808	3,810	586,372	49,400
1994–95	Nil	Nil	1,059,183	14,599	1,074,541	64,066
1995–96[2]	Nil	Nil	1,593,599	15,247	1,194,927	67,023
1996–97	Nil	Nil	1,450,385	11,967	1,342,571	78,655
1997–98[3]	Nil	Nil	1,593,731	12,939	1,206,320	78,634

[1] Occupation during part financial year

[2] Additional premises acquired part way through the financial year

[3] Replaces provisional 1997–98 figures included in my reply of 6 May 1998, *Official Report*, column *408*.

Staff Car Mileage Allowance

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what was the total real terms value of *(a)* staff car mileage claims paid and *(b)* staff rail fares paid; and what was the amount of staff car mileage for which reminbursement was made and the percentage change year on year, for each year since 1989–90. [44080]

Mr. Tom Clarke: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 6 May 1998, *Official Report*, column *408*.

Reviews

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will list, for each of the last four years, the departmental inquiries and reviews instigated by Ministers which have been chaired by individuals outside his Department; and in each case if he will give the date of establishment and the name of the chairman. [44360]

Mr. Tom Clarke: The information requested is as follows:

1995

Working Group on University Sports Scholarships. Sir Roger Bannister. October.

1996

National Reading Initiative. Joanna Trollope. October.

1997

Review of Area Museum Councils of England. Tony Pender. CBE. January.

Report into IT in Public Libraries. Matthew Evans. February.

Film Policy Review. Stewart Till (joint chairman with Right Hon. Tom Clarke, CBE MP) May.

Football Task Force. Right Hon. David Mellor. July.

England's World Heritage Sites, Tentative List Review. Oliver Pearcey. October.

Review of Lyric Theatre in London. Sir Richard Eyre. November.

1998

Working Group on Legal Deposit. Sir Anthony Kenny. January.

Report on the Bowes Museum, Barnard Castle Richard Foster. DL. April.

Libraries (Large Print Books)

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will issue guidance to local library authorities producing annual library plans not to reduce funding for large print books; and what guidance he has issued on this matter to date. [44368]

Mr. Fisher: The Government recognise the importance of specialist library services, and require library authorities to report on them in their Annual Library Plan. The actual level of expenditure on different types of book is for library authorities to determine, based on local priorities and resources.

Artefacts (Repatriation)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions he has had with UNESCO concerning the repatriation of cultural artefacts. [44378]

Mr. Fisher: Neither my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State nor I have had discussions with UNESCO on this issue. Officials have taken part in meetings which have touched on the issue of restitution in the normal course of business.

Tourism Forum

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will list the Chairman and members of the Forum Working Group into Tourism. [44933]

Mr. Tom Clarke: There are 12 working groups attached to the Tourism Forum. The Chairmen and members are listed.

Members

Communications strategy working group members

Charles Allen—Chairman	Granada
Judith Anthony	Thames Valley Economic Partnership
Colin Browne	BBC
Gary Crosley	Reid Catering Titles
Sandie Dawe	British Tourist Authority
Dereck Dear	British Airways
Harvey Elliot	Consultant
Jim Graham	Border TV
David Harbourne	Consultant
Símon Johnson	Banque Credit Suisse
Ray Kelly	Carat UK
Lyn Lavers	Distinctive Publishing
Jeremy Logie	British Hospitality Association
Ken McCulloch	MHM
Prof. Peter Jones	Bournemouth University
Eve Pollard	Journalist, English Tourist Board
Ann Scott	Ann Scott Associates
Diane Summers	Financial Times
Clare Walker	Jannus Group
Roy Tutty	Department for Culture Media and Sport

Whitehall issues working group members

Ken Robinson—Chairman	Tourism Society
Peter Agar	Confederation of British Industry
Ailsa Blaire	Local Government Association
Colin Clark	Horwath and Horwath
Sue Garland	British Tourist Authority/English Tourist Board
Barry Goddard	Council for Travel and Tourism
Peter Hampson	British Resorts Association
Brian Handley	Yorkshire Tourist Board
Michael Hirst	Joint Hospitality Industry Congress
John Lee	Association of Leading Visitor Attractions
Jeremy Logie	British Hospitality Association
James Spencer	British Holiday and Home Parks Association
Barbara Phillips	Department for Culture Media and Sport (observer)

Members	
Business tourism working group members	
Michael Hirst—Chairman	Joint Hospitality Industry Congress
Peter Agar	Confederation of British Industry
Robert Ayling	British Airways
Barry Cleverdon	NEC
Sarah Dale	Sarah Dale Travel
Michael Edwards	AmEx
Sir John Egan	London Tourist Board
Carole Forman	British University Accommodation Consortium
David Hackett	The Marketing Organisation
Albert Hampson	Automobile Association
John Jarvis	Jarvis Hotels
Jack Monro	Glasgow Tourist Board
Mike Platt	Hogg Robinson
Peter Rand	Rand Group
Tony Rogers	British Association Conference Destinations
Georges Sampeur	Avis
Anthony Sell	British Tourist Authority
Michael Skapinker	Financial Times
Mike Toynbee	Executive Travel
Robert Watson	British Telecom
Ivor Warburton	InterCity West Coast
Roy Tutty	Department for Culture Media and Sport
Visitor attractions working group members	
John Lee—Chairman	English Tourist Board, Association of Leading Visitor Attractions
Ken Robinson	Tourism Society
Michael Jolly	Tussauds
Brian Handley	Yorkshire Tourist Board
Michael Ann	English Tourist Board, Drusillas Park
Patricia Yates	Holiday Which, Consumers' Association
David Beeton	Historic Royal Palaces Agency
Martin Sandbach	English Tourist Board
John Murphy	Department for Culture Media and Sport, Tussauds
DCMS:	
Nigel Pittman	Buildings, Monuments and Sites Division
Hugh Corner	Museums and Galleries Division
Richard Thomas	Lottery Policy Branch
Stephen Creigh-Tyte	Economics Branch
Human resources or "people" working group members	
Peter Moore—Chairman	Center Parcs/English Tourist Board
David Wood	Hotel Catering and International Management Association
Pauline Wells	Tussauds Group
David Harbourne	Hospitality Training Foundation
Conrad Lashley	The Council for Hospitality Management Education
Elaine Noble	English Tourist Board/British Tourist Authority
Stephen Moss	Restauranteurs Association Great Britain
Nicola Hayward	Seaview Hotel
Mary Curnock-Cook	British Institute of Innkeeping
Matthew Farrow	Confederation of British Industry
Kim Parrish	Scottish and Newcastle
Presentation of heritage and culture group members	
David Quarmby—Chairman	British Tourist Authority
Mary Allen	Arts Council
Anthony Sell	British Tourist Authority
David Beeton	Historic Royal Palaces Agency
John Tod	British Council
Sir Jocelyn Stevens	English Heritage
Graham Greene	British Museum
Robert Anderson	British Museum
James Joll	Museums and Galleries Commission
Timothy Mason	Museums and Galleries Commission
Damien Whitmore	Tate Gallery
Martin Drury	National Trust
Michael Taylor	National Trust
Strategic planning working group members	
David Quarmby	British Tourist Authority
Michael Jolly	Tussauds Group
Charles Allen	Granada
Michael Hirst	Joint Hospitality Industry Congress
Ken Robinson	Tourism Society

Members	
Michael Elliot	Heart of England Tourist Board
John Lee	Association of Leading Visitor Attractions
Peter Moore	CenterParcs
Jeremy Logie	British Hospitality Association
Councillor John Price	Local Government Association

Widening access to tourism working group members	
Jeremy Logie—Chairman	British Hospitality Association
John Bamsey	Hilton UK
Roger de Haan	Saga Holidays
Peter Holland	The Disability Partnership
Sir William Lawrence	Heart of England Tourist Board
Stephen Mills	English Tourist Board
David Phillips	Holiday Care Service
Peter Taylor	Millennium and Copthorne Hotels
Maundy Todd	Tourism for All
Alan Bishop	National Caravan Council Ltd
Jenny How	Cheshire County Council
Tim Mason	Museums and Galleries Commission
Phil White	National Express Group
Roddy Watt	Berkeley Scott Group
Rosemary Griggs	Department for Culture Media and Sport

Domestic tourism working group members	
Councillor John Price—Chairman	Chester City Council
Dorothy Naylor—Vice Chair	North West Tourist Board
Geoffrey Lipman	World Travel and Tourism Council
Jerry Fowden	Rank Group plc
Brendan Burns	Federation of Small Businesses
Peter Hampson	British Resorts Association
Bob Ackland	North Somerset Council
Tim Bartlett	English Tourist Board
Professor Victor Middleton	International Management Consultant in Tourism

Domestic tourism working group: quality sub-group members	
Jerry Fowden—Chairman	Rank Group plc
Tim Bartlett	English Tourist Board
Peter Hampson	British Resorts Association
James Spencer	British Holiday and Home Parks Association
Nicola Hayward	Seaview Hotel, Isle of Wight
Patricia Yates	Holiday Which
Dorothy Naylor	North West Tourist Board

Domestic tourism working group: distribution sub-group	
Brendan Burns—Chairman	Federation of Small Businesses
Bob Ackland	North Somerset Council
Brian Barrett	Virgin Rail Group
Peter Chappelow	Holiday Cottages
Nick Cust	Superbreak
Colin Doyle	Countrywide Holidays
Stephen Freudmann	Association of British Travel Agents
Ken Male	Bournemouth Tourism
Dorothy Naylor	North West Tourist Board
Martin Sandbach	English Tourist Board
Richard Tobias	British Incoming Tour Operators Association

Domestic tourism working group: sustainability sub-group members	
Geoffrey Lipman—Chairman	World Travel and Tourism Council
Dorothy Naylor	North West Tourist Board
Tim Whitehead	English Riviera Tourist Board
Stephen Mills	English Tourist Board
Richard Wakeford	Countryside Commission
Alex Youel	National Trust
Margaret Clarke	Rural Development Commission
Jonathon Porritt	Forum for the Future
Bill Breakell	North Yorks Moors National Park
Victor Middleton	Oxford Brookes University
John Dawson	Automobile Association
David Lunn	Windsor District Council
Chris Collier	Cumbria Tourist Board
Stephen Hodgson	Department for Culture Media and Sport

Note:
Organisations listed were correct at the time the Working Groups were established.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Curfews (Electronic Monitoring)

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current average cost of a curfew order backed by electronic tagging in *(a)* Norfolk, *(b)* Greater Manchester and *(c)* Reading. [43879]

Ms Quin: It is not possible on the grounds of commercial confidentiality to provide a breakdown of current average costs of a curfew order for different trial areas. Based on the experiences of the first two years of the trials of curfew orders with electronic monitoring, the cost per order for a national roll-out was estimated to be about £1,900. However, this cost does not account for any savings achieved through providing electronic monitoring for Home Detention Curfew simultaneously with curfew orders.

Cab Drivers (Offences)

Mr. Forth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many cab drivers convicted of assault and rape, were *(a)* taxicab drivers, *(b)* minicab drivers who had accepted fare-paying passengers illegally and *(c)* minicab drivers who had accepted fare-paying passengers legally in the Greater London area in the last year for which figures are available; [44688]

(2) how many minicab drivers convicted of assault and rape *(a)* had and *(b)* did not have previous convictions for a similar offence in the Greater London area in the last year for which figures are available; [44686]

(3) how many prosecutions of minicab drivers for illegally seeking or accepting fare-paying passengers there were in the Greater London area in the last year for which figures are available. [44687]

Mr. Michael: Information held centrally on the Home Office Court Proceedings database does not identify the profession of offenders convicted or re-convicted of violent and sexual offences.

In 1996 (latest available), there were 132 prosecutions in the Metropolitan Police (including City of London) area for offences under section 167 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994—Touting for hire car service without a Public Service Vehicle operator's licence.

There were also 19 prosecutions recorded under the Metropolitan Public Carriage Act 1869, but we cannot determine from the data held centrally whether any occurred under section 7 of the Act—illegally plying for hire (where a vehicle, which is not a licensed London taxi, is made available for immediate hire).

In theory, provincial taxi and Private Hire Vehicle drivers could commit either of the above offences. London taxi drivers may illegally ply for hire waiting at places which are not designated ranks, but this offence is under section 33 of the London Hackney Carriage Act 1843 and, again, we can only identify prosecutions under the whole of the Act, of which there were 71 within the Metropolitan Police (including City of London) area in 1996.

Animal Tests

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the amount spent by his Department in the two years prior to 1998–99 on research into alternatives to testing cosmetic products on animals. [44665]

Mr. George Howarth: Each year, the Home Office makes a budget available to the Animal Procedures Committee to fund research into replacement, reduction and refinement alternatives to the use of animals in all types of scientific procedures, not just cosmetic testing. In 1996–97, this budget amounted to £242,000 and in 1997–98 to £182,000.

Applications are invited from those who are seeking sponsorship for projects relating to the development or implementation of alternatives. The Animal Procedures Committee, through its Research Sub-Committee, provides independent advice about which of these projects should be funded. During the last two years, no applications have been received for research relating to alternatives to the use of animals in cosmetic product testing.

Cosmetic testing accounts for about 0.1 per cent. of all scientific procedures using animals in the United Kingdom. Available funds are best targeted at research projects which will benefit more animals.

The cosmetic industry itself allocates considerable resources to the development of alternative tests, partly to meet the requirements of the 6th amendment to the European Communities Cosmetics Directive 93/35/EEC. The companies licensed to use animals in testing finished cosmetic products agreed in November 1997 to end, with immediate effect, this work in the United Kingdom.

Hand Guns

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cases of compensation for hand guns in each police force area made under (i) option A, (ii) option B and (iii) option C are currently outstanding; and what amount has been paid out to date in each force area. [44867]

Mr. Michael: The information is given in the table.

	Outstanding Claims		
Name of force	*Option A/B*	*Option C*	*Amount paid £*
Avon and Somerset	14	627	1,404,135.90
Bedfordshire	0	251	402,982.43
Cambridgeshire	1	290	509,094.10
Central Scotland	1	81	100,256.10
Cheshire	9	334	1,495,079.80
City of London	0	6	24,892.20
Cleveland	0	194	326,891.36
Cumbria	1	197	350,173.51
Derbyshire	3	426	688,420.16
Devon & Cornwall	3	799	1,602,005.03
Dorset	0	434	898,257.57
Dumfries and Galloway	3	44	79,131.35
Durham	4	219	404,494.49
Dyfed	3	265	396,507.96
Essex	13	1,109	2,402,148.43
Fife	0	82	99,228.10
Gloucestershire	0	236	399,091.11
Grampian	0	207	324,828.05
Greater Manchester	6	844	1,740,952.71

Name of force	Outstanding Claims: Option A/B	Outstanding Claims: Option C	Amount paid £
Gwent	0	281	441,227.32
Hampshire	4	865	1,496,682.03
Hertfordshire	1	483	931,438.04
Humberside	3	317	563,867.62
Kent	4	998	1,587,223.61
Lancashire	1	601	1,674,785.43
Leicestershire	9	236	1,283,815.89
Lincolnshire	0	350	543,710.63
Lothian & Borders	2	211	414,950.32
Merseyside	3	541	1,090,965.34
Metropolitan MP1	0	141	310,062.30
Metropolitan MP2	4	658	1,806,678.30
Metropolitan MP3	17	766	1,371,445.05
Metropolitan MP4	8	848	1,553,036.46
Metropolitan MP5	9	744	1,203,243.53
Norfolk	5	420	841,820.92
North Wales	3	300	1,120,196.81
North Yorkshire	10	352	2,133,358.23
Northamptonshire	2	181	595,426.78
Northern	2	190	366,290.08
Northumbria	1	457	542,259.71
Nottinghamshire	4	459	1,183,314.05
South Wales	3	606	1,061,723.07
South Yorkshire	22	440	849,971.62
Staffordshire	2	444	824,134.20
Strathclyde	6	511	698,078.86
Suffolk	0	540	560,093.40
Surrey	3	571	1,256,143.54
Sussex	12	673	1,158,589.52
Tayside	0	131	215,043.15
Thames Valley	11	1,127	3,785,513.43
Warwickshire	1	260	297,773.69
West Mercia	8	598	1,188,137.34
West Midlands	8	680	1,640,524.38
West Yorkshire	17	640	1,734,827.23
Wiltshire	1	279	488,043.13

Mediation UK

Mr. Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what level of financial and other support his Department plans to provide to Mediation UK in the current financial year. [44948]

Mr. Michael: No application has been made by Mediation UK for financial support for this financial year. Mediation UK have met Home Office officials to discuss a possible application for financial support for 1999–2000 and I have also listened to local representatives of Mediation UK to consider their work.

Foreign Nationals (Drug Offences)

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many foreign nationals were serving a prison sentence in England and Wales in each of the last five years; and what percentage were serving prison sentences for drug offences. [45158]

Ms Quin: The available information is for the prison population as at 30 June each year and is given in the table. A more detailed breakdown of sentenced prisoners, by nationality, ethnicity and type of offence, is published annually in "Prison Statistics England and Wales" (Table 9.5 of the 1996 edition, CM 3732), copies of which are available in the Library.

Number of sentenced foreign nationals in prisons in England and Wales, and proportion serving sentences for drugs offences, as at 30 June 1993–97

As at 30 June	Number of sentenced foreign nationals	Proportion serving sentences for drugs offences (%)
1993	2,298	30
1994	2,309	34
1995	2,616	34
1996	2,867	35
1997[1]	3,250	36

[1] Provisional

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Drug Testing Kits

Mr. Clappison: To ask the President of the Council what action has been taken during the UK Presidency of the European Union in respect of the manufacture and distribution of *(a)* ecstasy and *(b)* other drug testing kits. [44162]

Mr. George Howarth: I have been asked to reply.

No specific work on the general availability of drug testing kits for Ecstasy or other drugs has been undertaken at European Union level during the United Kingdom Presidency. The manufacture and distribution of such kits is essentially a matter for individual member states in accordance with their domestic legislation.

As far as the application of drug testing equipment to law enforcement purposes is concerned, the European Commission is taking forward a research project to identify the requirements for roadside drug testing equipment, which will make a comparative assessment of existing equipment or prototypes. The project is expected to start before the end of 1998.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Millennium Line

Mr. Linton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he plans to announce the preferred route for the Millennium Line. [44088]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I understand that the Chelsea–Hackney Line has been described as the Millennium Line.

The scheme will be examined in the light of our current work on transport integration, the development of a Greater London Authority incorporating a London Transport Authority and our consideration of transport priorities for London.

Leasehold Commercial Premises

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what

information he collates on the proportion of leasehold commercial premises which receive individual fuel bills based upon occupancy levels. [44382]

Mr. Raynsford: My right hon. Friend does not collate information on the proportion of leasehold commercial premises which receive individual fuel bills based on occupancy levels.

Housing Corporation

Ms Jenny Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is the current annual salary of *(a)* the Chief Executive of the Housing Corporation and *(b)* the regional directors of the Housing Corporation. [44421]

Mr. Raynsford: The salary of the Chief Executive of the Housing Corporation is derived from Pay Bands 7 and 9 for senior civil servants. The current annual salary is £96,456 (effective from 8 April 1998). In addition, the Chief Executive is eligible for consideration of an annual performance bonus of up to 15 per cent. of current salary, and provision of a car valued for tax purposes at £6,953.

The salaries for Regional Directors of the Housing Corporation are derived from Pay Bands 1 and 3 for senior civil servants and all fall within the range of £47,633 to £67,515. In addition they are each provided with the use of a car.

Ms Jenny Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the annual running costs of *(a)* the head office of the Housing Corporation and *(b)* the West Midlands regional office of the Housing Corporation in (i) 1994, (ii) 1995, (iii) 1996 and (iv) 1997. [44420]

Mr. Raynsford: The information requested is as shown:

Annual running costs outturn

£ million

	1994–95	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*
Headquarters	16.6	17.0	16.2	15.8
West Midlands	1.3	1.2	1.2	1.3

Pennine Bridleway

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on funding of the Pennine Bridleway route as far as Kirkby Stephen. [44854]

Angela Eagle: Funding for the Pennine Bridleway, including the proposed northern extension, comes from the Countryside Commission's budget.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will place in the Library a complete list of all those in Cumbria who may be owners or have an interest in the land which may be subject to one of the possible routes of the Pennine Bridleway. [44857]

Angela Eagle: The Countryside Commission, for reasons of confidentiality, does not publicise the names of those participating in its informal consultations on National Trail proposals.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will publish each of the possible routes for the Pennine Bridleway which has been identified by the Countryside Commission. [44858]

Angela Eagle: The Countryside Commission is still conducting informal consultations over possible routes for the Pennine Bridleway northern extension. Once the Commission begins its formal consultation, it will publish the proposed route. The route of the Pennine Bridleway between Carsington Reservoir, Derbyshire, and Kirkby Stephen, Cumbria, was approved by the Secretary of State in 1995.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what information he has received from the Countryside Commission on their plans for the Pennine Bridleway in Cumbria; and if he will make a statement. [44855]

Angela Eagle: I understand that the Countryside Commission is currently undertaking informal consultations on the route of the proposed northern extension of the Pennine Bridleway in Cumbria with a view to identifying a single route for formal consultation later this year. We expect that a proposal will be put to the Secretary of State next year.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the parish councils through which the proposed Pennine Bridleway might pass in Cumbria. [44856]

Angela Eagle: The route of the proposed Pennine Bridleway in Cumbria might pass through the following parish councils:

Midgeholme
Farlam
Castle Carrock
Cumrew
Ainstable
Kirkoswald and Renwick
Glassonby
Ousby
Culgaith
Milburn
Long Marton
Dufton
Murton
Warcop
Musgrave
Appleby
Bandleyside
Soulby
Waitby
Ravenstonedale.

Transport Council

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) of 24 March 1998, *Official Report*, columns *85–86*, on the Transport Council, which delegates requested a study into the employment effect of

the abolition of duty free; and which Ministers expressed regret at the reasoned opinions sent to the member states by the Commission on the EC/US air transport negotiations. [44891]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Discussion on the abolition of duty free was prompted by a proposal from the Irish delegation. The right hon. Member's question on EC/US air transport negotiations was not one on which formal votes were taken in the Council, and there is therefore no official record of the stance taken by delegations on it.

Housing Policy Guidance (Cumbria)

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will publish housing policy guidance for Cumbria including the Government's estimate of the additional housing required. [44860]

Mr. Raynsford: We have recently issued to all housing authorities guidance for the 1998 Housing Investment Programme round, which includes advice on housing policy, designed to assist authorities in developing their own strategies appropriate to the needs of their area.

Housing figures for Cumbria, based on 1992 household projections, were issued in Regional Planning Guidance for the North West (RPG13) in May 1996. These figures were an average annual net addition of 1,500 per year between 1991 and 2011, making a total of 30,000 new dwellings. These were allocated between the individual districts in Cumbria by the County Council in its Structure Plan which covers the years 1991–2006 and was adopted in July 1995.

Housing Stock Renovation

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he is taking to assist with the renovation of housing stock in *(a)* Eden, *(b)* Carlisle and *(c)* Allerdale districts. [44845]

Mr. Raynsford: In common with housing authorities across the country, Eden, Carlisle and Allerdale receive resource allocations under the Housing Investment Programme for that purpose. In addition, Carlisle and Allerdale also benefit from the Capital Receipts Initiative. Allocations for the year 1998–99 are as follows:

£

	Housing investment programme	*Capital receipts initiative*
Allerdale	1,884,000	713,000
Carlisle	1,543,000	1,240,000
Eden	799,000	Nil

Eden does not receive resources from the Capital Receipts Initiative since it is a "debt free" authority, and is therefore, unlike most authorities, able to use any capital receipts it generates to invest directly according to its local priorities.

In addition, the Government have acknowledged the particular need to address investment on Allerdale's Salterbeck estate by this year approving Estates Renewal Challenge Fund bid, with provisional approval being given grant to just under £4m over the next three years.

Rivers (SSSI Status)

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list each river in England and Wales which is proposed for SSSI status. [44844]

Angela Eagle: I will ask the Chief Executives of English Nature and the Countryside Council for Wales to write to the right hon. Member.

Road Signs

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to *(a)* evaluate and *(b)* introduce the Scottish Strungbow type road signs. [44861]

Ms Glenda Jackson: These signs indicate that road users can leave and rejoin a main road via a bypassed town or village. They were included in the Traffic Signs Regulations 1994, and can therefore be used by English traffic authorities as appropriate.

Mr. Prior: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on proposals for reducing the number of road signs in rural areas. [44482]

Ms Glenda Jackson: It is for the relevant highway authority to decide how many signs are necessary or appropriate in the light of local circumstances. The hon. Member will know, from the debate he initiated on 18 March 1998, *Official Report*, column 1258–61, that studies are underway which are intended to produce researched recommendations on good design practice for rural traffic management. The CTMG demonstration projects, announced by the Minister for Transport on 31 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *494–95*, include an assessment of the effects of removing or repositioning signs from roads on Dartmoor, but the results are not expected to be published before the end of next year.

Mr. Prior: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the restrictions on the use of fibre optic traffic signs. [44483]

Ms Glenda Jackson: All traffic signs used in this country must conform with the requirements of the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions 1994 (SI 1519) or be specially authorised by the Secretary of State. The TSRGD do not specify any particular technology for variable signs, but fibre optic and other light emitting signs are required to meet the Secretary of State's requirements for optical performance and safety. New designs of light emitting variable signs, actuated by vehicles travelling at excessive speed, have been specially authorised at sites in North Norfolk and elsewhere as part of a monitored experiment, which is still in progress, to assess their effect on reducing speeds and improving safety.

Carlisle Airport (Nuclear Material)

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received on flights of nuclear material out of Carlisle airport. [44878]

Ms Glenda Jackson: My Department has received 6 such representations since May 1997.

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when the £140 million of new Government money for the Channel Tunnel Link becomes due, how much of it will depend on the completion of Phase II of the line. [44885]

Ms Glenda Jackson: LCR expect to complete the CTRL by 2007. The sum of £140 million, the payment of which depends on Eurostar revenues, would not be payable before 2010—so it is not linked to any particular phase of CTRL construction.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the benefits for Coventry and the West Midlands region, from the proposed Channel Tunnel Rail Link via Stratford. [44723]

Ms Glenda Jackson: My right hon. Friend took account of the evident enthusiasm for Regional Eurostar services including that from the West Midlands in reaching his recent agreement with LCR which he announced on 3 June 1998, *Official Report*, columns 367–70. He has asked the transport operator who will take responsibility for Eurostar (UK) Ltd to assess the feasibility of running regional services and report by the end of the year.

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what are the terms of Railtrack's option to build the second phase of the CTRL through London. [45410]

Ms Glenda Jackson: It is intended that Railtrack shall be granted by LCR an exclusive option to commit to purchase the assets relating to the second phase of construction of the CTRL; that this option must be exercised no later than 1 July 2003; and that in the event that Railtrack does not exercise that option, LCR will be obliged to find another third party, or complete the second phase itself.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if the new agreement on the Channel Tunnel Rail Link makes provision for sleeper services running on the link; and if he will make a statement. [44672]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The deal announced by my right hon. Friend on 3 June 1998, *Official Report*, columns 367–70, does not involve provisions for sleeper services. In July 1997 European Night Services Ltd. announced that they had dropped their plans for services from the regions to Paris. I understand that the Joint Venture have no plans for sleeper services.

Heathrow-Paris Eurostar Service

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) how long it is estimated the journey time will take from Heathrow to Paris by the proposed new service announced by the Eurostar consortium; [44886]

(2) if the proposed rail service between Heathrow and Paris by the Eurostar consortium is intended to connect with any French airport; [44888]

(3) which rail lines the service between Heathrow and Paris by the Eurostar consortium will use; and what rail services currently use those rail lines; [44884]

(4) how frequent the rail service between Heathrow and Paris by the Eurostar consortium will be. [44887]

Ms Glenda Jackson: My right hon. Friend announced on 3 June 1998, *Official Report*, columns 367–70, that the Eurostar operator intends to run services from Heathrow through the Channel Tunnel from 2001. Precise routes, service patterns and journey times have yet to be defined.

Travellers

Ms Ward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to amend legislation relating to travellers; and if he will make a statement. [44604]

Mr. Raynsford: My Department has no plans to amend sections 77 to 80 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 which give local authorities powers to deal with unauthorised camping, and which repealed local authorities' duty to provide sites and the Secretary of State's power to pay grant for such sites.

My Department is committed to issuing good practice advice to local authorities on unauthorised camping, and it is proposed to launch this on 29 October at a conference organised by the National Association of Gipsy and Traveller Officers in Coventry.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he plans to take to impose obligations on fuel suppliers to give advice on energy efficiency; and if he will make a statement. [44881]

Angela Eagle: The relevant regulators already require electricity and gas suppliers to provide customers, on request, with advice on energy efficiency. For the future, the Government's Green Paper "A Fair Deal for Consumers" proposes that Ministers will issue statutory guidance to the regulators on social, environmental and energy efficiency matters, including matters (such as advice to customers on energy efficiency) which are already dealt with in the present regulatory framework.

Mobile Telecommunications

Jackie Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many local authority refusals of planning permission for telecommunications masts were overturned on appeal by planning inspectors in the year 1997–98. [44951]

Mr. Raynsford: 54 out of a total of 122 appeals made against local planning authority refusals for telecommunications masts/towers were allowed in the year 1997–98.

Mr. Prior: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement regarding the future development of the mobile telecommunications industry in rural areas. [44484]

Mr. Raynsford: This Government's general policy on telecommunications development is to facilitate the growth of telecommunications systems while protecting the environment. Mobile services are important to an efficient modern national telecommunications network. This will help bring considerable economic and social benefits to all parts of the country, including rural areas. The establishment of such a network should not, however, happen at disproportionate cost to the environment. For that reason, we announced our expectation that operators would provide evidence to local planning authorities that they have carefully considered the use of existing masts, buildings and other structures before seeking to erect any new mast.

Local planning authorities continue to have the opportunity to exercise control over individual mast developments, whether that be through the consideration of a full planning application or the determination of a prior approval application under the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995.

Housing Benefit

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans she has to repeal those sections of the Local Government and Housing Act 1990 which require that housing benefit is paid from the housing revenue account of local authorities. [44946]

Mr. Raynsford: We are considering all aspects of housing finance as part of our Comprehensive Spending Review. We expect to announce conclusions from the Review in the summer.

Building Regulations

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) if, in the case of housing development, only the building regulations in force at the time of submission of a planning application apply to the construction, irrespective of the date of construction; [44902]

(2) if the Government plan to make Part M of the Building Regulations apply to all buildings constructed after the making of the regulations, irrespective of the date of the planning consent. [44903]

Mr. Raynsford *[holding answer 8 June 1998]:* I am aware of the cases in the hon. Member's constituency which have given rise to concern that housing developers may seek to use building control procedures to circumvent the changes I have announced that will apply Part M of the building regulations to new dwellings. I understand that two initial building control notices for a total of 12,000 houses will not now take effect. These related to land for which I understand there is no current prospect of planning permission for housing.

I share the hon. Member's concern that building control procedures should not be used to circumvent the new requirements for access and facilities for disabled people. The general position is that building work is subject to the requirements in force at the time the relevant building control notice is given.

I have previously announced in my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon (Angela Smith) on 9 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *12*, that I envisage an interval of one year between the publication of the new Part M requirements and the coming into effect of the Amendment Regulations. This would be to allow time for guidance to be developed in support of the new requirements and also to allow time for building workers to be trained in the new techniques that will be necessary.

Against that background, I am considering what steps to take to ensure an effective transfer to the new Part M requirements following the coming into force of the new regulations.

Second Homes

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made into the impact of second homes on the supply of local housing. [44932]

Mr. Raynsford: The Survey of English Housing conducted annually for my Department indicates that about 200,000 households with their main residence in England also own or rent a second home in England. That figure excludes households whose second home is the main residence of another household, and households with a second home which they intend to sell.

Local authorities should take account of second homes in their assessments of housing need. These assessments inform authorities' housing strategies (including empty homes strategies where they exist) and development plans.

Mr. Prior: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how much council tax is currently raised from second-home owners. [44488]

Mr. Raynsford: I refer the hon. Member to the answer my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Housing gave to the hon. Member for St. Ives (Mr. George) on 9 June 1998, *Official Report*, column *509*.

Mr. Prior: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the impact of the 50 per cent. reduction in council tax for second-home owners. [44487]

Mr. Raynsford: If a local authority has a high proportion of second homes that receive a 50 per cent. discount, and therefore a reduced tax base, it will receive more grant to compensate. Contrary to some of the concerns that have been expressed, the level of council tax bills paid by local residents will therefore not be affected unless the local authority is spending above the "standard spending" level fixed by Government as a basis for distributing grant. We have received a number of representations about the council tax and second/holiday homes. We are considering these and will set out our proposals in a White Paper this summer.

Kent County Council

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many staff have been made redundant by Kent County Council as a result of the creation of the new Medway Unitary Authority in the year 1997–98; and how many will be made redundant in 1998–99. [44213]

Mr. Raynsford *[holding answer 8 June 1998]:* I understand from Kent County Council that, as a result of local government reorganisation, 330 of their staff were made redundant in 1997–98 and fewer than 50 are expected to be made redundant in 1998–99.

Radioactive Material (Transport)

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many crashes occurred involving *(a)* road vehicles, *(b)* aircraft and *(c)* trains carrying radioactive material in the United Kingdom in 1997 and 1998 to date. [44986]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The numbers of such crashes notified to the Department are:

Year	*Number*
(a)	
1997	3
1998	none to date
(b)	
1997	none
1998	none to date
(c)	
1997	none
1998	3 to date

In none of these crashes was there any loss of radioactive material from any package.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if it is the Government's policy not to limit the number of movements of radioactive material by air provided International Atomic Energy Agency standards are met. [44959]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I refer the hon. Member to my reply of 14 July 1997, *Official Report*, column *15*.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what procedures are currently in place to ensure the safe transportation of mixed oxide plutonium within the United Kingdom. [44724]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Mixed Oxide Fuel and plutonium, in common with all radioactive materials, are subject to the following regulations:

Road

The Radioactive Material (Road Transport) (Great Britain) Regulations 1996 (SI 1996 No. 1350).

The Radioactive Substances (Carriage by Road) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1983 (SR 1983 No. 344).

The Radioactive Substances (Carriage by Road) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1986 (SR 1986 No. 61).

Sea

The Merchant Shipping (Dangerous Goods and Marine Pollutants) Regulations 1990 (SI 1990 No. 2605); Merchant Shipping Notice No. M 1620, "The Carriage of Dangerous Goods and Marine Pollutants in Packaged Form on Ships".

Air

The Air Navigation (No. 2) Order 1995 SI No. 1970. The Air Navigation (Dangerous Goods) Regulations 1994 SI No. 3187 and Amendment 1996 SI No. 3100.

Ports

The Dangerous Substances in Harbour Areas Regulations 1987 (SI 1987 No. 37).

Rail

The Packaging, Labelling and Carriage of Radioactive Material by Rail Regulations (RAMRail) 1996 (SI 1996 No. 2090): Approved Requirements for the packaging, labelling and carriage of radioactive material by rail 1996 Edition. The Carriage of Dangerous Goods (Classification, Packaging and Labelling) and Use of Transportable Pressure Receptacles Regulations (CDGCPL) 1996 (SI 1996 No. 2092).

Inland Waterways

British Waterways Board Terms and Conditions: Dangerous Goods BWB 1981, and Schedule of Dangerous Goods ("The Green Book") BWB 1981 (Class 7).

Merchant Seamen (Sickness)

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what legal requirements merchant shipping employees on sick leave were required to fulfil in June 1991 when returning to work offshore after instructions from their employer; [45033]

(2) what legal requirements employers of merchant seamen were required to fulfil in June 1991 when instructing employees on sick leave to return to work offshore; [45034]

(3) if he will make a statement on amendments made since 1986 to Merchant Shipping Notice No. 1536 and Merchant Shipping Notice No. 1331 in respect of diseases of the oesophagus, stomach and duodenum; [45035]

(4) what Health and Safety Executive regulations, relating to record keeping, were in force in May 1991 in respect of the transfer of sick merchant seamen to oil platforms in the United Kingdom sector of the North Sea. [45037]

Ms Glenda Jackson: In terms of Merchant Shipping (Medical Examination) Regulations 1983, applicable in 1991, a seafarer cannot be employed on a ship covered by the Regulations unless he holds a valid medical fitness certificate. Under Merchant Shipping legislation, there are no specific or additional requirements relating to return to work after sick leave.

Merchant Shipping Notice M1536, which listed doctors approved by the Secretary of State to carry out seafarer medicals, and M1331, setting out the medical standards for seafarers, have both been updated. While the medical fitness standards have been kept under review by the Department's medical advisers, no change has been made in respect of diseases of the oesophagus, stomach and duodenum.

There were no regulations relating to record keeping for the transfer of sick merchant seamen to oil platforms in the United Kingdom sector of the North Sea, although

the offshore installations (Logbooks and Registration of Deaths) Regulations 1972 required a record to be kept of all persons arriving at or departing from an installation.

LCR and Eurostar

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many representatives of Government there will be on the Board of LCR and the Eurostar management company; and if their rights, duties and responsibilities will be the same in company law as the private sector directors. [45403]

Ms Glenda Jackson: It is not intended that there will be any Government appointments to the Board of either LCR or the Eurostar management company.

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Mr. Prior: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps his Department is taking to protect areas of outstanding natural beauty from overdevelopment; and if he will make a statement. [44478]

Mr. Raynsford: Planning Policy Guidance note 7 affords special protection from development to Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, along with other statutorily designated areas. Policies in structure and local plans and development control decisions should in general favour conservation of the natural beauty of the landscape. It would normally be inconsistent with the aims of designation to permit the siting of major industrial or commercial development in these areas. Only proven national interest and lack of alternative sites can justify an exception.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Mr. Prior: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the sites of special scientific interest in the United Kingdom distinguishing those which are in *(a)* England and *(b)* Norfolk. [44489]

Angela Eagle: As at 5 June 1998 there were 6,517 Sites of Special Scientific Interest in the United Kingdom. 3,991 in England and 155 in Norfolk. I shall arrange for a copy of the full list of sites to be placed in the Library of the House shortly.

Local Government Reorganisation

Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what resources he will make available under the local government reorganisation costs scheme to Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council for reorganisation costs incurred by them in 1998–99; and if he will make a statement. [45432]

Ms Armstrong: Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council did not submit a bid at the initial stage of the Local Government Reorganisation Costs Scheme for 1998–99. They have since identified £400,000 of costs that are eligible under the scheme. After careful consideration, I have decided that it would be appropriate to allocate a maximum amount of £400,000 to Redcar and Cleveland Council to cover these costs in full.

Regional Airports

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what changes he has decided to make to his policy on international access to regional airports in the United Kingdom following the consultation exercise on this issue earlier in the year. [45433]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Government wish to encourage international access to regional airports by pursuing a policy of liberalisation. We have decided that open access to all UK airports, except Heathrow and Gatwick, should be offered to all of our bilateral air services partners, provided that UK airlines are also allowed to operate on the same routes. My officials will be writing to all of our bilateral partners where such access is not already available with details of this change of policy.

This change in policy will allow both UK airlines and the airlines of the country concerned to operate to and from that country on such routes without restrictions on capacity or frequency, and without the need for international aviation negotiations to establish such services. This will enable UK and foreign airlines to plan the development of services with confidence that future growth will not be limited by bilateral restrictions.

Air Quality Standards

Mr. Leslie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what progress has been made on the finance, management and policy review of the Expert Panel on Air Quality Standards. [45745]

Mr. Meacher: My Department has completed the first stage of the review, and we have decided to continue to sponsor the Expert Panel on Air Quality Standards. In the light of new evidence emerging on the effects of air pollution, and of growing interest in pollutants not yet covered by the Panel, we believe that the need for expert advice on these issues remains. The Expert Panel is best placed to provide that advice. The Expert Panel has served the Department extremely well over the last five years, and we are grateful for its very significant contribution to the development of air quality policy over the last five years.

The Department will now review how the Panel should operate in future, looking at all aspects of its management, including its membership and working procedures and at its work programme for the next five years.

SCOTLAND

Direct Labour and Services Organisations

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will list by authority and service area the recorded deficits made by local authority direct labour or services organisations in Scotland that have failed to meet the rate-of-return requirements under the terms of the Local Government (Planning and Land) Act 1980 and the Local Government Act 1988 in *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97 and *(c)* 1997–98 in (i) cash and (ii) constant prices; [43907]

(2) if he will list by authority and service area the surplus achieved by local authority direct labour or services organisations in Scotland for those services covered under the terms of the Local Government (Planning and Land) Act 1980 and the Local Government Act 1988 in *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97 and *(c)* 1997–98 in (i) cash and (ii) constant prices. [43908]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 3 June 1998]:* I have arranged for a detailed list, taken from annual reports submitted by authorities, of the surpluses and deficits achieved by direct labour and direct service organisations of Scottish local authorities in 1995–96 to be placed in the Library. A partial list is provided for 1996–97. This covers the authorities for which annual reports have been received. Information for 1997–98 is not yet available.

I am committed to ensuring local authority direct labour and direct service organisations achieve efficiency and value for money. Direct labour and direct service organisations exist to provide quality services competitively and I shall not hesitate to use my powers to deal with those who fail to perform as they should.

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of the total cost of the investigation which he has ordered into the financial affairs of the direct labour organisations in all Scottish local authorities. [44707]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 8 June 1998]:* The cost of the inquiries which are being undertaken by my Department and by the Accounts Commission for Scotland will be met within existing public expenditure provision.

Arts Sponsorship

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he is taking to promote business sponsorship of the arts. [44203]

Mr. Galbraith: The Government fully recognise the importance of business sponsorship of the arts, which brings a range of benefits both to the sponsor and to the sponsored organisation.

Active encouragement is given to businesses to sponsor the arts, mainly through Government funding of the Association for Business Sponsorship of the Arts Pairing Scheme, which provides financial awards to arts organisations which have secured sponsorship for individual projects. The Government also provide financial support for specific initiatives which aim to bring relevant business skills and improved management capabilities to arts organisations.

Unemployment

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many and what percentage of registered unemployed among 18 to 25 year olds in *(a)* Dundee, *(b)* Perth and Kinross and *(c)* Angus found work and signed off as unemployed in (i) January, (ii) February, (iii) March and (iv) April in each year since 1986. [43411]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 4 June 1998]:* Data on the destination of leavers from the claimant count are available from the Office for National Statistics for 1998 onwards for the areas requested. Information is not readily available on the numbers aged 18 to 25 claiming unemployment related benefits and so the numbers who found work, in the table, are given for those aged 18 to 24.

Number of 18 to 24 year olds, leaving the register and finding work[1]

Unitary Authorities

	Dundee	*Perth and Kinross*	*Angus*
January 1998	55	42	46
February 1998	146	108	145
March 1998	137	98	117
April 1998	139	93	95

[1] Excluding clerical claims and claims with missing or invalid postcodes

Source:
Office for National Statistics

The number of people aged 18 to 24 on the claimant count is available through the Nomis database in the House of Commons Library. Library staff are ready to assist in accessing the information.

Fisheries Research

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into stocks of monkfish and megrim; and if he will make a statement about the future of fisheries research funding. [44806]

Mr. Macdonald: The Government are committed to ensuring that the monkfish and megrim fisheries are exploited on a sustainable basis, and are therefore expanding their programme of scientific research in this particular area. The Fisheries Research Services (FRS) Marine Laboratory in Aberdeen routinely samples landings of monkfish and megrim into Scotland, and participates in the annual stock assessments undertaken by the Advisory Committee on Fishery Management (ACFM). In addition, the FRS is this year initiating a new biennial survey of deep-water species such as these in the West of Scotland; and is next year undertaking a dedicated monkfish and megrim survey. The FRS and Scottish Fishermens Federation (SFF) are also liaising on further data collection, and on a possible EU-funded research project on the distribution and exploitation of monkfish and megrim.

Overall the Government retain their commitment to the funding of fisheries research, as demonstrated by the introduction into service of the new research vessel Scotia.

Road Accident Deaths

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on road accident deaths in Scotland. [44684]

Mr. McLeish: As part of a continuing programme of road safety research, The Scottish Office has commissioned, in the past 10 years, 6 research studies which have included consideration of road accident deaths. These studies, which are listed below, looked at all categories of road accident casualties from fatal to slight: none has looked only at deaths. All have been evaluated by The Scottish Office Central Research Unit

except for the study on the circumstances of child pedestrian accidents, which is due for completion later this year.

"Must Do Better"—A Study of Child Pedestrian Accidents and Road Crossing Behaviour in Scotland, published 1989;

"The Pedestrian Casualty Problem in Scotland—Why So Many", published 1996;

"Accidents at Signal Controlled Junctions and Pelican Crossings in Glasgow", published 1996;

"Linking Road Traffic Accident Statistics to Census Data in Lothian", published 1996;

"Impact of the Road Network on Scotland's Accident Rates", published 1997;

"The Circumstances of Child Pedestrian Accidents", (not yet published).

A Review of The Scottish Office Road Safety Research Programme 1989–97 was published in 1997 by The Scottish Office Central Research Unit.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Conditional Fee Agreements

Mr. Cranston: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what net savings in legal aid will be achieved by the implementation of the Government's proposals to remove legal aid from personal injury work and other areas to which conditional fee agreements will apply. [44131]

Mr. Hoon: Our intention is neither to increase nor to reduce in real terms expenditure on legal aid. We have, of course, estimated what the effect on the fund's cashflow would be of removing legal aid from the categories suggested in the consultation paper, Access to Justice with Conditional *Fees*. These estimates are:

1998–1999 : £0 million

1999–2000 : –£69 million

2000–2001 : –£100 million.

The saving would diminish in later years, when case costs would be recovered to benefit the fund.

What we intend is, within a controlled legal aid budget overall, to re-focus limited resources on those most in need, particularly in the areas of social welfare law.

Mr. Cranston: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what investigations his Department has carried out into the capacity of the Bar to do conditional fee agreement work. [44132]

Mr. Hoon: Barristers are already taking cases on a conditional fee basis. I, and my officials, have had several meetings with the Bar Council during the development of the proposals to extend the availability of conditional fee agreements. They have responded in detail to the consultation paper "Access to Justice with Conditional Fees", as have a number of other organisations representing barristers. These, together with all the other responses, are being carefully considered before decisions are taken.

Fast-track System

Mr. Cranston: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when the Government will make detailed proposals for the fast-track system. [44134]

Mr. Hoon: Detailed proposals for fast-track procedures were the subject of public consultation last summer. In the light of that consultation, rules of court have been drafted and considered by the Civil Procedure Rule Committee. Officials are currently placing the latest drafts of the rules on the website [http:www.open.gov.uk/lcd] of the Lord Chancellor's Department and these drafts should be available for viewing before the end of this month. I expect to make an announcement about a costs regime in the fast-track shortly.

Civil Justice Reforms

Mr. Cranston: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what resources the Government intends to provide to ensure adequate judicial training, management administration and technology for the effective implementation of Lord Woolf's proposals. [44133]

Mr. Hoon: The Judicial Studies Board estimated that it would require £400,000 this financial year to fund the training of the full-time judiciary in the civil justice reforms. The Board also bid for £256,000 in the next financial year to train the part-time judiciary. These sums have been allocated.

The introduction of IT to other areas of administrative work in the civil courts will release staff to support the introduction of the Civil Justice Reforms in April 1999.

The cost of technological support has been provided for in the Court Service's expenditure plans although the exact amounts have yet to be finalised. It is currently involved in negotiations with its IT supplier. I am not prepared to jeopardise those negotiations by disclosing indicative costs.

TREASURY

No. 11 Downing Street (Receptions)

Mr. Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many receptions have been held at No. 11 Downing Street for members of regional Labour parties; what was the total cost of such receptions; and who paid for them. [44218]

Mr. Gordon Brown: I refer to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce), on 26 February 1998, *Official Report*, column *358*.

Economic and Monetary Union

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what steps his Department took to establish whether the adjusted Italian gross domestic product figures used in calculating Italy's convergence performance under the Maastricht criteria were accurate; [44371]

(2) what factors were taken into account by the European Commission in estimating the size of the underground economy in Italy when determining its gross domestic product to national debt ratio. [44370]

Mrs. Liddell: Under Council Directive 89/130/EEC, all Member States submit to the Commission (Statistical Office of the European Communities) data on gross domestic product according to the European System of Accounts (ESA 1979). As set out in Council Regulation (EC) No. 3605/93, these ESA 1979 data are used as the denominator for calculating the Maastricht definition of deficit and debt ratios.

Bank of England

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what profit the Bank of England has derived from seigniorage on notes and coin issued in each of the last 10 years. [44452]

Mrs. Liddell: Any profits 'derived' from the note issues are not retained by the Bank of England but are paid to the Treasury. The profits of note issue for each of the last ten years are:

Year	*£ million*
1988–89	1,368
1989–90	1,905
1990–91	2,546
1991–92	1,875
1992–93	1,556
1993–94	1,117
1994–95	967
1995–96	1,294
1996–97	1,218
1997–98	1,528

Note:
Year to end February

The Bank of England does not issue coins thus has no seigniorage on these.

Euro

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proposals his Department has to adopt the European Parliament's Captain Euro publicity in respect of the preparations for the introduction of the euro. [45154]

Mrs. Liddell: HM Treasury has no plans at present to adopt the Captain Euro publicity in respect of the preparations for the introduction of the euro.

Public Sector Borrowing Requirement

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when, and under what authority, the Office for National Statistics was given the duty of determining the allocation of expenditure to the PSBR. [44720]

Mrs. Liddell: In the mid-1960s, when estimates of borrowing started to be produced for the public sector as a whole, a joint technical group of officials from Treasury, the Central Statistical Office, the Bank of England and some other Government Departments was set up to consider issues of definition, classification and measurement. Such matters remain the responsibility of the technical committee. The Office for National Statistics determines what constitutes the public sector by reference to international standards for national accounts. The PSBR figures are produced jointly by the Office for National Statistics and the Treasury.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish the guidance on the basis of which the Office for National Statistics determines whether expenditure incurred by or on behalf of the Government and any of its agents or partners is to be part of the public sector borrowing requirement. [44721]

Mrs. Liddell: The principles used are set out in Treasury Working Paper 61 of December 1993. To summarise them, cash expenditure by any part of the public sector determines the PSBR, except when such expenditure is the repayment of debt incurred by Government. As explained in my reply to an earlier question (ref: 3658N), the definition of the PSBR is the joint responsibility of the Office for National Statistics and the Treasury. The Office for National Statistics determines what constitutes the public sector by reference to international standards for national accounts.

Inheritance Tax

Mr. Derek Twigg: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to raise the limit below which delivery of an inheritance tax account is not required for administering a deceased person's estate. [45539]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue has today laid Regulations increasing the limit from £180,000 to £200,000. The increased limit will come into operation on 1 July 1998, for estates of persons dying on or after 6 April 1998. It will simplify the administration of some 5,000 estates.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Sierra Leone

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) when she was first informed of the involvement of Sandline International in Sierra Leone; [42300]

(2) when her Private Office was first informed of the involvement of Sandline International in operations in Sierra Leone; [42304]

(3) when she was first informed of the existence of the Customs and Excise investigation into the involvement of Sandline International in operations in Sierra Leone; [42302]

(4) when her Private Office was first informed of the existence of the Customs and Excise investigation into the involvement of Sandline International in operations in Sierra Leone; [42298]

(5) what meetings she or her officials have had with representatives of Sandline International since May 1997; [41940]

(6) when she was informed of possible breaches of the UN Security Council Resolution 1132 concerning Sierra Leone; [41942]

(7) what contacts officials in her Department have had with representatives of Sandline International. [41939]

Clare Short: I refer the right hon. Gentleman to the speech by the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in the House on 18 May 1998, *Official Report*, columns 604–11, in which he announced the investigation by Sir Thomas Legg KCB QC into allegations about Government involvement with the supply of arms to Sierra Leone by UK citizens and firms, and said that the Terms of Reference would be placed in the Library. The Foreign Secretary intends to publish the report of the investigation.

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) when her Private Office was first informed of the plan for military intervention to restore the Government of President Kabbah of Sierra Leone; [42303]

(2) when she was first informed of the plan for military intervention to restore the Government of President Kabbah of Sierra Leone. [42299]

Clare Short: The Government did not have prior knowledge of the military intervention by the Military Observer Group of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOMOG) of 5 February 1998.

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what *(a)* British aid to Sierra Leone was delivered by and *(b)* deliveries of British aid to Sierra Leone were assisted by Sandline International or organisations hired on behalf of Sandline International. [41941]

Clare Short: None. Neither Sandline International nor any organisation acting on their behalf have assisted the delivery of British aid to Sierra Leone.

Indigenous People

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the role of her Department in assisting the World Bank group in the promoting of dialogue between indigenous people and *(a)* project organisers and *(b)* private sector organisations. [41042]

Clare Short: The World Bank's indigenous peoples policy—first introduced in 1982 and revised in 1991—is currently being revised again as part of the programme of revisions to the Bank's Operational Policies (OPs). We have strongly encouraged the Bank to undertake wide consultation on its OPs, as we have for other areas of policy development and project implementation. We have also played a leading role in helping the Bank to increase its capacity to address social development issues, including those relating to indigenous peoples.

The Bank has prepared an Approach Paper outlining the revision process, and is currently designing a consultation strategy for stakeholder input—including that from indigenous peoples and their organisations. Consultation will take place over several months. We expect the revised policy to include guidance for private sector investments, drawing on the experience of the recently established Social Unit in the International Financial Corporation (IFC) and the Bank's Social Development Department, which undertakes training for Bank, IFC and Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA) staff on indigenous peoples and economic development.

Debt Relief

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the progress made at the recent G8 summit in Birmingham in relation to the redemption of debt of developing countries; and if she will make a statement. [44993]

Clare Short: At the G8 Summit in Birmingham on 15–17 May, we made useful progress in speeding up the implementation of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) debt Initiative. The Communiqué set out the objective of getting all those countries which need debt relief under the Initiative, likely to be around 20 in number, into the process by the year 2000. This constitutes a significant step towards meeting the aims of the Government's Mauritius Mandate. And following a British initiative, the Summit also agreed on the need to look at ways of providing more and earlier debt relief to help heavily indebted post-conflict countries. We shall be pressing in all appropriate forums for the implementation of these targets.

WALES

Reviews

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list, for each of the last four years, the departmental inquiries and reviews instigated by Ministers which have been chaired by individuals outside his Department; and in each case if he will give the date of establishment and the name of the chairman. [44367]

Mr. Ron Davies: The information is listed as follows:

Name of inquiry/review	*Name of chair*	*Date of establishment*
Changing Roles Group (examining the prospective role of new health authorities)	Joint chairs Jeremy Hallett and David Pritchard	February 1995
Child Care Procedures and Practice in North Wales	Adrianne Jones	December 1995
The Environmental Impact of the Sea Empress Oil Spill (by the Sea Empress Environmental Evaluation Committee)	Professor Ron Edwards CBE	March 1996
North Wales Child Abuse Allegations: investigation of papers	Nicola Davies QC	June 1996
North Wales Child Abuse Tribunal	Sir Ronald Waterhouse	June 1996
Welsh at Key Stage 4 in 10 secondary schools	Rudi Plaut	July 1997

Name of inquiry/review	*Name of chair*	*Date of establishment*
Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy Inquiry (joint with other departments)	Lord Justice Phillips	December 1997
Review of the National Curriculum	Rudi Plaut	January 1998
Changing Roles Group (examining the prospective role of new health authorities)	Joint chairs Jeremy Hallett and David Pritchard	February 1995
Child Care Procedures and Practice in North Wales	Adrianne Jones	December 1995
The Environmental Impact of the Sea Empress Oil Spill (by the Sea Empress Environmental Evaluation Committee)	Professor Ron Edwards CBE	March 1996
North Wales Child Abuse Allegations: investigation of papers	Nicola Davies QC	June 1996
North Wales Child Abuse Tribunal	Sir Ronald Waterhouse	June 1996
Welsh at Key Stage 4 in 10 secondary schools	Rudi Plaut	July 1997
Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy Inquiry (joint with other departments)	Lord Justice Phillips	December 1997
Review of the National Curriculum	Rudi Plaut	January 1998

Economic and Monetary Union

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the effect of economic and monetary union on *(a)* the Welsh farming industry, *(b)* small businesses in Wales and *(c)* the Welsh economy as a whole. [44035]

Mr. Win Griffiths: I am concerned that Welsh businesses and farmers should be well placed to meet the challenges and take advantage of the opportunities presented by the EMU. The Government are committed to helping businesses to adapt and are providing advice to businesses about the euro.

Arts Funding

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was his subvention to *(a)* the National Orchestra of Wales, *(b)* the National Museum of Wales and *(c)* the principal theatres in Wales in 1997–98; and if he will make a statement. [44595]

Mr. Ron Davies: The information requested by my hon. Friend is as follows:

(a) the Welsh Office does not provide direct support for the arts but does so through grant in aid to the Arts Council of Wales. In 1997–98 the Arts Council's grant to the BBC National Orchestra was £609,875;

(b) Welsh Office direct grant in aid to the National Museum and Galleries of Wales was £12.3 million;

(c) the Arts Council's grants to the mainstream producing theatres Wales in 1997–98 amounted to £1.4 million.

Orchestras

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his policy on support for regional orchestras; and if he will make a statement. [44593]

Mr. Ron Davies: Welsh Office support for music is channelled through the Arts Council of Wales. The Arts Council's music budget for 1998–99 has been set at £3.5 million. Out of this, the Arts Council funds the BBC National Orchestra of Wales and the orchestra of the Welsh National Opera.

Millennium Projects

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the millennium projects in North East Wales, indicating their locations and his Department's support for each; and if he will make a statement. [44597]

Mr. Ron Davies: My Department does not provide direct financial support for millennium projects. However, the following projects in North East Wales have been awarded grants by the Millennium Commission, which is sponsored by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport:

St. Cynfarch and St. Cyngar Church

Floodlighting, Wrexham: £16,882

Erbistock Village Hall, Wrexham: £27,300

Ceiriog Centenary Hall, Llanarmon, Wrexham: £143,000

Section of the Sustrans National Cycle

Network: £468,000.

Projects in North East Wales are also being considered for Millennium Commission grants for umbrella projects stretching across the United Kingdom.

Theatres

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he has taken to assist regional theatre; and if he will make a statement. [44592]

Mr. Ron Davies: Welsh Office support for drama is channelled through the Arts Council of Wales. The Arts Council's drama budget for 1998–99 has been set at just over £3 million.

Tourism

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list his initiatives for the development of tourism in *(a)* Wales, *(b)* North Wales and *(c)* North East Wales; and if he will make a statement. [44596]

Mr. Hain: We continue to fund the Wales Tourist Board's section 4 capital grant programme. The Board has targeted grant at resorts and historic towns in North Wales generating investment of £11.75 million over the past three years and is also involved in developing a new North Wales Regional Tourism Strategy. In North East Wales the Board has allocated £600,000 to support development in Denbigh and Ruthin with new initiatives likely to come from the new regional strategy.

Government support also enables the Board to support tourism through marketing, product development, training, quality grading and research initiatives. The Board is soon to consult the industry on a new tourism strategy for the next century.

Museums

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he has taken to assist the principal museums of Wales; and if he will make a statement. [44594]

Mr. Ron Davies: My Department provided funding of £12.3 million to the National Museums and Galleries of Wales in 1997–98. In addition, the Council of Museums in Wales, the body which represents non-national local museums throughout Wales, received £522,000 and a grant of £100,000 was made to the Big Pit mining museum at Blaenavon.

Cricket Clubs

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales in what ways he has assisted cricket clubs in North Wales; what grants he has made; and if he will make a statement. [44598]

Mr. Ron Davies: Further to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend on 19 May 1998, *Official Report*, column *31*, I understand that the Chief Executive of the Sports Council for Wales has written to my hon. Friend with details of all grants made to cricket clubs in Wales over the last five years. A copy of his letter has been placed in the Library of the House.

Local Government Boundary Reviews

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many local government boundary reviews being carried out under the current review process *(a)* have been completed and *(b)* are awaiting completion; when each of the outstanding reviews is due to be completed; and if the 1999 unitary council elections within all unitary authorities will take place within the new local government boundaries. [43491]

Mr. Win Griffiths: Following local government reorganisation 2 boundary reviews were completed in February 1996 by the Local Government Boundary Commission. A further boundary review is being undertaken by the Commission, and is expected to be completed by Spring 1999. The 1999 local government elections will take account of the 2 boundary reviews completed in February 1996. It will not be possible to take account of the most recent boundary review in time for these elections.

In addition to these boundary reviews the Commission is undertaking a review of the electoral arrangements in all Welsh local authorities following local government reorganisation. It has submitted 14 reports to the Secretary of State to date, and a further report is expected shortly. The final 7 reports have yet to be completed. The outstanding reports have to be submitted to the Secretary of State by 1 December 1999. The Secretary of State is still considering whether these reports should be implemented in time for the May 1999 elections, in the context of his consultation on the modernisation agenda for local government.

Housing

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many local authority houses in Wales were assessed to be unfit for human habitation *(a)* in total and *(b)* by local authority in 1997. [43494]

Mr. Win Griffiths: Information is not available for 1997. The latest Welsh House Condition Survey was conducted in 1993. From this, it is estimated that 37,900 occupied local authority dwellings, 15.8 per cent. of the total, in Wales were unfit. Information on individual local authority areas is not available from the survey.

The 1997 Welsh House Condition Survey is in progress. Information from this survey which will provide results for local authority areas is expected to be available later this year.

House Renovation Grants

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what sums were allocated by his Department to private sector renovation grants for the financial years *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 1997–98. [43492]

Mr. Win Griffiths: The Department issued Supplementary Credit Approvals of £179.5 million in 1996–97 and £149.6 million in 1997–98 specifically for private sector renovation and disabled facilities grants. Further Supplementary Credit Approvals of £17 million in 1996–97 and £14 million in 1997–98 were issued for area renewal schemes. Authorities may additionally use part of their Basic Credit Approval or Supplementary Credit Approval issued under the Capital Receipts Initiative for individual grants and area renewal.

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the level of spending by each local authority in Wales on (i) renovation grants, (ii) disabled facility grants, (iii) home repair grants, (iv) common parts grants, (v) conversional grants and (vi) empty home grants or their equivalent for the financial years *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 1997–98. [43493]

Mr. Win Griffiths: The available information is given in the following table. Detailed information on the split of local authority expenditure for housing grants is not held centrally.

Local authority expenditure on renovation and other housing grants

£ million

	(a) 1996–97		
	(b) Renovation grants	*(c) Other housing grants*	*(b) (d) 1997–98 Renovation grants*
Blanenau Gwent	5.3	0.0	4.9
Bridgend	6.0	0.0	5.8
Caerphilly	9.3	1.2	6.9
Cardiff	21.2	0.0	14.6
Carmarthenshire	13.2	0.0	13.2
Ceredigion	6.8	0.0	5.9
Conwy	4.0	0.0	4.4
Denbighshire	2.6	0.0	1.1
Flintshire	7.4	0.0	6.4
Gwynedd	7.8	1.9	9.0
Isle of Anglesey	3.8	0.0	4.4
Merthyr Tydfil	4.0	0.0	3.2
Monmouthshire	2.3	0.0	2.0
Neath Port Talbot	8.3	0.0	7.2
Newport	5.9	0.0	3.6
Pembrokeshire	7.2	0.0	7.7
Powys	7.3	0.0	7.6
Rhondda Cynon Taff	17.4	0.0	16.3
Swansea	11.0	0.0	10.2
Torfaen	2.5	0.8	2.9
The Vale of Glamorgan	5.0	0.0	4.2
Wrexham	5.5	0.0	5.8
Wales	163.8	3.8	147.2

(a) Provisional outturn

(b) Includes renovation, disabled facility, home repair, common parts grants and grants to homes in multiple occupancy

(c) Includes all other housing grants

(d) Local authority forecast. Information is not yet available for 'other' housing grants

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Export Credit Guarantees

Ms Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to her answer of 7 April 1998, *Official Report*, column *159*, and her letter of 7 May, if she will list the ECGD exposure which was not included in the original figure but included in the revised figure of £848 million. [43699]

Mrs. Roche: In my answer to my hon. Friend of 7 April I quoted a figure of £654 million as the level of ECGD's current exposure on Indonesia which is in respect of defence equipment. It subsequently emerged that this figure understated the actual total by £194 million as a result of an error in the computer programme which ECGD used when converting foreign currency liabilities into the total current exposure in sterling.

As soon as the error was identified, I wrote to my hon. Friend advising her that the correct total was, in fact, £848 million.

Export Licences

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many licences have been *(a)* granted and *(b)* refused since 1 May 1997 for the export of military goods to (1) Algeria, (2) Angola, (3) Bahrain, (4) Botswana, (5) Cambodia, (6) China, (7) Colombia, (8) Egypt, (9) Eritrea, (10) Ethiopia, (11) Georgia, (12) India, (13) Indonesia, (14) Jordan, (15) Kuwait, (16) Kenya, (17) Malaysia, (18) Mexico, (19) Morocco, (20) Mozambique, (21) Namibia, (22) Oman, (23) Pakistan, (24) Peru, (25) Qatar, (26) Saudi Arabia, (27) Singapore, (28) Sri Lanka, (29) Syria, (30) Turkey, (31) UAE, (32) Uganda, (33) Yemen, (34) Zambia and (35) Zimbabwe; and if she will specify the number of licences granted in each of the categories set out under Part III of Schedule 1 to the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1989. [44040]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 3 June 1998]:* The Export Control Organisation's computer databases have been interrogated, and the results are contained in tables which have been placed in the Library of the House.

Post Office

Sir Sydney Chapman: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans she has to give the Post Office the commercial freedoms enjoyed by the *(a)* German Post Office and *(b)* Dutch Post Office. [44676]

Mr. Ian McCartney: As announced by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade on 6 April 1998, *Official Report*, column *63*, the current review of options that will best deliver greater commercial freedom for the Post Office is taking account of the ways in which overseas competitors and analogous organisations are facing, or being set up to face, the challenges of the changing market. We plan to present our proposals following the review in the Autumn; these will cover the extent and form of future commercial freedoms for the Post Office.

Dounreay

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will establish an inquiry into the workings of Dounreay with specific reference to the reported loss of highly enriched uranium; and if she will make a statement. [44873]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 9 June 1998]:* As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister reported to this House on 3 June 1998, *Official Report*, column 365, there is no evidence to suggest that enriched uranium from Dounreay has been stolen or has fallen into the hands of terrorists. The Safeguards Office of my department are studying the UKAEA report "Dounreay Shaft Inventory" and if they see any reason for further investigation I will of course ensure that the necessary work is put in hand. Since 1973, nuclear material accountancy at Dounreay and other nuclear sites in the UK has been subject to independent oversight by the Euratom Safeguards Directorate. In

addition, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) are already conducting a review of safety at Dounreay and I expect their findings to be made public.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the current estimated cost of refurbishment of the reprocessing facility at Dounreay to be used to process the uranium fuel recently received from Georgia; when the plant is expected to be ready; and what further foreign customers she expects to use the plant. [40670]

Mr. Battle *[pursuant to his reply, 11 May 1998, c. 32]:* I need to amend the information that I gave to my hon. Friend then that unirradiated fuel amounts to 80 per cent. of the uranium fuel in the consignment received from Georgia.

The correct percentage is 70. I have now been informed that the full details of the material from Georgia are as follows:

The precise quantity of Highly Enriched Uranium (HEU) is: 4.125 kg of unirradiated material (which contains 3.7052 kg of Uranium-235); and 0.6191 kg of irradiated material (which contains 0.5537 kg of Uranium-235).

The balance of the material is approximately 9.5 kg of low enriched uranium (LEU), which is not immediately weapons useable and therefore of less proliferation concern. The LEU consists of 5.840kg of unirradiated material (which contains 0.584 kg of Uranium-235) and 3.7449 kg of irradiated material (which contains 0.3609 kg of Uranium-235).

In summary therefore, the total quantity of Uranium received from Georgia was 14.329 kg—made up of LEU of 9.5 kg and as previously stated HEU of 5.0 kg.

The irradiated material when it is eventually reprocessed will result in no more than two barrels of Intermediate Level Waste, again as previously stated.

Research Councils

Dr. Starkey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to her answer of 14 May 1998, *Official Report*, columns *189–90*, what percentage of applications from men, in relation to each of the research councils, was successful for *(a)* project grants, *(b)* programme grants, *(c)* special grants intended for new investigators, *(d)* studentships and *(e)* fellowships, in 1997 and in each of the two previous years. [44586]

Mr. Battle: The available data are shown in the table.

In answer to my hon. Friend's previous question on 14 May 1998, *Official Report*, columns *189–90*, the figure for the percentage of applications from women who were successful for Medical Research Council fellowships for 1996 was wrongly stated. The figure should be 13 per cent., not 34 per cent.

Percentage

Research council and year	*Project grants*	*Programme grants*	*Special grants*	*Studentships*[1]	*Fellowships*
Biotechnology and Biological Sciences					
1995	27.9	23.1	26.3	35	n/a
1996	29.8	25.8	16.7	54	8.25
1997	31.3	30.1	24.5	50	8.55
Engineering and Physical Sciences					
1995	66.3	—	n/a	78.6	10.4
1996	46.0	—	n/a	78.4	9.5
1997	38.9	—	58.2	76.7	10.7
Economic and Social					
1995	n/a	n/a	n/a	26	n/a
1996	n/a	n/a	n/a	25	n/a
1997	17	n/a	n/a	28	n/a
Medical					
1995	37	61	n/a	46	20
1996	32	59	n/a	46	15
1997	26	57	n/a	43	16
Natural Environment					
1995	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	10
1996	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	16
1997	26	21	n/a	n/a	17
Particle Physics and Astronomy					
1995	59	—	n/a	79	9
1996	54	—	n/a	84	13
1997	67	—	n/a	85	9

[1] There are no data for the studentship applications because, with the exception of the ESRC research studentships, the Research Councils allocate studentships by quota to institutions which are responsible for the subsequent award. The figures given are therefore the percentage of studentships awarded to men, with the exception of the ESRC which shows the percentage of applications for research studentships by men which were successful

Notes:

1. The EPSRC and PPARC do not distinguish project from programme grants. In addition, the EPSRC figure for these grants and for the special grants is the percentage of applications by men in applications where the gender is known
2. NERC figures for project grants represent NERC non-thematic (responsive) grants, and for programme grants NERC thematic (directed) grants
3. The success rate for MRC programme grants relates to final applications rather than applications submitted
4. Some Councils do not run special grants intended for new investigators, or are in only the first year of doing so

Eureka Programme

Dr. Gibson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement on the impact of the Eureka programme on British industry. [44926]

Mr. Battle: Since 1985, 513 UK industrial organisations, 225 of them SMEs, have participated, or continue to participate, in 345 Eureka projects. DTI accepts the findings of the 1997 independent evaluation of Eureka, that 70 per cent. of industrial participants achieved new products or processes by the end of their projects.

Dr. Gibson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the financial contribution of the United Kingdom towards the Eureka programme. [44927]

Mr. Battle: DTI has so far made offers totalling £155.08 million towards projects involving UK participants since Eureka began in 1985. Spend to the end of Financial Year 1997–98 was £130.71 million.

Dr. Gibson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to revise the Eureka programme before the year 2000. [44925]

Mr. Battle: The UK will work with the other members of Eureka to adapt the initiative so that it continues to be relevant to all sectors of European industry. Any changes will take into account the increasing global nature of R&D, and the changed political and business environment since Eureka's inception. They will appear in the next Eureka Medium Term Plan in June 2000.

Human Genome Sequencing

Dr. Gibson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate she has made of the share of the world's effort in human genome sequencing which is being undertaken in the UK. [44980]

Mr. Battle: We estimate that the UK undertake one third of the world's effort in sequencing the human genome. The UK contribution is made primarily through the work of the Wellcome Trust and the Medical Research Council.

Nuclear Weapons (Developing Countries)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps she has taken to ensure that no plutonium from the United Kingdom has been used in the production of nuclear weapons in developing countries. [44725]

Mr. Battle: I refer my hon. Friend to the detailed answer given to the hon. Member for Perth (Ms Cunningham) on 1 June 1998, *Official Report*, columns *119–20*.

The stringent controls described in that answer would apply to any applications to export plutonium to a developing country.

Nuclear Power Stations (Health Risks)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what new proposals she has to improve transparency in respect of the health risks arising from nuclear power stations. [43511]

Mr. Battle: None. Existing arrangements already provide for a high degree of public openness about health, safety and environmental issues associated with the UK civil nuclear industry.

Nuclear operators publish annual reports which provide detailed information about both the environmental and the health and safety considerations associated with their activities. Those bodies responsible for the regulation of the civil nuclear industry, including the Health and Safety Executive, the Environment Agency, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, the National Radiological Protection Board, and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, also publish detailed annual reports. Where they believe there to be a matter of particular public interest to be addressed, regulators also published reports covering specific regulatory issues.

Independent expert consideration of the potential implications of the civil nuclear industry for public health is further provided for through the existence of the Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment (COMARE). COMARE was established by the Government in 1985 with a remit to investigate and advise on the health effects of both natural and man-made radiation and on the need for further research in this area. COMARE has undertaken investigations into the incidence of cancers in the vicinity of a number of UK nuclear installations and in each case has published a detailed report setting out its findings.

For safety and environmental issues associated with the UK civil nuclear industry, independent expert scrutiny is provided for through the existence of two advisory committees, the Nuclear Safety Advisory Committee (RWMAC). NuSAC publishes a biennial report setting out details of the work of the committee and its sub groups and of its future programme of work. RWMAC publishes a similar report on an annual basis.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

BSE

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the effect of BSE on the knackers' trade. [44357]

Mr. Rooker: Cattle displaying clinical signs suggestive of BSE are not sent to knackers yards. They are slaughtered on farm and the carcases taken to incineration facilities contracted to the Department to deal with BSE suspects.

Following the announcement on BSE in March 1996, some £97 million was made available for the rendering industry in the financial year 1996–97. In return, renderers were required to maintain pre-crisis prices and charges to all their suppliers of animal waste. A further £59 million of aid, also designed to help the entire red meat/animal waste chain, was made available during the financial year 1997–98. The support was always intended to be temporary and was phased out gradually during 1997–98 to enable the chain to adjust to the changing economics.

The knacker industry is playing an important role in the collection and transport of Over Thirty Months Scheme casualty animals to incineration facilities. Over 140,000 have been handled to date. However, the Government are

aware of the concern being expressed by the knacker industry about the increased costs of collecting other fallen stock following the removal of support. Officials are liaising with farming representatives to consider how farmers should, in future, dispose of fallen stock and to encourage the industry to put suitable arrangements in place.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the incidence of BSE by cattle breed in 1997 and 1998 to date. [44897]

Mr. Rooker: The number of cattle confirmed as having BSE in Great Britain in 1997 and 1998 to date are listed by cattle breed in the table.

Number of confirmed cases by breed and year of slaughter as at 5 June 1998

Breed	*1997*	*1998*
Aberdeen Angus	8	1
Aberdeen Angus x	16	0
Aberdeen Angus x Charolais	1	0
Aberdeen Angus x Friesian	15	2
Ayrshire	23	4
Ayrshire x Shorthorn	1	0
Belgian Blue	1	1
Belgian Blue x	3	2
Black Hereford	1	0
Blonde d'Aquitaine	3	0
Blonde d'Aquitaine x	3	1
Blonde d'Aquitaine x Friesian	6	0
Blue Grey	1	0
British White	1	0
Brown Swiss	10	1
Brown Swiss x	5	0
Brown Swiss x Friesian	13	2
Brown Swiss x Guernsey	1	0
Canadian Holstein	1	0
Charolais	7	1
Charolais x	17	1
Charolais x Belgian Blue	1	0
Charolais x Friesian	7	2
Charolais x Guernsey	1	0
Charolais x Hereford	1	0
Charolais x Holstein	1	0
Charolais x Limousin	1	0
Charolais x Simmental	1	0
Charolais x South Devon	1	0
Devon x Friesian	1	0
Friesian	3,055	474
Friesian x	11	2
Friesian x Ayrshire	4	0
Friesian x Belgian Blue	2	0
Friesian x Galloway	0	1
Friesian x Holstein	322	59
Friesian x South Devon	1	0
Guernsey	37	6
Guernsey x Jersey	1	0
Guernsey x Merse Rhine Issel	1	0
Hereford	15	1
Hereford x	118	13
Hereford x Friesian	122	11
Hereford x Simmental	2	0
Highland	3	0
Holstein	90	21
Holstein x	2	0
Jersey	40	2
Jersey x	1	0
Jersey x Friesian	3	0
Limousin	17	2
Limousin x	64	9
Limousin x Friesian	37	3
Limousin x Hereford	0	1

Number of confirmed cases by breed and year of slaughter as at 5 June 1998

Breed	*1997*	*1998*
Limousin x Jersey	1	0
Limousin x Luing	1	0
Limousin x Simmental	1	0
Longhorn	1	0
Meuse Rhine Issel	2	0
Meuse Rhine Issel x Guernsey	1	0
Meuse Rhine Issel x Jersey	1	0
Montbelliarde	1	0
Murray Grey	1	0
Murray Grey x Friesian	1	0
Murray Grey x Jersey	1	0
Not recorded	61	90
Red Friesian	8	0
Red Friesian x	2	0
Red Poll	2	0
Saler x	1	0
Saler x Friesian	1	0
Shetland	1	0
Shorthorn	1	0
Shorthorn x	3	0
Shorthorn x Friesian	2	1
Simmental	19	4
Simmental x	56	9
Simmental x Friesian	33	4
Simmental x Holstein	2	0
Sioux	0	1
South Devon	2	1
South Devon x	0	1
Sussex x	1	0
Sussex x Friesian	3	1
Welsh Black	2	1
Welsh Black x	1	0
Total	4,313	736

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if Dr. Narang has supplied his Ministry with the information his scientists had requested in order to validate his BSE testing method; and if he will make a statement. [44866]

Mr. Rooker: The Department is not awaiting any information from Dr. Narang. Research funded by the Medical Research Council is underway at Leeds University to investigate the feasibility of diagnosing pre clinical BSE using cattle urine. Dr. Narang is collaborating in this work.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the effectiveness and accuracy of the methods advocated by Dr. Narang for detecting BSE. [44894]

Mr. Rooker: Dr. Narang has advocated a method to detect pre clinical BSE in cattle using urine. Research is currently underway in Leeds University to investigate the feasibility of such a method. It is too early to comment on effectiveness or accuracy.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the urine test method of detecting BSE in cattle. [44890]

Mr. Rooker: It is too early for an assessment to be made. The research currently underway at Leeds University to investigate the feasibility of using cattle urine to diagnose pre clinical BSE is in its early stages.

An independent advisory panel set up by the Medical Research Council is overseeing the work and will be meeting in early July to consider preliminary findings.

E. Coli

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research, by whom and at what cost, his Department has commissioned into E. coli in *(a)* cow's milk, *(b)* sheep's milk and *(c)* goat's milk. [45016]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 9 June 1998]:* The Department has recently undertaken a survey of the microbiological quality of unpasteurised sheep and goats' drinking milk on sale in England and Wales, at a cost of £11,926. It is also in the process of carrying out a more general survey of the microbiological quality of unpasteurised sheep and goat's milk, at an expected cost of £35,700. The analyses carried out in the surveys include testing for the presence of E. coli in the milk. ADAS was commissioned by the Department to undertake both surveys.

My Department has also commissioned a significant amount of other research on E. coli much of which will be of relevance to the presence of the organism in milk.

Coastal Erosion

Mr. Prior: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on protecting areas of environmental importance from coastal erosion. [44464]

Mr. Morley: The Department expects coastal authorities to make the potential impact on habitats, and the environment generally, a key consideration when planning works to prevent or reduce coastal erosion. They should start from the presumption that natural river and coastal processes should not be disrupted except where life or important man-made or natural assets are at risk. Schemes which are not environmentally acceptable are not eligible for grant aid.

Last year the Department introduced a priority scoring system (taking account of Ministerial priorities, urgency and benefit:cost ratio) with a view to optimising the allocation of available funds. Sites of environmental significance are specifically identified within Ministerial priorities, with particular priority being given to sites of international importance.

Toxocariasis

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the incidence of toxocariasis in rural areas compared to urban areas. [44443]

Ms Jowell: I have been asked to reply.

The data available on numbers of cases of human toxocariasis are based on laboratory reports received by the Public Health Laboratory Service's Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre (CDSC). However, reporting of cases is not a statutory requirement and therefore not all laboratory diagnosed cases are necessarily reported to the CDSC.

From the data received by CDSC in recent years no significant change has been noted in the number of reports (1993—25; 1994—25; 1995—38; 1996—19; 1997—18).

The location of the laboratory reporting an infection does not necessarily indicate the area of residence of the patient, or whether this is urban or rural, or the country (United Kingdom or overseas) in which infection was acquired.

HEALTH

Chiropody

Angela Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library the final version of the recent report on chiropody service levels. [44124]

Mr. Boateng: I understand that the report referred to is entitled "On Your Feet: Older People and NHS Chiropody Services" and was published by Age Concern in March 1998. Copies are available in the Library.

Recruitment Agencies

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the names of agencies which have supplied contract labour from outside the United Kingdom to the NHS in the last 10 years and the total amount paid in commission fees by the NHS to such firms in each of the last 10 years. [44500]

Mr. Milburn: This information is not available centrally and could be collected only at disproportionate cost. Each National Health Service trust is responsible for recruiting its own staff and may choose to use a recruitment agency to help it do so.

Travel Vaccinations

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what representations he has received about the possibility of privatising the provision of travel vaccinations; [44701]

(2) what consultation he is undertaking on proposals for the future provision of travel vaccinations. [44703]

Ms Jowell: Inconsistencies and ambiguities have arisen over the years in the arrangements for travel vaccines and the prescribing of medicines for overseas travel and there are differences in the way that the various vaccines are dealt with. The Department, as part of an ongoing internal review, is seeking to resolve the anomalies which exist at present in the arrangements for travel vaccines. Once we have recommendations to present we will consult the relevant professional bodies.

As a routine, Ministers and officials of the Department receive a number of letters from interested hon. Members and members of the public about the arrangements for travel vaccines and the prescribing of medicines for overseas travel. These letters express a range of views. In particular, letters have been received from the Patients' Association, the Overseas Doctors' Association, various student unions, the Primary Care Virology Group, Pasteur Merieux MSD and the Royal College of Nursing.

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the cost to the NHS of travel vaccinations in each of the last three years. [44702]

Ms Jowell: It is not possible to say how much is spent in total on travel immunisation each year. The net ingredient costs for vaccines which may be given for the purposes of travel were:

Year	*£ million*
1994	40.5
1995	47.0
1996	[1]49.1

[1] The vaccines are those preparations in the British National Formulary (issue 30, September 1995) section 14.6—International travel: Bacille Calmette-Guérin, cholera, diphtheria, hepatitis A, meningococcal A&C, normal immunoglobulin, poliomyelitis, typhoid, typhoid-paratyphoid A&B and yellow fever. Some of these vaccines will have been prescribed for reasons other than travel.

Note:
The net ingredient cost refers to the costs of the drug before discounts and does not include any dispensing costs or fees.

However, these costs include some vaccines which will have been prescribed for reasons other than travel. It is not possible to identify separately the cost of vaccinating patients in general practice.

Fatal Diseases (Overseas Travel)

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will estimate how many NHS patients are currently suffering from potentially fatal diseases caught while travelling overseas; [44689]

(2) what estimate he has made of the cost to the NHS of treating United Kingdom citizens for potentially fatal diseases caught while travelling overseas in the last year for which figures are available. [44699]

Ms Jowell: Estimates are not available of the cost to the National Health Service of treating United Kingdom citizens for potentially fatal diseases caught while travelling overseas. It is not possible to estimate reliably how many NHS patients are currently suffering from potentially fatal diseases actually caught while travelling overseas, since many diseases which could be caught overseas can also be caught in the UK and it is often impossible to identify where a patient contracted an illness.

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his Department's estimate of the number of United Kingdom citizens making overseas trips in 1997 to areas at risk to potentially fatal diseases. [44700]

Ms Jowell: The Office for National Statistics advise that, during 1997, 46.8 million United Kingdom residents made visits abroad, of which 5.4 million were to areas outside North America and Western Europe (preliminary figures).

There is the risk of contracting a potentially fatal disease anywhere in the world.

Ongar War Memorial Hospital

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to announce his decision on the proposed closure of the Ongar War Memorial Hospital. [44883]

Mr. Milburn: My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State will announce his decision when he has given full and proper consideration to the proposals once they have been put forward by North Essex Health Authority.

Pathogen Sales

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what pathogens were sold and at what price to the American Type Culture Collection in Rockville, Maryland, by his Department's installations between *(a)* 1 January 1980 and 31 December 1984 and *(b)* 1 January 1990 and 31 December 1997. [44184]

Ms Jowell: The Centre for Applied Microbiology and Research (CAMR) has not sold or supplied any pathogens to the American Type Culture Collection (ATCC) between 1 January 1980 and 31 December 1984, and 1 January 1990 and 31 December 1997.

The National Collection of Type Cultures (NCTC), Public Health Laboratory Service (PHLS) does not have complete records for the whole period 1 January 1980 to 31 December 1984. From the records it does have relating to this period and to the period between 1 January 1990 and 31 December 1997, the NCTC has not sold or supplied to the ATCC pathogens categorised as Hazard Group 3 (pathogens such as *Bacillus anthracis* and *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* belong to this group). A wide range of biological agents which are less hazardous are categorised as Hazard Group 2 and, although information on which strains have been supplied to the ATCC can be provided, this will take considerable time to compile. I will write to the hon and learned Member with details as soon as possible.

The National Collection of Pathogenic Fungi, PHLS, has supplied as follows:

Date	*Strain number*	*Species*
1984	NCPF 2109	Aspergillus fumigatus
1984	NCPF 2140	Aspergillus fumigatus
1993	NCPF 2808	Ramichloridium mackenziei

These cultures of fungi were supplied in response to requests by the ATCC for strains to be added to their catalogue and as such were not charged for.

Community Hospitals

Mr. Prior: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many doctors and nurses are currently working in community hospitals. [44479]

Mr. Milburn: The information is not collected centrally in the format requested.

Mr. Prior: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance he has given to health authorities on the closure of community hospitals. [44480]

Mr. Milburn: In our White Paper "The New NHS—Modern, Dependable" we set out the important role community hospitals can play in providing locally based services. Within this broad framework, health authorities are responsible for determining the appropriate balance of care for their populations.

Myalgic Encephalomyelitis

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to promote awareness and understanding of myalgic encephalomyelitis among doctors and the general public; what help is offered to people who suffer from the illness; and if he will make a statement. [44923]

Ms Jowell: The National Health Service provides a wide range of services to which sufferers of myalgic encephalomyelitis (ME)/chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS) have access and such patients are seen within a wide range of community services and hospital specialties. Patients can discuss the options available to them with their general practitioner and they may also request an assessment of their needs by local authority social services departments. It is the responsibility of health authorities to decide how the needs of ME/CFS sufferers should be met and whether or not they should purchase dedicated services. All such decisions are made in the light of competing priorities.

Raising awareness and understanding about ME/CFS is a major part of the work of the ME/CFS voluntary organisations. Since 1988, the Department has provided substantial funding to ME/CFS organisations, amounting to almost a quarter of a million pounds. Some of the ME/CFS organisations provide information packs to GPs about the condition, as well as to sufferers and their families.

Abortion

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the cost of abortions in the first trimester to the National Health Service in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [43490]

Ms Jowell: Information on the costs of specific operations is not held centrally.

Complementary and Alternative Medicine

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Health following the recent review of expenditure, if he will list the reductions in funding for complementary and alternative medicine services by category and amount broken down by *(a)* homeopathy, *(b)* acupuncture and *(c)* therapeutic touch in the East London and The City Health Authority; and if he will make a statement. [45136]

Ms Jowell: This information is not held centrally in the form requested. East London and The City Health Authority ceased funding complementary medicine with effect from 1 April 1997. This represented some £120,000 in contracts with a number of National Health Service trusts and other providers.

Medicines Control Agency

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the key business targets for the Medicines Control Agency for 1998–99. [45278]

Ms Jowell: We have today placed copies of the 1998–99 high level business targets of the Medicines Control Agency in the Library.

DEFENCE

Ex-service Men

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on the effects of counselling for ex-servicemen. [44387]

Dr. Reid: The Ministry of Defence has not commissioned or evaluated any research into the effects of counselling for ex-Service personnel. However, my Department maintains links with numerous ex-Service organisations and charities, including the Ex-Services Mental Welfare Society (Combat Stress), which provides limited counselling facilities. We very much value the contributions which these organisations make towards the resettlement and aftercare of ex-Service personnel.

Army Personnel

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the personnel numbers for *(a)* the full strength and *(b)* the current strength of each Army regiment. [44189]

Dr. Reid: I will write to the hon. and learned Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Royal Navy Vessels (Crew)

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Royal Navy vessels are below full crew complement; and by how many. [44190]

Dr. Reid: The major ships of the Surface Flotilla all experience a degree of gapping which, on average, amounts to 5 per cent. of the full crew complement. In the case of minor ships, this average is 4 per cent. No submarines are operating below their full crew complement.

Nuclear Threat Assessment

Mr. Alasdair Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the *(a)* extent and *(b)* sources of the external nuclear threat to the United Kingdom. [45038]

Mr. George Robertson: We do not see any immediate nuclear threats to the United Kingdom. However, while large nuclear arsenals and risks of proliferation remain we cannot be certain that this situation could not change. Our minimum deterrent therefore remains a necessary element of our security.

Western European Union (Training)

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many joint WEU training missions the *(a)* Royal Navy, *(b)* British Army, and *(c)* RAF have participated in over the past five years; and if he will make a statement. [44183]

Dr. Reid: The exercise programme of the Western European Union (WEU) is focused on testing crisis management procedures at the headquarters level; exercises of this type organised by the WEU have involved UK personnel, including Service personnel. UK

forces train with those of other WEU nations for the types of missions which the WEU might undertake; this training is organised by nations, not by the WEU.

Royal Navy (Fuel Quota)

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if it is the practice to allocate each ship in the Royal Navy an annual quota of fuel. [44185]

Mr. Spellar: Fuel is allocated to the RN surface Flotilla on an annual basis. Individual HM Ships receive a monthly allocation based on their forward programme requirements.

Soldiers (Exercises and Operations)

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the average annual number of days spent on *(a)* exercises and *(b)* operations by an infantry soldier in each of the last 10 years. [44186]

Dr. Reid: This information is not held centrally by my Department and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Iraq

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the cost of the RAF's involvement in policing the air exclusion zones over Northern and Southern Iraq in each year since 1992; and from what budget heading the cost of the operations has been met. [44180]

Mr. George Robertson: The additional costs of the RAF's involvement in policing the air exclusion zones over Northern and Southern Iraq, i.e. in Op Jural and Op Warden, and the budget headings from which the costs were met are shown in the table:

Year	*North (£ million)*	*South (£ million)*	*Budget*
1992–93	3.865	3.303	Class 1. Vote 1. (Personnel cost, support and other services)
	0.038	0.678	Class 1. Vote 2. (Procurement)
1993–94	4.892	2.157	Class 1. Vote 1. (Operational and support costs)
	0.199	0.229	Class 1. Vote 2. (Logistics services)
1994–95	5.963	3.932	Class 1. Vote 1. (Operational and support costs)
	0.333	0.622	Class 1. Vote 2. (Logistics services)
1995–96	0.512	0.457	Class 1. Vote 1. (Operational and support costs)
	0.260	0.728	Class 1. Vote 2. (Logistics services)
1996–97	0.639	0.938	Class 1. Vote 1. (Operational and support costs)
	0.105	0.134	Class 1. Vote 2. (Logistics services)
1997–98	0.165	0.31	Class 1. Vote 1. (Operational and support costs)
	0.296	0.294	Class 1. Vote 2. (Logistics services)

Note:
Changes in the MOD Budget Structure in 1993 resulted in the renaming of Budget Headings.

Persian Gulf

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the cost of the Royal Navy's involvement in operations in the Persian Gulf in each year since 1992; and from what budget heading the cost of the operations has been met. [44181]

Mr. George Robertson: The additional costs of the Royal Navy's involvement in operations in the Persian Gulf, (ie Op Granby and Op Bolton), and the budget headings from which the costs were met are shown in the table:

Year	*Cost (£ million)*	*Budget*
1992–93	0.906	Class 1. Vote 1. (Personnel cost, support and other services)
	10.512	Class 1. Vote 2. (Procurement)
1993–94	0.770	Class 1. Vote 1. (Operational and support costs)
	17.031	Class 1. Vote 2. (Logistics services)
1994–95	0.320	Class 1. Vote 1. (Operational and support costs)
	14.854	Class 1. Vote 2. (Logistics services)
1995–96	0.011	Class 1. Vote 2. (Logistics services)
1996–97	0.00	N/A
1997–98	4.506	Class 1. Vote 1. (Operational and support costs)
	0.630	Class 1. Vote 2. (Logistics services)

Note:
Changes in the MOD Budget Structure in 1993 resulted in the renaming Budget Headings.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the cost of the RAF's involvement in operations in the Persian Gulf in each year since 1992; and from what budget heading the cost has been met. [44191]

Mr. George Robertson: The additional costs of the RAF's involvement in operations in the Persian Gulf, i.e. Op Granby, Op Driver and Op Bolton, and the budget headings from which the costs were met are shown in the table:

Year	*Cost (£ million)*	*Budget*
1992–93	1.117	Class 1. Vote 1. (Personnel cost, support and other services)
	54.700	Class 1. Vote 2. (Procurement)
1993–94	2.347	Class 1. Vote 1. (Operational and support costs)
	25.940	Class 1. Vote 2. (Logistics services)
1994–95	0.511	Class 1. Vote 1. (Operational and support costs)
	−2.276	Class 1. Vote 2. (Logistics services)

Year	Cost (£ million)	Budget
1995–96	0.892	Class 1. Vote 2. (Logistics services)
1996–97	0.086	Class 1. Vote 2. (Logistics services)
1997–98	1.688	Class 1. Vote 1. (Operational and support costs)
	0.219	Class 1. Vote 2. (Logistics services)

Note:
Changes in the MOD Budget Structure in 1993 resulted in the renaming of Budget Headings. These figures exclude the costs of the No Fly Zones over Southern and Northern Iraq.

Royal Navy (Peacekeeping)

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the cost of the Royal Navy's involvement in peacekeeping operations IFOR and SFOR; and from what budget heading the cost of the operations was met for *(a)* 1994–95, *(b)* 1995–96 and *(c)* 1996–97. [44182]

Mr. George Robertson: The additional costs of the Royal Navy's involvement in IFOR and SFOR operations and the budgets from which the costs were met are as follows:

Year	IFOR (£ million)	SFOR (£ million)	Budget
1994/95	0.00	0.00	n/a
1995/96	0.360	0.00	Class 1, Vote 1. (Operational and Support Costs)
	7.321	0.00	Class 1, Vote 2. (Logistics Services)
1996/97	4.806	1.693	Class 1, Vote 1. (Operational and Support Costs)
	16.734	6.497	Class 1, Vote 2. (Logistics Services)
1997/98	0.00	1.600	Class 1, Vote 1. (Operational and Support Costs)
	0.124	13.454	Class 1, Vote 2. (Logistics Services).

Overseas Personnel

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the numbers and locations of UK armed forces' personnel stationed overseas. [44187]

Mr. George Robertson: This information is not held centrally. However, the countries in which UK military personnel were serving on 1 April, together with the number in each country, based on those records which we do have available, are given in the table.

Country	Number of UK armed forces personnel
Algeria	12
Angola	1
Antarctica	3
Antigua and Barbuda	1
Argentina	4
Ascension Island	25
Australia	65
Austria	2
Bahrain	86
Baltic States	6
Bangladesh	2
Barbados	11
Belgium	434
Belize	192
Bermuda	3
Bosnia	5,200
Brazil	6
British Virgin Islands	4
Brunei	1,049
Bulgaria	2
Canada	684
Chile	1
China	4
Colombia	3
Croatia	2
Cyprus	3,938
Czech Republic	3
Denmark	29
Diego Garcia	40
Egypt	3
Ethiopia	2
Finland	1
France	50
Georgia	1
Germany	21,480
Ghana	6
Gibraltar	794
Greece	3
Guatemala	2
Guinea	1
Gulf Region (at sea)	1,851
Hungary	2
India	5
Indonesia	4
Iraq	4
Ireland	2
Israel	3
Italy	203
Jamaica	2
Japan	3
Jordan	3
Kenya	36
Korea (South)	3
Kuwait	572
Lebanon	6
Malaysia	6
Mauritius	1
Mediterranean area (at sea)	170
Mexico	2
Morocco	1
Nepal	66
Netherlands	294
New Zealand	9
Norway	70
Oman	239
Pakistan	5
Philippines	1
Poland	880
Portugal	44
Qatar	1
Romania	2
Russia	10
Rwanda	7
Saudi Arabia	413
Sierra Leone	4
Singapore	4
Slovakia	1
South Africa	15
South Atlantic (including Falkland Islands)	1,907

Country	Number of UK armed forces personnel
Spain	10
Sri Lanka	3
Sweden	4
Switzerland	2
Syria	2
Thailand	2
Turkey	189
Turks and Caicos Islands	4
Uganda	1
Ukraine	2
United Arab Emirates	14
United States of America	1,299
Venezuela	1
West Africa Region (at sea)	255
West Indies Region (at sea)	260
Yugoslavia (Fed Rep)	2
Zimbabwe	18
Total	43,074

These figures include personnel attached to Embassies, those on exercise, those on loan or exchange postings, those training overseas personnel or undergoing long term training themselves, and those serving in NATO headquarters and our overseas garrisons. They do not include ships or aircraft on passage or undertaking temporary visits, but do cover personnel on ships engaged on operations or longer deployments overseas. Germany based personnel deployed to countries of the former Yugoslavia are shown against the latter.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Algeria

Dr. Vis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the Government will urge the United Nations to appoint a special rapporteur on Algeria with a mandate to co-ordinate an investigation into the massacres and other human rights abuses there. [44065]

Mr. Fatchett: In our regular contacts with the Algerian Government, we continue to emphasise the contribution to transparency and international confidence that would follow from co-operation with Special Rapporteurs. To date the Algerians have declined to allow rapporteurs to visit. We continue to watch developments in Algeria closely and will consider our position carefully at this year's United Nations General Assembly.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what communications he has had with the Algerian Government concerning the human rights situation in Algeria since 19 February. [44384]

Mr. Fatchett: Officials have had a number of discussions with Algerian counterparts on human rights in Algeria since February. This subject was covered when my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary met the Algerian Foreign Minister on 3 June.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the human rights situation in Algeria; and what is his assessment of changes since the visit of the Minister of State on 20 January. [44383]

Mr. Fatchett: We note that the level of violence has decreased substantially since Ramadhan, although terrorist activities do continue, particularly bombings in the capital. We understand that the Algerian Government have successfully carried out counter-insurgency operations. The authorities have arrested a number of officials on charges of human rights abuses; and over a hundred members of the Algerian police force languish in prison on similar charges. Nevertheless, we remain deeply concerned about the situation in Algeria and the allegations of continued human rights abuses there. We continuously monitor the situation, through official, NGO and media reports. Throughout our Presidency of the European Union we have maintained a broad-based political dialogue with Algeria, most recently a meeting between my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and the Algerian Foreign Minister.

Sudan

Mr. McWalter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what actions he is taking to make the Sudanese government more mindful of the rights of the people of Southern Sudan. [44125]

Mr. Fatchett: We continue to put pressure on the Government of Sudan to respond to the concerns of the international community about human rights violations in Sudan. The UK co-sponsored the UNHCR resolution which was passed by the 54th session of the Commission on Human Rights on 21 April 1998 and was highly critical of the Sudanese Government.

The UK has long supported the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) peace process as the best chance to bring an end to the civil war in Sudan through a comprehensive negotiated settlement that respects the rights of all Sudanese.

As Presidency we issued an EU Declaration on 1 May which voiced European concerns and called for an immediate cease-fire. At UK instigation, Sudan was discussed at the UN Security Council on 5 May, and a press statement was made by the President expressing the UN's concerns. As a next step, we have pressed for an early meeting of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development Partnership Forum. I shall represent the UK at a meeting in The Hague on 18 June.

Chevening Scholarships

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list *(a)* the countries of the recipients of Chevening scholarships, *(b)* the names and occupations of the recipients and *(c)* the amounts spent on Chevening scholarships since May 1997. [44344]

Mr. Fatchett *[holding answer 4 June 1998]:* Chevening Scholarships are offered each year to scholars from more than 150 countries and territories. A list of those countries and territories is set out in the following list. In the last Financial Year more than 1,800 new Chevening Scholars arrived in the UK to begin their studies. The amount spent on the Chevening Scholarships Programme in the 1997–98 Financial Year was £32 million. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office contributed about £15.5 million of this and the Department for International Development, £12.5 million. The remaining £7 million was raised by

co-sponsors. The names and occupants of Chevening Scholars cannot be disclosed for reasons of personal privacy.

List of countries and territories eligible for Chevening Scholarships

Albania
Algeria
Angola
Anguilla
Antigua
Argentina
Armenia
Australia
Austria
Azerbaijan
Bahamas
Bahrain
Bangladesh
Barbados
Belarus
Belgium
Belize
Benin
Bermuda
Bolivia
Bosnia
Botswana
Brazil
British Virgin Islands
Brunei
Bulgaria
Burkina Faso
Burma
Burundi
Cambodia
Cameroon
Canada
Cape Verde
Cayman Islands
Central African Republic
Chad
Chile
China (including Hong Kong Special Administrative Region)
Colombia
Comoros Islands
D.R. Congo
Congo
Costa Rica
Cote d'Ivoire
Croatia
Cuba
Cyprus
Czech Republic
Denmark
Djibouti
Dominica
Dominican Republic
East Jerusalem
Ecuador
Egypt
El Salvador
Equatorial Guinea
Eritrea
Estonia
Ethiopia
Falkland Islands
Fiji
Finland
France
Gabon
Gambia
Georgia
Germany
Ghana
Gibraltar
Greece
Grenada
Guatemala
Guinea
Guinea Bissau
Guyana
Haiti
Honduras
Hungary
Iceland
India
Indonesia
Iran
Irish Republic
Israel
Italy
Jamaica
Japan
Jordan
Kazakhstan
Kenya
Kyrgyzstan
Kiribati
Korea
Kuwait
Laos
Latvia
Lebanon
Lesotho
Liberia
Lithuania
Luxembourg
FYR Macedonia
Madagascar
Malawi
Malaysia
Maldive Islands
Mali
Malta
Mauritania
Mauritius
Mexico

Micronesia and Marshall Islands
Moldova
Mongolia
Montserrat
Morocco
Mozambique
Namibia
Nauru
Nepal
Netherlands
New Zealand
Nicaragua
Niger
Nigeria
Norway
Oman
Pakistan
Panama
Papua New Guinea
Paraguay
Peru
Philippines
Poland
Portugal
Qatar
Romania
Russia
Rwanda
Sao Tome and Principe
Saudi Arabia
St. Helena
St. Kitts/Nevis
St. Lucia
St. Vincent
Senegal
Seychelles
Sierra Leone
Singapore
Slovakia
Slovenia
Solomon Islands
South Africa
Spain
Sri Lanka
Sudan
Surinam
Swaziland
Sweden
Switzerland
Syria
Tadjikistan
Taiwan
Tanzania
Thailand
Togo
Tonga
Trinidad and Tobago
Tunisia
Turkey
Turks and Caicos
Turkmenistan
Tuvalu
Uganda
Ukraine
United Arab Emirates
Uruguay
USA
Uzbekistan
Vanuatu
Venezuela
Vietnam
Western Samoa
Yemen
Yugoslavia
Zambia
Zimbabwe.

People's Europe Event

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which bodies were asked to nominate individuals to serve on the Executive Committee of the People's Europe event in London of 5 to 7 June; what criteria he used in selecting these; and if he will place in the Library a copy of the letter and accompanying material requesting their co-operation. [44449]

Mr. Doug Henderson: Decisions about the composition of the Executive Committee for the People's Europe 98 conference were the responsibility of the organisers. At the Government's suggestion, the organisers sought to ensure that a wide range of opinion was represented on the Executive Committee. The Committee included representatives of the CBI SME Unit, the TUC, the Local Government International Bureau, the National Council for Voluntary Organisations, the European Movement, Chatham House, Green Alliance and the office staff.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what will be the cost to public funds of the People's Europe event in London on 5 to 7 June; and what sums will be received from *(a)* Her Majesty's Government, *(b)* the European Commission, *(c)* the European Parliament, *(d)* other public bodies and *(e)* voluntary bodies. [44450]

Mr. Doug Henderson: I refer my hon. Friend to answers I gave on 1 April 1998, *Official Report*, columns *534–35*.

The European Parliament is providing 30,000 ECU, or £20,313, towards the costs of the People's Europe event.

Sierra Leone

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those inquiries requested by his Department or other agencies launched without Ministers being informed since 1 May 1997. [42097]

Mr. Robin Cook *[holding answer 14 May 1998]:* No formal investigations have been launched since 2 May 1997 by officials of the FCO without my knowledge. In the case of the alleged breach of the arms embargo on

Sierra Leone, officials acted perfectly properly in referring allegations to Customs and Excise. It is general practice for allegations and information about potential breaches of arms embargoes or UK export controls to be reviewed in the Restricted Enforcement Unit, whatever case was, without Ministers being consulted. The decision on whether it merited investigation was for HM Customs and Excise, not the FCO.

Cameroon

Mr. Fabian Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance the British Government have given to English-speaking opposition parties in Cameroon. [44931]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Our High Commission in Cameroon supports a wide range of projects to promote good governance and human rights. These are to help all people in Cameroon, regardless of political affiliations or ethnic origin. In addition, the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD) has provided support for the Social Democratic Front (SDF) and Union des Populations Camerounaises (UPC), both opposition parties in Cameroon.

Our priority is to promote a genuine multiparty democracy in Cameroon.

Mr. Fabian Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is Her Majesty's Government's policy towards proposals for minority rights recognition for the English speaking minority in Cameroon at the Human Rights Convention in Geneva. [44934]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We expect Cameroon to adhere to the Harare Declaration of Principles which include a commitment to equal rights and opportunities for all citizens regardless of race, colour, creed or political belief. Cameroon is also a party to the UN International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination. We welcome any discussion which raises awareness of minority rights issues, including at the UN Minority Rights Working Group in Geneva.

Yemen

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what representations he has made to the Government of Yemen in respect of the kidnapping of three BBC journalists; and what action he proposes to take to secure their release; [44995]

(2) what representations he has received on the kidnapping of three BBC journalists in Yemen; and if he will make a statement. [44994]

Mr. Fatchett: There has been no kidnapping of BBC journalists in Yemen.

Three BBC journalists were detained by the Yemeni authorities on 26 May and released on bail on 28 May. They were subsequently charged with filming in an area without permission. The case was heard in Court on 6 and 7 June and the journalists were found not guilty. When delivering his verdict the Judge observed that Yemen believed in the freedom of the press, and that the press was a necessity in this age. Her Majesty's Government greatly welcome this satisfactory outcome.

We understand that the journalists have now returned to the UK.

James Miles and Paul Loseby

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the cases of James Miles and Paul Loseby, imprisoned in Venezuela. [44996]

Mr. Fatchett: I refer my hon. Friend to my remarks in the Adjournment debate of 9 July 1997, *Official Report*, columns 1044–52 and to my answer to his question of 18 February 1998, *Official Report*, column 679. On 18 July, Mr. Miles and Mr. Loseby were informed that they had been sentenced to 4 years imprisonment. On appeal, this was increased to 5 years. The result of the appeal was made known to them on 5 February 1998.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what requests have been made by James Miles and Paul Loseby to the British Embassy in Caracas for dental treatment; what assessment the Embassy has made of the requests; and what steps are in place to ensure that their medical and dental requirements are met. [44997]

Mr. Fatchett: Mr. Miles and Mr. Loseby have made several requests to see a doctor and a dentist. Such requests are always taken seriously and given high priority by the British Embassy in submitting them to the Venezuelan authorities. The British Ambassador has written on 5 occasions to the judges involved in the case requesting appropriate medical attention: on 27 November 1996, 10 April 1997, 10 July 1997, on 27 January 1998 and on 17 March 1998. On 14 April the judges informed the Ambassador that instructions had been issued for Mr. Miles and Mr. Loseby to be seen by a doctor and a dentist.

Mr. Loseby was seen by a doctor on 3 April 1998. Both men were seen by a doctor on 23 April 1998. The Embassy continues to press the Venezuelan authorities to arrange for both men to be seen by a dentist.

Tehran Embassy

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the total forecast cost is of the present refurbishment of the British Embassy in Tehran; and if he will list the works being undertaken and their specifications. [44960]

Mr. Fatchett: The total forecast cost of the refurbishment of the British Embassy in Tehran is £995,000. This figure includes the estimated cost of works, fees, furnishings and travel costs.

The Embassy offices in Tehran are in a 4 storey building built in the 1960s. Essential services, finishes and fittings are in a poor condition and need to be upgraded to a modern and secure standard.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Government Information and Communication Service

13. **Mr. Baker:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what action has been taken following the publication of the report of the Working Group on the Government Information Service. [43507]

Mr. Kilfoyle: The Progress Report of the Head of the Government Information and Communication Service shows that the majority of recommendations have been implemented. The Report will be issued to the Select Committee on Public Administration and placed in the Library of the House.

21. **Mr. Ruffley:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what recent representations he has received regarding the Government Information Service. [43518]

Mr. Kilfoyle: As the hon. Member will be aware, there is an inquiry into the GICS by the Public Administration Committee. In addition, I have been asked a number of questions by Members of this House.

Better Government White Paper

17. **Mr. McNulty:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the publication of the Better Government White Paper. [43513]

Dr. David Clark: Work is progressing to publish the Better Government White Paper later this year. This White Paper will outline the measures the Government have in mind to modernise the business of the public services and ensure the delivery of better services to our citizens.

19. **Ms Moran:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the impact on local democracy of the Better Government project. [43516]

Dr. David Clark: The Better Government programme is about revitalising the public sector. Local government is a key partner. Improving public services will be an important contribution to renewing the democratic relationship between the public and all levels of government. Alongside the important developments in local government democracy being taken forward by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister, the Better Government programme will contribute to making local government more open and responsive to the needs of users.

Freedom of Information

18. **Mr. Edwards:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on progress towards freedom of information legislation. [43515]

22. **Mr. Hanson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what progress he has made towards publishing draft freedom of information legislation. [43519]

Dr. David Clark: We are making good progress in turning the policy proposals set out in the White Paper *Your Right to Know* into draft legislation. I greatly welcome the support of the Select Committee on Public Administration in their recent substantial report on our proposals. My colleagues and I are now considering carefully the detailed recommendations that the Committee has made. When we have done so I intend to publish the draft bill, again for consultation, as soon as possible.

23. **Mr. Hoyle:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on his public consultations on measures to make his Department more open. [43521]

Dr. David Clark: My Department like all government departments will be subject to our proposals for a Freedom of Information Act. As regards the result of consultations on those proposals, I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East (Dr. Kumar) on 1 April 1998, *Official Report*, columns *587–89*.

24. **Mr. Paterson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on his recent consultations on his proposed freedom of information legislation. [43522]

Dr. David Clark: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East (Dr. Kumar) on 1 April 1998, *Official Report*, columns *587–89*.

Ms Abbott: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many responses he has received to his Freedom of Information White Paper. [43510]

Dr. David Clark: I received 557 responses to the consultation exercise on the Freedom of Information White Paper, *Your Right to Know*.

Mr. Amess: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what recent representations he has received on his proposals for open government. [43517]

Dr. David Clark: I recently received the Report of the Select Committee on Public Administration on the Government's White Paper, *Your Right to Know*, which described the proposals as "a radical advance in open and accountable government".

Clergymen

25. **Mr. Peter Bradley:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on his powers to appoint clergymen to livings; and on how many occasions he has exercised such powers since 1 May. [43524]

Dr. David Clark: The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster is responsible for appointing incumbents to 42 church livings on behalf of her Majesty the Queen in Right of Her Duchy of Lancaster. Since 1 May 1997 I have approved the appointment of one clergyman and one woman priest to two of these livings which had become vacant.

Civil Service (UK Nationals)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many posts are classified as restricted to United Kingdom nationals only in the Civil Service, by department. [45114]

Dr. David Clark: A full survey of the number of 'public service' posts (i.e. posts, which, under the terms of the EC Treaty, member states may reserve for their own nationals) was last undertaken in 1994. The findings of that survey, adjusted to include more up to date information from the Ministry of Defence, are as follows:

Department	*Number of public service posts*	*Public service posts as % of total*	*Number of non public service posts*	*Non public service posts as % of total*	*Total number of posts*
Agriculture	1,536	14	9,063	86	10,599
Customs and Excise	18,704	72	7,305	28	26,009
Cabinet Office	774	35	1,446	65	2,220
Charity Commission	0	0	714	100	714
Central Office of Information	0	0	515	100	515
CPS	36	1	6,399	99	6,435
Crown Office	52	5	1,001	95	1,053
Defence[1]	46,075	40	69,381	60	115,457
Education	74	3	2,249	97	2,323
Employment Department	637	1	58,472	99	59,109
Environment	243	9	2,513	91	2,756
FCO	6,581	100	0	0	6,581
Government Actuary's Department	10	13	67	87	77
Health	42	1	4,633	99	4,675
HMSO	8	1	2,041	99	2,049
Home Office	728	2	47,772	98	48,500
Inland Revenue[2]	51,015	70	21,721	30	72,736
Intervention Board	20	2	1,020	98	1,040
Land Registry	2	1	8,535	99	8,537
Legal Secretariat Law Officer	21	75	7	25	28
Lord Advocates Department	20	91	2	9	22
Lord Chancellor's Department	1,091	9	11,346	91	12,437
National Heritage	309	28	793	72	1,102
National Investment and Loans Office	0	0	39	100	39
National Savings	31	1	5,569	99	5,600
Northern Ireland Office	185	83	39	17	224
ODA	227	20	882	80	1,109
Office of Fair Trading	47	11	371	89	418
Ofsted	10	2	577	98	587
Office of Water Services	0	0	156	100	156
OPCS	0	0	1,879	100	1,879
Ordnance Survey	11	1	2,053	99	2,064
Paymaster Generals Office	0	0	730	100	730
Privy Council Office	22	67	11	33	33
Public Records Office	11	2	455	98	466
PSA	0	0	458	100	458
Royal Mint	6	1	988	99	994
Scottish Courts Administration	14	1	1,001	99	1,015
Scottish Office	510	8	5,714	92	6,224
Scottish Prison Service	8	1	4,642	99	4,650
Social Security	189	1	84,070	99	84,259
Trade and Industry	1,793	18	8,319	82	10,112
Transport	336	2	15,269	98	15,605
Treasury[2]	121	12	931	88	1,052
Treasury Solicitor	45	9	458	91	503
Welsh Office	522	23	1,768	77	2,290
Total	132,066	25	392,574	75	524,640

[1] 1996 figures
[2] 1992 figures

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) how many posts he estimates will become restricted to United Kingdom nationals only in the Civil Service, due to retirement over the next five years, by department; [45112]

(2) how many posts have become restricted to United Kingdom nationals only since the 1996 Civil Service rule change, due to retirement, by department. [45113]

Dr. David Clark: 'Public Service' posts (i.e. posts which, under the terms of the EC Treaty, member states may reserve for their own nationals) are defined by the nature of the work undertaken in them. For this reason their number is not directly affected by changes of personnel.

Prior to the last change to the civil service nationality rules in 1996, these posts were also open to citizens of the Republic of Ireland and of Commonwealth countries. Post holders from those countries at the date of change were granted reserved rights to continue to work in such posts for the duration of their careers. No central records are available either of the number of 'public service' posts which at the time of the change in the rules were filled by non-UK nationals or of the number of 'public service' posts which are still filled by non-UK nationals.

Marsham Street

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when the former Department of the Environment building in Marsham Street will be demolished. [44945]

Mr. Kilfoyle: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated under the terms of the Framework Document to Property Advisers to the Civil Estate. I have asked its Chief Executive, Mr. John Locke, to write to the hon. member.

Letter from John C. Locke to Mr. Edward Leigh, dated 10 June 1998

Demolition of 2 Marsham Street

You tabled a written Parliamentary Question to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster asking when the former Department of Environment building in Marsham Street will be demolished. The care and maintenance of 2 Marsham Street is now the responsibility of the Property Advisers to the Civil Estate (PACE) and as Chief Executive I have been asked to reply to your question.

The Department of Environment and Transport vacated the building at the end of April 1998 and Government's intention was to let a contract for its demolition this summer with the work expected to take some 18 months to complete.

Demolition is however conditional on any overriding Government need for temporary decant accommodation. If such a need materialised then reuse would prove to be a better value for money solution to the Exchequer than immediate demolition.

Two government departments are planning to refurbish their HQ accommodation and are currently considering proposals which might lead to the temporary use of Marsham Street. Temporary reoccupation will have the effect of deferring demolition until Autumn 2002 at the earliest.

Crown Copyright

Mr. Todd: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he has evaluated the responses to his consultation on "Crown Copyright in the Information Age"; and if he will make a statement. [43520]

Dr. David Clark: The responses have been evaluated. As I mentioned in my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg), on 20 May 1998, *Official Report*, column *374*, plans are being formulated for the future administration of Crown copyright which take the responses into account. I shall inform the House in due course of the way forward.

E-mail

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many Ministers have published their e-mail addresses; and how many are now equipped with electronic red boxes. [43523]

Dr. David Clark: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin), on 10 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *441*, regarding Ministers' e-mail addresses.

The electronic red box is still at the prototype stage of development. During this early stage, only the Minister for Science, Energy and Industry and I are experimenting with these prototypes.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

New Deal (Young People)

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list for each of the pilot areas for the New Deal for 18 to 24 year olds, how many of those eligible failed to join any of the four available categories. [43369]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Statistical information on the progress of those joining the New Deal in the Pathfinder areas to 31 March is available in the Library. The bulk of those commencing the New Deal during the period were still in the New Deal Gateway, the period of up to 4 months help before New Deal participants start on New Deal options.

Teachers' Pay

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations he has received from individual teachers regarding the staging of their pay award. [44373]

Mr. Byers: The Department has received 89 letters from members of the general public about staging the pay award.

GCSE/GNVQ Scores

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the national average GCSE point score of *(a)* male, *(b)* female and *(c)* all 15 year old pupils (i) in total and (ii) in maintained schools including special schools in 1997; and if he will indicate the numbers of pupils in each category. [44952]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 9 June 1998]:* The information requested in respect of national average GCSE point scores is shown in the table.

GCSE average point score of 15 year old pupils by institution and gender 1997

	Maintained schools[1]		*All schools*	
	Average GCSE point score	*Number of pupils*	*Average GCSE point score*	*Number of pupils*
Male	32.5	273,136	33.5	299,509
Female	37.3	264,526	38.3	287,257
All 15 year old pupils	34.9	537,662	35.8	586,766

[1] Including special schools

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what were the average GCSE/GNVQ point scores in 1997 of *(a)* male, *(b)* female and *(c)* all 15 year old pupils in maintained schools including special schools with 15 year old pupils assigning GNVQ grades points on the basis that at intermediate level a distinction equals 7.5 points, a merit equals 6 points and a pass equals 5 points, and at foundation level a distinction equals 4 points, a merit equals 3 points, and a pass equals 1.5 points. [44954]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 9 June 1998]:* The information requested in respect of average GCSE/GNVQ point scores in maintained schools is:

	Average GCSE/GNVQ point score
Male	32.5
Female	37.4
All 15 year old pupils	34.9

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the national average GCSE/GNVQ point score of *(a)* male, *(b)* female and *(c)* all 15 year old pupils in 1997, assigning GNVQ grades points on the basis that at intermediate level a distinction equals 7.5 points, a merit equals 6 points, and a pass equals 5 points, and at foundation level a distinction equals 4 points, a merit equals 3 points, and a pass equals 1.5 points. [44953]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 9 June 1998]:* The information requested in respect of national average GCSE/GNVQ point scores in all schools is:

	Average GCSE/GNVQ point score
Male	33.5
Female	38.4
All 15 year old pupils	35.9

Music Funding

Mr. Prior: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the local education authorities which have reduced funding for music in schools in 1998–99. [44481]

Mr. Byers: This information is not collected centrally.

Mr. Prior: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on future funding of music in schools. [44486]

Mr. Byers: Music teaching which forms part of the National Curriculum will continue, as now, to be funded through schools' delegated budget shares. So far as instrumental music tuition is concerned, the Government's recently published consultation paper 'Fair Funding: Improving Delegation to Schools' set out a proposal to fund LEA provision for such tuition through the Standards Fund. A decision on this will be announced at the same time as decisions on the new Devolved Funding system.

School Closures

Mr. Prior: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many schools have been notified to his Department as being subject to proposals for closure since 1 May 1997; and if he will indicate their size. [44490]

Mr. Byers: Statutory proposals for the closure of 167 mainstream schools have been published since 1 May 1997. This figure includes 17 nursery schools. Of the closure proposals, 101 involved the amalgamation of schools to form new schools. The numbers of pupils on the rolls of the schools proposed for closure ranged from 1 to 980.

Village Schools

Mr. Prior: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what guidance his Department has issued to local education authorities on the future of rural village schools. [44485]

Mr. Byers: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Grogan) on 26 February 1998, *Official Report,* column *364.*

Our announcement of 28 February 1998, made it clear that all proposals to close rural schools would be called in for decision by the Secretary of State and that there would be a presumption against the approval of proposals to close such schools.

Primary Schools

Mr. Prior: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many primary schools with fewer than 40 pupils there are in *(a)* England and *(b)* Norfolk. [44644]

Mr. Byers: As at January 1997, there were 364 maintained primary schools with less than 40 full-time pupils in England. The equivalent figure for Norfolk Local Education Authority area was 34 schools.

School Exclusions (West Chelmsford)

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many children at *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools in the West Chelmsford constituency were excluded from school in each of the past five years. [44415]

Ms Estelle Morris: Information on the number of pupils permanently excluded from schools in the West Chelmsford constituency is shown in the table. Information on permanent exclusions was not collected prior to 1994–95. The Department does not currently collect information on fixed period exclusions:

Permanent exclusions from maintained schools in the West Chelmsford constituency

Type of school	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Primary	2	3
Secondary	4	8
Special	0	0
Total	6	11

Exclusions data for 1996–97 are currently being collated and will be published later this year.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the future position of grant-maintained schools. [44922]

Mr. Byers: Subject to the School Standards and Framework Bill gaining Royal Assent, a new framework for the organisation of schools will be established on 1 September 1999. All existing types of school, including grant-maintained (GM) schools, will be replaced by five new categories: community, foundation, voluntary, community special and foundation special. Schools will be allocated to the category which most closely reflects their current characteristics. However, GM schools will be able to choose an alternative category at the outset if they wish. Under the new framework, GM schools will be able to retain many of their present characteristics, for example in terms of employment of staff and ownership of premises. But all categories of school will operate within a framework based on fair funding, fair admissions and partnership between schools and LEAs.

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. Prior: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on arrangements for the transfer of children on the assisted places scheme to another school *(a)* on compassionate grounds, *(b)* where there is a financial saving and *(c)* where there is an educational need. [44491]

Mr. Byers: The Education (Schools) Act 1997 allows the transfer of an assisted place between schools only where a school closes, merges with another school, or notifies the Secretary of State that it no longer wishes to participate in the scheme. Transfer is not legally permitted in any other circumstances.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 11 June 1998

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Freedom of Information

Siobhain McDonagh: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he intends to publish the 1997 report on the operation of the code of practice on access to Government information. [45947]

Dr. David Clark: I have published this report today. Copies have been placed in the Library.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Public Bodies (Boundaries)

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the public bodies which it is proposed to reorganise to make their boundaries coterminous with those of the Government Offices of the Regions. [44224]

Angela Eagle: Of bodies within my Department's area of responsibility, the regional office structure of English Partnerships is being reorganised to match the boundaries of the Government Offices for the Regions, in order to facilitate the transfer of functions from English Partnerships to Regional Development Agencies in April 1999. There will similarly be some reorganisation of the regional office structure of the Rural Development Commission.

Road Fuel Gases

Jackie Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what action his Department is taking *(a)* to encourage the spread of gas-powered vehicles and *(b)* widening of access to LPG. [44799]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Government have already undertaken a number of measures to promote the use of road fuel gases including freezing the duty on road fuel gases in successive budgets and providing £6.5 million to the Energy Saving Trust's Powershift programme to help stimulate the market for alternative fuels. The Government have also announced the introduction from January 1999 of an incentive of up to a £500 reduction in VED for lorries and buses meeting stringent emission standards.

These measures are significantly reducing the operating costs of gas-powered vehicles in order to make them competitive with conventional petrol and diesel fuelled vehicles. By stimulating demand in this way the Government anticipate that refuelling facilities will gradually increase though it seems likely that they will be confined, at least initially, to urban sites for use by dedicated fleets.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the environmental impact of propane as a fuel; what steps he proposes to encourage its use; and if he will make a statement. [45129]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Vehicles powered by liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), of which propane and butane are the primary constituents, can make a contribution towards meeting our air quality objectives, particularly when used in well engineered applications by commercial fleets operating in urban areas. The steps being taken to encourage the use of LPG were the subject of my reply today to a question from the hon. Member for Taunton (Jackie Ballard).

Hedgerows

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) on 19 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *693*, if he will include in the information to be collected centrally under the Hedgerow Regulations 1997 the lengths of hedgerow for each local planning authority in England that have been the subject of *(a)* notification under the regulations, *(b)* hedgerow removal notices and *(c)* hedgerow retention notices. [44808]

Angela Eagle: My Department's consultation with representatives of local government on what information should be collected centrally in relation to the operation of the Hedgerows Regulations 1997 sought views on whether this should include data on the length of hedgerow for each local planning authority in England or Wales subject to hedgerow removal notices (served by those wishing to remove a hedge), and subject to hedgerow retention notices (served by the local authority). It also sought views on whether the information collected should include data on length of important hedgerow for each planning authority in England and Wales in respect of which retention notices were not issued. We are considering the results of that consultation.

This information is currently held at the local level. Each local planning authority in England and Wales is required, under the Hedgerows Regulations 1997, to compile and make publicly available a record containing, among other items, a copy of every hedgerow removal notice received by it; every notice given by it stating that a hedgerow may be removed; and every hedgerow retention notice issued by it.

East Midlands Regional Development Agency

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what progress has been made in establishing a regional development agency for the East Midlands; and what consideration has been given to locating its headquarters in Loughborough. [44939]

Angela Eagle: The Regional Development Agencies Bill, under which Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) will be established, received its second reading in Another Place on 18 May 1998, *Official Report, House of Lords*,

columns 1290–1354. Work is continuing at a regional and national level in anticipation of the creation of RDAs. As I stated in my answer on 27 January 1998, *Official Report*, column *305*, the RDA for the East Midlands will be best placed to decide where its offices should be.

"Access to the Open Countryside in England and Wales"

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the respondents to his consultation paper, "Access to the Open Countryside in England and Wales", indicating what arrangements have been made for these comments to be viewed by the public. [44645]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 10 June 1998]:* Responses to the consultation paper, *Access to the Open Countryside in England and Wales*, were requested by Friday 5 June. A list of non-confidential responses will be placed in the libraries of both Houses once all responses have been logged. Copies of non-confidential responses will be placed in my Departments's library and will be available to members of the public for inspection by appointment.

Blight

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what was the outcome of consultation on the final report of the Interdepartmental Working Group on Blight; what proposals he has to change the law relating to compulsory purchase and blight; and if he will make a statement. [45538]

Mr. Caborn: The results of the consultation have shown that blight is just one issue which needs to be reviewed in relation to compulsory purchase and land compensation. I have, therefore, commissioned a fundamental review of the law and procedures which relate to the compulsory acquisition of land. I have placed a copy of the terms of reference of the review in the Library of the House. I would expect to have an interim report on this by the end of the year.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland will consider separately the case for reform of the law in Scotland.

Nuclear Materials (Transportation)

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many aeroplane flights he estimates occurred in *(a)* 1996 and *(b)* 1997 in UK airspace in which radioactive material was carried. [45378]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Department does not collect information of the kind requested. The Department has no more recent estimate than that given to the hon. Member on 14 July 1997, *Official Report*, column *15*.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if the Government will make it their policy further to restrict the transportation of radioactive materials *(a)* via the Channel Tunnel and *(b)* on their passenger ferries. [45379]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Such transport is permitted subject to *(a)* the rules and restrictions of Eurotunnel, as approved by the Channel Tunnel Safety Authority of the UK/France Intergovernmental Commission and *(b)* compliance with The Merchant Shipping (Dangerous Goods and Marine Pollutants) Regulations 1990 (SI 1990 No. 2605) and Merchant Shipping Notice No. M 1620, "The Carriage of Dangerous Goods and Marine Pollutants in Packaged Form on Ships". These place no restriction on the number of transports.

Local Authorities (Pilot Schemes)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the pilot schemes announced since 1 May by his Department that involve local authorities in a lead or partnership capacity; if he will list each of the local authorities involved in each case; and what revenue and capital funding each local authority will receive through the pilot in 1997–98, 1998–99, 1999–2000 and 2000–01. [45337]

Angela Eagle: Local authorities are involved in a wide range of activities across my Department, and it is not possible to provide a definitive list.

However, pilot schemes that have been announced by my Department since May 1997 and which involve local authorities in a lead or partnership capacity include Best Value pilots and the joint commissioning of new social housing schemes.

The relevant details are as follows:

Best Value

On 4 December 1997, my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Housing announced the selection of 37 pilot projects to test the best value framework in advance of the introduction of the Government's best value policy. The pilots began on 1 April 1998 and are expected to run for 2 or 3 years. No additional funding is being provided by the Government. The successful authorities were:

Birmingham City Council
Bradford City Council
Braintree DC
Brent LB
Brighton/Hove, Tandridge, Wealden DCs
Bristol City Council
Camden LB
Carrick DC
Cleveland Police Authority
Cumbria County Council
CWOIL group (Cambridge, Welwyn, Oxford, Ipswich, Lincoln)
Exeter City Council
Gosport BC
Great Yarmouth BC
Greater Manchester Police
Greenwich LB
Harrow LB
Ipswich BC
Leeds City Council
Lewisham LB
Lincolnshire County Council

Manchester City Council
Newark and Sherwood DC
Newcastle upon Tyne City Council
Newham LB
Northamptonshire County Council
Oldham MBC
Portsmouth City Council
Reading BC
Redcar and Cleveland BC
Southampton City Council
South Norfolk DC
Sunderland City Council
Surrey County Council
Warwickshire County Council
Watford BC
York City Council.

Joint Commissioning

Joint Commissioning involves the development of a long term housing strategy and a set of investment priorities for both ADP and non-ADP funding, agreed between the Housing Corporation and a local authority. It also often involves the competitive selection of a set of RSLs who are then invited to bid for funding for social housing schemes. The objectives are to ensure that investment in social housing is based on sound long term strategies and to reduce the amount of wasteful competition between RSLs for ADP funds each year. The 42 local authorities involved in the Joint Commissioning pilot scheme are set out according to the Housing Corporation Region in which they are located:

London Region
Redbridge
Hillingdon
Kensington
Greenwich

South West Region
Bournemouth
Cotswold
Cornwall SNAP (Special Needs Across the County)
Taunton Dean

South East Region
Surrey
Eastbourne
Crawley
Spelthorne
Swale
Brighton and Hove
Portsmouth
New Forest
Reading
East Hampshire

East Midlands and Eastern Regions
Ipswich
Essex Strategic Reserve (supported housing)
Harlow
Newark and Sherwood
Ashfield
Northampton
Fenland
Leicester

North West Region
Chester
Oldham
Manchester
Preston
Bolton

Merseyside
Wirral

West Midlands Region
Oswestry
Wrekin
Wychavon
Cannock

Yorkshire and Humberside and North Eastern Regions
NE Lincolnshire
Sheffield
Sunderland
Derwentside
South Tyneside
Hull.

Workplace Injuries

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 27 October 1997, *Official Report*, column *721*, on work-place injuries, if he will publish the finalised figures for 1996–97 and provisional figures for 1997–98, indicating the percentage change in each year since 1992–93. [45426]

Angela Eagle: The table shows the total number of fatal and major injuries to employees and self employed people reported to all enforcing authorities between 1992–93 and 1996–97 (years commencing 1 April) and indicates the percentage change from the previous year since 1992–93.

Year	*Employees*	*Percentage change from previous year*	*Self-employed*	*Percentage change from previous year*
Fatal Injuries				
1992–93	276	—	63	—
1993–94	245	−11	51	−19
1994–95	191	−22	81	+59
1995–96	209	+9	49	−40
1996–97[1]	207	−1	80	+63
Major Injuries				
1992–93	16,938		1,115	—
1993–94	16,705	−1	1,274	+14
1994–95	17,041	+2	1,313	+3
1995–96	16,568	−3	1,166	−11
1996–97[1]	27,964	+69	1,356	+16

[1] Definition of a major injury extended when The Reporting of Injuries, Disease and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995 came into force on 1 April 1996

Note:
Provisional figures will be available in July 1998 and a copy will be placed in the House of Commons Library

Greater London Authority

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make it his policy to ensure that the aims and methods of the

Better Government Programme for Older People are applied to the transitional arrangements for the establishment of the Greater London Authority. [45421]

Mr. Raynsford: Yes, where relevant.

Air Safety

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what proposals he has to improve *(a)* airport and *(b)* aircraft safety. [45044]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Civil Aviation Authority is responsible for the safety regulation of UK civil aircraft and airports. They constantly monitor the civil aviation industry and seek to improve safety standards by systematically defining and addressing safety risks. Consequently the UK has one of the best civil aviation safety records in the world.

The UK also plays a leading role in raising international aviation safety standards through its active membership of the International Civil Aviation Organisation and the joint Aviation Authorities. In addition, as part of the Presidency of the EU we are progressing proposals to establish a European Aviation Safety Authority.

Airport Noise

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what plans he has to introduce measures for the control of airport noise for airports outside London; [45040]

(2) what assessment he has made of the report on the Review of Airport Noise Legislation prepared for the previous Government; [45041]

(3) what plans he has to introduce noise abatement schemes at or in the neighbourhood of airports. [45043]

Ms Glenda Jackson: We are examining airports policy generally in the context set by the wider Integrated Transport Policy review. I am aware of proposals arising from the review of aircraft noise legislation in 1991–93. The environmental impacts of airports and the case for new legislation are being considered and proposals will be made in due course.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what recent representations he has received on *(a)* noise and *(b)* safety issues at airports. [45042]

Ms Glenda Jackson: My right hon. Friend and I have received various representations from time to time on noise and safety issues at airports. These tend to focus on current concerns, which include night restrictions and noise limits at the designated London airports, Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted.

Derbyshire County Council

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Pond) of 8 June 1998, *Official Report*, column *420*, on the final cap for Derbyshire County Council, what estimate he has made of the cost for each property in the county to be re-billed. [45361]

Mr. Raynsford: The County Council's estimate of the cost of re-billing is £320,000

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Pond) of 8 June 1998, *Official Report*, column *420*, on the final cap for Derbyshire County Council, what estimate he has made of the council tax reduction for a person living in a property in *(a)* Band A, *(b)* Band B, *(c)* Band C, *(d)* Band E, *(e)* Band F, *(f)* Band G and *(g)* Band H. [45376]

Mr. Raynsford: The amounts are *(a)* £2.87, *(b)* £3.35, *(c)* £3.83, *(d)* £5.27, *(e)* £6.23, *(f)* £7.18 and *(g)* £8.62. These figures are for a two person household (i.e. a dwelling which does not attract any discount), and the amounts of the reduction given may be a penny different in practice, owing to rounding.

South Downs

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received following the Countryside Commission recommendation to the Government not to designate the South Downs as a national park; and if he will make a statement. [45363]

Angela Eagle: Ministers have not yet received the Countryside Commission's formal advice on the future status of the South Downs; we expect to receive it later this month. We will need to look at the precise terms of the Commission's recommendations very carefully, together with all the information available, before taking any final decisions. We hope to be able to announce our conclusions in the autumn.

London Road Network

Mr. Colman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he intends to consult on which roads should form the strategic London road network for which the Greater London Authority will have responsibility. [45989]

Ms Glenda Jackson: We have today published our consultation document on a strategic London road network. Copies have been placed in the Library and sent to the London local authorities, the Association of London Government, London Transport and others with an interest in the movement of people and goods in London.

This fulfils an undertaking in the White Paper—*A Mayor and Assembly for London* (Cm 3897 published on 25 March 1998) to consult about precisely which roads should be part of the strategic London road network. The White Paper made clear that we start from the presumption that this network should be based on the present primary and red route networks. This comprises about 220 miles of trunk roads and 105 miles of borough roads. The transfer of the trunk roads to the GLA will represent a major shift in responsibilities from central to local Government.

The consultation document sets out possible additions to and deletions from the primary and red route networks in order to form the strategic network for which the Greater London Authority will take responsibility. Comments on the proposals are invited by 7 August.

National Air Traffic Services

Mr. Geraint Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if the Government have reached a decision on the future of the national air traffic services. [46057]

Dr. Strang: We have been considering the future of the National Air Traffic Services (NATS) taking account of the views expressed in the Report by the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee on Air Traffic Control published in April.

Safety is paramount. The Select Committee raised major concerns about the current arrangements in their report. The Civil Aviation Authority is currently responsible both for the provision of air traffic control services through NATS and for regulating the safety of those services. The Government will bring forward proposals to ensure that air safety regulation will be conducted independently from NATS. We will ensure that regulation is open and transparent and that the aviation industry and its employees can play a full part. The regulator's remit will be to enforce the toughest safety standards in the world.

We have looked at a number of options for the future of NATS, including those mentioned in the Select Committee's Report.

In the planned multi-billion investments in the Channel Tunnel Rail Link and London Underground, we have demonstrated our ability to mobilise private capital to serve the public interest through public/private partnerships.

The Government believe that the level of investment and efficiency that we need in our National Air Traffic Services can best be achieved through a partnership between the public and private sectors. A partnership of this kind would help NATS to finance the investment it needs to operate effectively and would mobilise private sector resources.

Our preference is that 49 per cent. of the shares, and a golden share, are held by the Government; and 51 per cent. by private investors including employees.

This package, taken together, will guarantee the highest safety standards as air transport increases in the future. It will retain a large public stake and golden share in NATS. And it will ensure that NATS can finance its future investment effectively within a secure framework of safety and economic regulation.

The Government will consult interested parties further on the implementation of their decision in principle and will then bring forward the necessary legislation.

Local Authority Airports

Mr. Charles Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what changes are planned by the Government to free local authority airports from borrowing controls. [46056]

Dr. Strang: All borrowing via local authority airports currently counts against the public expenditure control total. This is not conducive to the proper commercial management of these airports.

We now intend that local authority airports whose finances are sufficiently sound should be given the flexibility to borrow to finance airport related capital investment in the UK, where the lending would be genuinely commercial. This will allow airports such as Manchester, Newcastle, Leeds Bradford and Norwich to compete for business on a level playing field with private sector airports, while safeguarding the interest of the taxpayer.

DEFENCE

Foreign Nationals (Security Clearance)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many defence projects for which foreign nationals have been cleared have then been reclassified to a higher security classification in each of the last five years. [45093]

Mr. Spellar: Information is not held on the number of defence projects for which foreign nationals have been cleared which have then been reclassified to a higher classification. However, it is rare for any major defence project to be so upgraded.

TRACER Programme

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will sign a memorandum of understanding with the Government of the USA on the TRACER programme; and if he will make a statement. [45091]

Mr. Spellar: We are currently considering the TRACER programme and hope to reach a decision shortly.

HMS Ocean

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much has been spent on repairs for HMS 'Ocean' since her launch; and what repairs have been carried out. [45127]

Mr. Spellar: The cost of repairs to the damage sustained to the hull of HMS Ocean during her launch on 11 October 1995 amounted to £1.125 million and was paid by the MOD under its Indemnity scheme. The ship also underwent repairs, by VSEL sub contractors, to her tail shaft bearings while in dry dock at Portsmouth in May 1998. The cost and liability for the damaged tail shaft has yet to be established.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of damage caused to HMS 'Ocean' during refloating at Portsmouth naval base following repairs; and if he will make a statement. [45126]

Mr. Spellar: During the re-floating of HMS Ocean on 2 June 1998, some very minor damage was sustained to a handrail. This was repaired immediately at no significant cost.

Arms Tactical Training Centre

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the cost of the new arms tactical training centre due to be installed in Germany for the British Army. [45029]

Dr. Reid *[holding answer 9 June 1998]:* The latest estimated acquisition costs of the Combined Arms Tactical Trainer facility to be installed at Sennelager in Germany are £57 million.

Heavy Lift Aircraft

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proposals he has evaluated for a heavy lift aircraft for HM forces to be manufactured by the Airbus consortium. [45277]

Mr. Spellar: A provisional Request for Proposals has been issued to Airbus, Turkish Aerospace Industries, Alenia and FLABEL pending the formation of Airbus Military Company. We are still discussing with our partners when Requests for Proposals will be issued to potential suppliers under competitive arrangements. A procurement decision will be made in the light of the conclusions of the Strategic Defence Review and of the responses to the Request for Proposals.

Low Flying (Brecon Beacons)

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to reduce low-level flying exercises in the Brecon Beacons. [45139]

Mr. Spellar: The amount of low flying training undertaken throughout the United Kingdom is already limited to that strictly necessary for aircrews to achieve and maintain operational effectiveness. We remain committed to achieving as equitable a distribution of low flying activity as practicable, taking into account geographical, climatic and operational considerations. Since 1988, low flying in Wales has reduced by about half accordingly. There are no plans to reduce military low flying training carried out in the Brecon Beacons.

Apache Helicopter

Mr. Wilkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the implementation of the direct industrial offset commitments by the Boeing company for the construction in the United Kingdom of the Apache helicopter for the British Army. [44874]

Mr. Spellar: The Boeing company, in common with all other overseas companies holding Industrial Participation obligations, is required to submit regular reports of the work placed in the United Kingdom in order to fulfil the commitment it has made. These reports are monitored and assessed within the Ministry of Defence. The company is progressing satisfactorily towards its direct Industrial Participation target.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Prisoners (Incentives and Earned Privileges Scheme)

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 1 June to the hon. Member for Newark (Mrs. Jones), *Official Report*, columns *50–51*, what plans he has for the future provision of in-cell televisions with access to *(a)* satellite television services, *(b)* sporting events broadcast on satellite television services and *(c)* adult channels on satellite television services. [44610]

Ms Quin: There are no plans for the future provision of non-terrestrial in-cell television.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 1 June to the hon. Member for Newark (Mrs. Jones), *Official Report*, columns *50–51*, what limits will be placed on the times at which prisoners will be able to have access to in-cell television. [44611]

Ms Quin: This will be a matter for local rules. Steps will be taken in all establishments holding juveniles to ensure observation of the threshold for unsuitable programmes set by the broadcasting authorities.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 1 June to the hon. Member for Newark (Mrs. Jones), *Official Report*, columns *50–51*, how many levels of privilege are generally in operation throughout the Prison Service. [44616]

Ms Quin: Three: the basic, standard and enhanced privilege levels.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 1 June to the hon. Member for Newark (Mrs. Jones), *Official Report*, columns *50–51*, if video recorders are to be made available to prisoners as part of the increased availability of in-cell television. [44614]

Ms Quin: There are no plans to allow prisoners to have video recorders as part of the policy on in-cell television.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 1 June to the hon. Member for Newark (Mrs. Jones), *Official Report*, columns *50–51*, in respect of the procurement process for in-cell television, what is the average cost per television; if the televisions will be new; and if they will contain *(a)* digital technology and *(b)* teletext. [44615]

Ms Quin: The Prison Service has begun a procurement process for new, non-digital, 14 inch colour television sets. Teletext will not be included but, where there is networked aerial cabling, there will be the capacity to use spare channels to communicate by text information such as establishment routines. The unit cost of televisions purchased depends on the outcome of the tendering process and will not be known until a contract is awarded.

Probation Service

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the programme of inspections of each county probation force by HMIP and what thematic inspections are planned. [44846]

Ms Quin: Between 1994 and the end of 1998, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation will have inspected each area probation service once under its quality and effectiveness inspection programme. This programme also involves a follow up inspection about 18 months after the publication of the area inspection report. Consideration is now being given to the form of inspection which will follow the completion of the quality and effectiveness programme.

Future thematic inspection reports will cover probation hostels, life sentence prisoners (jointly with Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons) and supervision plans.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the average number of days sick leave taken by probation staff in each grade in each probation service in England and Wales in each of the last three years. [44852]

Ms Quin: The information requested is not collected centrally; however, a recent study based on samples of probation service staff suggested that the average sick leave across services in 1997 was about nine days.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what (1) was the staff turnover rate for each category of staff in each probation service in England and Wales in each of the last three years; [44851]

(2) what were the absenteeism or unauthorised absence rates for each grade of probation staff in each probation service in England and Wales in the last three years. [44850]

Ms Quin: The information is not collected centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the average case load for each probation service in England and Wales in each of the last three years. [44853]

Ms Quin: The readily available information refers to the court order caseload for 1995 and 1996 and is shown in the table. In addition to the 15.6 cases per officer shown, there were 12.0 cases of pre and post-release supervision for England and Wales. The latter figure would be available by probation area only at disproportionate cost.

Table: Average caseload [1] of criminal court orders per maingrade officer [2]

England and Wales 31 December	*Cases per officer 1995*	*1996*
Avon	19.2	20.2
Bedfordshire	13.2	14.3
Berkshire	15.1	16.5
Cambridgeshire	11.5	12.9
Cheshire	13.1	16.2
Cornwall	14.4	24.3
Cumbria	11.8	14.2
Derbyshire	15.1	18.0
Devon	14.7	15.0
Dorset	16.9	16.4
Durham	18.5	22.8
Essex	13.9	14.7
Gloucestershire	18.0	17.6
Hampshire	14.1	15.3
Hereford & Worcester	10.7	12.9
Hertfordshire	14.2	16.3
Humberside	18.0	19.6
Kent	16.5	18.6
Lancashire	16.3	16.4
Leicestershire	11.5	13.2
Lincolnshire	13.4	13.0
Greater Manchester	15.9	17.1
Merseyside	12.5	13.2
Norfolk	11.8	14.2
Northamptonshire	9.3	10.0
Northumbria	13.6	14.9
Nottinghamshire	12.3	14.1
Oxford & Buckingham	12.2	13.3
Shropshire	13.6	13.3
Somerset	14.3	16.0
Staffordshire	15.5	16.6
Suffolk	10.7	12.8
Surrey	12.3	13.3
East Sussex	11.9	13.7
West Sussex	13.1	12.5
Teesside	18.0	20.3
Warwickshire	14.3	16.1
West Midlands	14.9	15.7
Wiltshire	15.3	16.0
North Yorkshire	16.6	18.4
South Yorkshire	13.1	15.1
West Yorkshire	15.2	16.2
Inner London	15.6	15.9
NE London	12.2	14.0
SE London	15.1	14.4
SW London	11.8	13.3
Middlesex	13.4	14.8
Dyfed	18.3	20.4
Gwent	15.3	17.9
North Wales	14.0	15.8
Powys	18.3	20.1
South Glamorgan	12.1	11.2
Mid Glamorgan	13.8	14.2
West Glamorgan	15.1	15.0
All areas	14.4	15.6

[1] Excludes community services. Includes cases supervised by staff other than maingrade officers

[2] Excludes persons with life supervision. Persons receiving more than 1 supervision are counted in the court orders caseload only for the first supervision which applies

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if it is his policy to maintain a network of probation offices outside the largest towns and cities. [45331]

Ms Quin: The probation service needs to provide supervision programmes and facilities which are reasonably accessible to offenders who are required to attend. The number and location of offices are for probation committees to determine within the grant provision they have. In reaching decisions, I look to committees to take account of the potential additional costs and savings which more centralisation of accommodation could bring; the potential effect on operations and enforcement; and the potential contribution which other, more flexible, arrangements (such as mobile offices) might make in their circumstances.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Fabian Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the British Government's policy towards asylum seekers who have been active in opposition parties and are from the English speaking regions of Cameroon. [44930]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Every application for asylum is decided in accordance with the provisions of the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. Anyone who demonstrates a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion would be

recognised as a refugee. Any rejected applicant has the opportunity to appeal to the Immigration Appellate Authority.

The Government's assessment of the conditions prevailing in Cameroon is based on information from a variety of sources, including the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the United States Department of State and international organisations, such as Amnesty International. A country assessment on Cameroon, prepared by the Country Information and Policy Unit of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate, has been produced and will be revised and updated approximately every six months.

The Home Office country assessment reports concerns about human rights abuses in Cameroon. At this time we have received no evidence to show that mere membership of an opposition party or a Cameroonian's status as an anglophone would single a person out for persecution for those reasons alone.

Sir Norman Fowler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the estimated total cost to public funds in the last 12 months of making provision for applicants for political asylum. [45182]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Costs directly attributable to asylum seekers are not separately identified within spending figures, hence only a broad estimate is available. This estimates that the costs to public funds of provision for asylum seekers is around £500 million for 1997–98. This cost includes processing costs of asylum applications and appeals, and costs for providing support to asylum seekers via Department of Social Security benefits, support provided by local authorities under the National Assistance Act 1948, legal aid and health and education.

Recent claims that the total cost of asylum is in excess of £2 billion are wildly misleading.

Extradition

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for each of the last 15 years the number of extradition warrants issued by police forces in England and Wales for persons sought by them for terrorist type crimes whom the police believed to be resident in the United States of America; how many of the persons sought were returned to the United Kingdom in each year; and if he will give the same information in respect of persons sought for crimes not related to terrorism. [44916]

Mr. Straw: My right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Northern Ireland and for Scotland are responsible for extradition requests based on offences committed within those jurisdictions.

An arrest warrant issued in England and Wales cannot form an extradition request. Extradition arrangements with the United States are conducted on a treaty basis. A formal extradition request by the United Kingdom is prepared by the relevant prosecuting authority and is made through diplomatic channels, typically when the fugitive has been located in a particular country.

Home Office records of extradition requests do not indicate as a matter of course whether the offence which formed the basis of an extradition request was related to terrorism. Records do show, however, that between 1983 and 1997, one request was made to the United States for the return of a person on the basis of terrorist offences. That person was returned to the United Kingdom in 1996.

The table sets out the total number of requests made by the Home Office to the United States in each of the last 15 years, and the number of people returned from there in each of those years.

Year	*Number of requests made to the United States*	*Number of people returned from the United States*
1983	3	3
1984	4	5
1985	6	4
1986	4	7
1987	10	5
1988	8	8
1989	5	3
1990	7	5
1991	6	7
1992	7	6
1993	4	5
1994	2	3
1995	8	3
1996	3	4
1997	8	3

Note:
Twelve requests made during the period were subsequently withdrawn.

Animal Research

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 6 April 1998, *Official Report*, column *26*, concerning wild-caught primates, what were the scientific procedures the wild-caught baboon was subjected to; when the transplantation occurred; if the baboon is still alive; how many visits to the establishment where the procedures took place have been made by the Home Office Inspectorate since 1 January 1997; and what regulated procedures will be performed on the second wild-caught baboon. [45427]

Mr. George Howarth: The first animal was used in an orthotopic heart transplant procedure (in which it received a heart from a transgenic pig) on 23 March. It has since been humanely killed.

Since 1 January 1997, inspectors have visited the establishment on five occasions.

The second animal was considered to be an unsuitable candidate for surgery and was humanely killed without being used in any regulated procedures.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the letter of the Under-Secretary of State, Lord Williams of Mostyn, to the hon. Member for Linlithgow (AP/98 1/10/86), what action he is taking to reduce journey times of primates imported for research; and what plans he has to facilitate the flying of such animals directly to the United Kingdom. [44048]

Mr. George Howarth: Journey times are unduly long in some cases because, following a campaign by anti-vivisection groups, airlines stopped flying primates directly into the United Kingdom. Instead, the animals are flown into mainland Europe to be transported to this

country by road and ferry. The Home Office has no powers to insist that airlines carry primates or other animals directly into the United Kingdom.

In deciding whether to allow primates to be acquired from overseas sources, the transport arrangements are taken into account.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what statistics his Department collates about the countries from which primates are imported to the United Kingdom. [44049]

Mr. George Howarth: I assume that my hon. Friend is interested in statistics relating to the breeding and supplying centres and not in general statistics about the countries concerned.

In deciding whether to give approval for the acquisition of primates from overseas for use in regulated procedures in the United Kingdom, information about the breeding centre is scrutinised. This information includes details of the breeding colony (its size and composition); animal accommodation and husbandry; health status and monitoring arrangements; breeding performance; staffing; and arrangements for transportation to the United Kingdom.

Metropolitan Police Review

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy that changes in the level of police resources arising from the review of Metropolitan Police boundaries and divisional commands are subject to full public consultation. [45213]

Mr. Straw: Under the 1996 Police Act, I have a power to alter police areas by order. I have no power to alter police divisional boundaries within a police area, as this, and the deployment of police resources within a police area, are matters for the chief officer of the relevant police force. However, section 96 of the Police Act 1996 requires police authorities and, in the case of the Metropolitan Police District, the Commissioner, to make arrangements for obtaining the view of local people about matters concerning the policing of their area.

I am currently considering representations that changes to the boundaries of the Metropolitan Police District should make them conterminous with those of the proposed new Greater London Authority.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will assess the advantages of introducing greater conterminosity between police divisions and borough council boundaries in his review of the boundary of the Metropolitan Police. [45214]

Mr. Michael: Yes. The Government are keen to align boundaries in the criminal justice system wherever possible. Conterminous boundaries improve efficiency in the delivery of local services, increasing the effectiveness of joint working between agencies, particularly in partnership arrangements such as those proposed in the Crime and Disorder Bill [*Lords*].

Under the Police Act 1996, the Home Secretary has a power to alter police areas by order but has no power to determine police divisional boundaries within a police area, which are a matter for the chief officer of the relevant police force.

We are currently considering representations for changes to the boundaries of the Metropolitan Police District to make them conterminous with those of the proposed new Greater London Authority.

Epsom Police Station

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to relocate the command, control and management functions currently located at Epsom Police Station to within the Greater London boundary. [45212]

Mr. Michael: The Commissioner tells me that a new station for Epsom and Sutton Division of 4 Area is planned at Sutton. It will be funded through the private finance initiative. It is planned that the divisional headquarters staff and the command and control suite currently based at Epsom Police station will be relocated to the new Sutton police station.

Animal Rights Activists

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the letter of 12 January from the Under-Secretary of State, Lord Williams of Mostyn, to Dr George Poste of Smith Kline Beecham, what monitoring he has conducted of the efficacy of the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 in relation to violence by animal rights activists. [44067]

Mr. George Howarth: We have undertaken to review the use of the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 and to report our findings. The review will cover all types of cases brought under the Act and will start later this year.

Immigration Service

Sir Norman Fowler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many immigration service staff are currently employed for on-entry control duties at ports; and if he will make a statement. [45186]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: On 1 June 1998, the Immigration Service Ports Directorate employed a total of 2,343 staff at ports, of whom 2,172 were operational grades of Inspector, Chief Immigration Officer, Immigration Officer and Assistant Immigration Officer.

Police Service Budget

Sir Norman Fowler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the real term increase in the budget for the police service for the current year; and if he will make a statement. [45184]

Mr. Michael: The revenue budgets of police authorities in England and Wales rose by £255 million in 1998/99. This represents an increase of 3.7 per cent. over 1997/98.

Port Arrivals

Sir Norman Fowler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total number of arrivals at ports, in the last 12 months, broken down to show *(a)* EC and *(b)* other arrivals; and if he will make a statement. [45187]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Provisional data for the 12 months April 1997 to March 1998 are given in the table.

	Million
Total passenger arrivals	80.1
of which British citizens[1]	[2]52.4
other nationals of countries in the European Economic Area (EEA)	[2]16.7
non-EEA nationals	11.0

[1] Including residents of the Irish Republic and passengers of all nationalities in direct transit who did not pass through immigration control

[2] Estimated

Embarkation Controls

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what embarkation controls he has removed or reduced at which airports and ports; and what protection he has put in place at those ports and airports for children who are victims of attempted abduction from Britain. [44908]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The previous administration had already removed, in 1994, embarkation checks for passengers departing from ferry ports and small airports for destinations within the European Union/European Economic Area, with the consequence that some 40 per cent. of all departing passengers were not seen by an immigration officer. This meant that those seeking to evade embarkation controls could do so by using these ports.

Implementation of the new embarkation arrangements, which I announced on 16 March 1998, *Official Report*, columns *506–07*, commenced on 14 April at Heathrow Terminal 3, Gatwick North and Stansted. Gatwick South started on 7 June. These arrangements are due to come into place at the remaining major ports—Heathrow Terminals 1, 2 and 4, Birmingham, Glasgow and Manchester—on 1 July, or as soon as possible thereafter.

These intelligence-led embarkation checks are more effective than those which existed before; they include the increased use of Closed Circuit Television and enhanced co-operation between border agencies, port operators, and airlines. An important part of this liaison is the operation by the police of the All Ports Warning System in order to frustrate child abduction.

Human Rights

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the answer of 24 April 1998, *Official Report*, column 722, on human rights, if he will state which aspects of the Government's human rights policy are his Department's responsibilities. [44877]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Home Office is responsible for the Human Rights Bill [*Lords*]. We also work with other Departments on the operation and application of international mechanisms for protecting human rights, with a particularly strong interest in the European Convention on Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the European and United Nations Conventions against torture.

Non-custodial Sentences (Electronic Monitoring)

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what criteria will be used in evaluating bids by companies to manage electronic monitoring arrangements for home detention and community orders. [43877]

Ms Quin: The main criteria used in elevating bids both technically and commercially concern:

the deliverability of the whole project;

the quality and reliability of the service;

the ability of the proposed equipment to meet the required standards; and

the price.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

South Africa

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will provide help to the Republic of South Africa in the form of secondments of academic staff and administrators to South Africa. [44047]

Clare Short: There are in fact already extensive academic links between British and South African universities arranged under the Higher Education Links programme funded by my Department and managed by the British Council. 26 such links have been established.

Iwokrama International Rainforest Centre

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to the letter of 17 June 1997 from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State to the hon. Member for Linlithgow, what support her Department has given to the Iwokrama International Rainforest Centre to provide forest research capacity for the Guyana Shield. [44066]

Clare Short: My Department has committed £3 million to the Centre's Sustainable Human Development Project in order to develop sustainable forest management approaches which will benefit forest-dependent communities living in the Iwokrama Rainforest. It will include support for applied research and capacity building. The European Commission is appraising for EU funding a complementary project on the sustainable and equitable use of biodiversity in the Forest.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is committing £100,000 to the Centre's research programme which is also being assisted by Canada and which will benefit from close association with the Guyana Forestry Commission, also supported by DFID. Some of the Centre's research will be conducted in collaboration with the Tropenbos Foundation.

Annual Policy Forum

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on progress in setting up the annual policy forum proposed in the Government's White Paper on International Development. [45990]

Clare Short: The National Development Policy Forum will take place in Birmingham on 9 November. This will be preceded by a series of regional forums in ten locations around the UK. The dates and locations are as follows:

	Date	*Location*
Monday	7 September	Norwich
Wednesday	9 September	Birmingham
Monday	14 September	Bristol
Wednesday	16 September	Portsmouth
Monday	21 September	York
Thursday	24 September	Cardiff
Monday	5 October	Manchester
Wednesday	7 October	Edinburgh
Tuesday	13 October	Belfast
Friday	16 October	London

The Forum is one of a number of ways in which we are seeking to share experience and strengthen analysis of development issues across different sectors of society, and to broaden public awareness. This will be an annual process and full reports of the outcome will be available.

Our current estimate of the cost is between £200,000 and £300,000.

TREASURY

Tax Avoidance

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the number of personal portfolio bond holders who hold such instruments with the sole or main objective of avoiding tax. [45120]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 9 June 1998]:* It is not known how many people hold personal portfolio bonds with the sole or main object of avoiding tax.

Public Houses (Uniform Business Rate)

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if his Department publishes guidelines in relation to uniform business rates and the value of public houses; [45019]

(2) what measures are taken to monitor the accuracy of information given on forms used to assess uniform business rates for public houses; [45020]

(3) if *(a)* turnover prices and *(b)* the value of a property are taken into account in the setting of uniform business rates for public houses. [45018]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 9 June 1998]:* No general guidelines are published in relation to uniform business rates by HM Treasury. A guide relating to the valuation of public houses, entitled "Public Houses—Approved Guide to Valuation", is available to the general public as part of the Tolley's Tax Link CD-ROM from Tolley Publishing Co. Ltd. The guide forms part of the Valuation Office Agency's Rating Manual and sets out the agreement between the Valuation Office Agency and the Brewers and Licensed Retailers Association as to the method and broad levels of the value to be adopted for public houses as part of the revaluation of non-domestic property for business rates purposes, which came into effect on 1 April 1995.

The rateable value of a public house, in common with other non-domestic property subject to business rates, is an estimate of the amount of rent for which the property might reasonably be expected to be let. The capital value of the property is not taken into account. In arriving at the rateable value for public houses, the Valuation Officer, an employee of the Valuation Office Agency, has regard to turnover when estimating fair maintainable receipts. This yardstick is adopted to analyse rents and to compare properties.

The Valuation Officer has a statutory power to request information which is required to compile and maintain lists of rateable values for business rates purposes. Those supplying the information, usually the occupiers/owners of the property or their representatives, sign a declaration of authenticity. The supply of false information can lead to prosecution. The accuracy of information given on forms will be considered at both the valuation stage and when dealing with appeals.

Self-assessment

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many demands for a sum of 24 pence or less have been issued by the Inland Revenue since 1 January to taxpayers who have been held to have under-declared their earnings under the self-assessment scheme. [44816]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 9 June 1998]:* The information is not available.

Ms Stuart: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many taxpayers were billed for amounts of less than £5 under self-assessment. [44318]

Dawn Primarolo: The information is not available.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many tax demands have been issued under the self-assessment initiative for sums under *(a)* £1 and *(b)* £10. [44973]

Dawn Primarolo: The information is not available.

Economic and Fiscal Strategy

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will make a statement on his policy in respect of surpluses on the current balance measure of the UK budget deficit over the next five years; [44294]

(2) what is his policy on the ratio of public debt to national income; and if he will make a statement. [45174]

Mr. Darling *[holding answer 4 June 1998]:* I refer the hon. Gentlemen to the statement my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer made to the House today, *Official Report*, columns 1195–1201.

Disabled Person's Tax Credit

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide details of the timetable for consultation on the eligibility criteria for the disabled person's tax credit. [44900]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 8 June 1998]:* The disabled person's tax credit will replace the disability working allowance from October 1999. The Government are presently considering ways to ensure the disabled

person's tax credit can be made more effective and attractive than the disability working allowance, and will be making announcements and consulting in due course.

Child Benefit

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the tax yield from making child benefit taxable for *(a)* mothers who are higher-rate tax payers and *(b)* fathers who are higher-rate tax payers; and what would be the administrative cost of doing so. [44626]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 8 June 1998]:* If child benefit were taxed as part of the income of those mothers or lone fathers liable to tax at the higher rate of 40 per cent., the yield for 1998–99 would be about £40 million. If the benefit were taxed as part of the income of fathers and lone mothers liable to tax at the higher rate of 40 per cent., the yield for 1998–99 would be about £450 million. The administrative costs would depend on the precise way in which any tax charge was imposed.

Pensions (Tax Relief)

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the yield for allowing income tax relief only on pension contributions up to a ceiling of *(a)* £4,000 per annum, *(b)* £6,000 per annum, *(c)* £8,000 per annum and *(d)* £10,000 per annum. [44627]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 8 June 1998]:* The distribution of tax relief by level of contribution of participants in occupational and personal pension schemes is not available.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the cost to the Exchequer of giving tax relief on that part of employee and employer national insurance contributions which are treated as contributions to SERPS and which are not payable by those who have contracted out of SERPS. [44628]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 8 June 1998]:* The cost of income tax relief at the basic rate for the employee part of the age-related national insurance rebate if all those currently in SERPS contracted out into appropriate personal pensions is tentatively estimated at around £300 million each year at 1998–99 levels of earnings. Extending basic rate relief to the employer part of the national insurance rebate would cost approximately an additional £850 million.

Departmental Running Costs

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action he is taking to constrain the growth of Departments' running costs; and if he will make a statement. [45181]

Mr. Darling: The Government are committed to delivering high-quality public services at best value to the taxpayer. Expenditure on Departments' running costs is being closely scrutinised in the Comprehensive Spending Review. Controls on running costs will be maintained within the new spending plans announced at the conclusion of the Review.

Savings Income (Channel Islands)

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy to oppose the application to the Channel Islands of the proposed Council Directive on the minimum effective taxation of savings income (COM(1998)295). [43687]

Dawn Primarolo: We will be discussing this issue with the Channel Islands.

Golden Rule

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the Treasury definition of capital expenditure for the purposes of the Golden Rule. [45178]

Mr. Darling: Definitions used for the purposes of the golden rule were set out in Annexe B of the March 1998 *Financial Statement and Budget Report*.

Foreign Earnings Deduction

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the proportions of the expected yield arising from the proposed abolition of the foreign earnings deduction to be paid by media and entertainment personalities with very high incomes. [44642]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 10 June 1998]:* About one half of the yield arising from the proposed changes to the rules for foreign earnings deductions will come from media and entertainment personalities.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many of those claiming foreign earnings deduction earned *(a)* less than £40,000 per annum, *(b)* between £40,000 to £50,000 per annum, *(c)* £50,000 to £60,000 per annum, *(d)* £60,000 to £75,000, *(e)* £75,000 to £100,000 and *(f)* above £100,000 per annum, in the latest year for which figures are available. [44641]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 10 June 1998]:* The degree of disaggregation requested is not available.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many of those claiming the foreign earnings deduction were people considered by the Treasury to be very high-earning individuals in the latest year for which figures are available. [44643]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 10 June 1998]:* There is no standard definition of what constitutes very high earnings.

Tax Evasion

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures he is taking to end tax evasion through the use of company status by persons who would normally be considered to be *(a)* employees and *(b)* in receipt of additional income from sources outside their main employment. [45183]

Dawn Primarolo: Arrangements for the evasion or avoidance of tax are kept under review by the Inland Revenue who take action where appropriate. In addition, legislative steps are taken if necessary.

Sierra Leone

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) on what dates HM Customs and Excise interviewed *(a)* Mr. Peter Penfold, *(b)* Mr. Craig Murray, *(c)* Linda St. Cook, *(d)* Mr. Tim Andrews, *(e)* Mr. Philip Packham, *(f)* Lt. Col. Peter Hicks and *(g)* Colonel Andrew Gale in the course of their investigation into possible breach of UN Resolution 1132 and the consequent Order in Council; [41820]

(2) which civil servants have been interviewed by HM Customs and Excise in the course of their investigation into possible breach of UN resolution 1132 and the consequent Order in Council; and on what dates. [41821]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 14 May 1998]:* Customs have announced the conclusion of their investigation into the alleged breaches of the UN/Sierra Leone arms embargo. It is established practice that the Commissioners do not comment further on the details of their investigations.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action the Government are taking to investigate possible violations of arms sanctions in respect of Sierra Leone. [41114]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 8 May 1998]:* Customs have conducted an investigation of alleged breaches of the UN/Sierra Leone arms embargo and have announced their conclusions.

I also refer the right hon. Member to the statement by the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in the House on 18 May 1998, *Official Report*, columns 604–11, in which he announced the investigation by Sir Thomas Legg KCB QC into allegations about Government involvement with the supply of arms to Sierra Leone by UK citizens and firms, and said that the Terms of Reference would be placed in the Library of the House. The Foreign Secretary intends to publish the report of the investigation.

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans Customs and Excise have to interview the Secretary of State for International Development or officials of her Department in the course of their investigation into possible breaches of the UN Security Council Resolution 1132 concerning Sierra Leone. [41944]

Dawn Primarolo: None. The Customs and Excise investigation has been concluded in the terms of the announcement of 18 May 1998, *Official Report*, columns 604–11.

Information

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if it is his policy not to supply factual information requested by hon. Members if that information would be liable to misinterpretation. [43980]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 1 June 1998]:* I refer the right hon. Gentlemen to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Dafis) on 12 May 1998, *Official Report*, column 82.

Taxable Pay Tables

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the cost of the reprint of taxable pay tables LR+B to D marked May 1998; and what was the reason for the mistake in the originals. [44337]

Dawn Primarolo: The cost of reprinting the tables was £127,363.

The user testing did not identify errors within the instructional guidance contained in the new Calculator Tables. However, the revised tables (identified as May 1998 Issue 2) were issued by 16 May 1998 in time for the implementation of the Budget changes on the first pay day after 17 May 1998 in line with the original implementation date.

Training (Tax Relief)

Jackie Ballard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received regarding the administration of the vocational training tax relief scheme and the possible introduction of a composite form for use by training providers. [44913]

Dawn Primarolo: In an Inland Revenue Budget press release issued on 26 November 1996, comments were requested on a draft new form to replace the two eligibility forms in use for vocational training relief (VTR). The draft form was not welcomed by all training providers and, in the light of representations received, the Inland Revenue felt that they could not go ahead with the proposals as they stood.

Partnership Initiative

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the treatment for tax purposes of contributions made by private companies to educational institutions under the Partnership Initiative. [44680]

Dawn Primarolo: I am not sure what my hon. Friend has in mind. There are special rules granting tax relief for gifts of equipment to educational establishments. Otherwise, normal tax rules apply. If my hon. Friend wishes to write to me about any specific point, I will be happy to look into it for him.

Borrowing Targets

Mr. Timms: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about the Government's performance against targets in reducing borrowing in 1997–98. [45870]

Mrs. Liddell: As a result of the lower than expected outturn in government borrowing in 1997–98, and taking account of the Government's latest forecast for Central Government net borrowing in 1998–99, the Government have reduced their financing requirement to £12.1 billion in 1998–99. This is a reduction of £3.1 billion, compared with previous plans. The revised financing requirement is expected to be met from gilt sales of £11.6 billion, and a net contribution from National Savings of £½ billion. The revised financing arithmetic is set out in the table, followed by revisions to paragraph 4 of the Debt

Management Office remit for 1998–99, and the revised auction calendar for 1998–99. There are no other changes to the Government's plans for debt management, or to the rest of the Debt Management Office remit, as set out in the 1998–99 Debt Management Report.

Central Government Financing Requirement 1998–99

	£ billion
Central Government net borrowing	0.2
Loans and sales of financial assets	1.9
Accruals adjustments	1.4
Central Government net cash requirement	3.5
Expected net change in official reserves	0.0
Gilt redemptions	16.8
Gilt sales residual from 1997–98	–8.2
Financing requirement	12.1
Less net financing from:	
National Savings	0.5
Certificates of Tax Deposit	0.0
Treasury bills and other short term debt	0.0
Gross gilt sales required	11.6
of which:	
Ultra-short conventionals (1–3 years)	0
Short conventionals (3–7 years)	2.5
Medium conventionals (7–15 years)	2.5
Long conventionals (over 15 years)	3.1
Index-linked gilts	3.5

Over 1998–99 as a whole, the Debt Management Office will aim to make 30 per cent. of its gilts sales in index-linked stocks, with the remainder in conventional stocks, spread across the maturity ranges. On current forecasts, this implies index-linked gilt sales of £3.5 billion and conventional gilt sales of £8.1 billion. Three auctions of conventional stocks are now scheduled for 1998–99, including the auction already held on 20 May, when the DMO successfully auctioned £3 billion of long stock. The remaining two auctions of conventional stocks will be used to issue short and medium stocks, in broadly even proportions. The Government do not necessarily intend to maintain issuance in each maturity area in these proportions in future years.

Auction calendar 1998–99

Date	
Wednesday 20 May 1998	Conventional
Wednesday 29 July 1998	Conventional
Wednesday 28 October 1998	Index-linked
Wednesday 27 January 1999	Index-linked
Wednesday 24 March 1999[1]	Conventional

[1] Subject to Chancellor's decision on the Budgetary timetable

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Legal Aid (Northern Ireland)

Mr. Walker: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the 10 legal establishments in Northern Ireland which were awarded most in legal aid in the last two financial years and the amount awarded in each case. [44589]

Mr. Hoon: The administration of the legal aid scheme in Northern Ireland is the responsibility of the Law Society of Northern Ireland under the Legal Aid, Advice and Assistance (Northern Ireland) Order 1981. This function is exercised through the Legal Aid Committee which is a Committee of the Council of the Law Society of Northern Ireland and the Legal Aid Department which is a Department of the Law Society. The Legal Aid Department is also responsible for the administration of criminal legal aid on the Lord Chancellor's behalf.

The information can be provided only at disproportionate cost. The computer system in the Legal Aid Department is out of date and the Department is presently in the process of procuring a new computer. It will then take some considerable time before all new cases are in the system and in respect of which such information could be readily available.

Child Abduction

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what was the outcome of the international review meeting in 1997 of the Hague Convention on Child Abduction; and what follow-up action the British Government are taking. [44906]

Mr. Hoon: The review of the operation of the 1980 Hague Convention in March 1997 achieved a wide measure of consensus between contracting states on improvements to the operation of the Convention, and in particular on the standards needed to ensure that new states parties can implement the provisions of the Convention effectively. The Government have followed up the review by promoting judicial and administrative contacts to discuss and improve the operation of the Convention between the UK and other contracting states. In the wider international field, my Department has been working to promote improvements in relations with justice ministries in other European Union Member states as part of the UK's Presidency of the European Union.

Human Rights

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, pursuant to the answer of 24 April 1998, *Official Report*, column 722, on human rights, if he will state which aspects of the Government's human rights policy are his Department's responsibility. [44875]

Mr. Hoon: As a central part of their human rights policy the Government are giving further effect to the rights in the European Convention on Human Rights, through the provisions of the Human Rights Bill which is currently before Parliament. The Lord Chancellor is Chairman of the Cabinet Committee responsible for taking this forward.

The Lord Chancellor is responsible for ensuring compliance with the relevant Convention rights as they affect the machinery of justice in England and Wales. The Lord Chancellor is also responsible for ensuring that civil and family law give effect to Convention rights.

SCOTLAND

Road Accidents

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the European Commission's Statistical Office figures for road death rates in the Highlands and Islands region relative to the rest of Scotland. [44685]

Mr. McLeish: Detailed information about road accidents in Scotland is published annually by the Scottish Office in "Road Accidents Scotland", copies of which are available in the Library of the House. This publication includes information about the number of casualties and casualty rates per 100,000 population by each police force area, each local authority area and by severity, whereas the European Commission's Statistical Office figures show casualties for only 4 sub-divisions of Scotland.

The Scottish Office reviews annually accidents on trunk roads in Scotland with the aim of identifying clusters of accidents at particular locations and routes with high accident rates. This review provides the basis for the investigation of accidents on trunk roads and for appropriate remedial measures. The investigation and prevention of accidents on local roads are the responsibility of local road authorities.

Breast Cancer

Ms Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give a breakdown by age range of the incidence of breast cancer in women in Scotland in each of the last five years. [44935]

Mr. Galbraith: The information requested is set out in the table:

Number of registrations of incident cases of breast cancer (ICD-9[1] 174) among women in Scotland by age group and year of registration, 1992–1996

Age Group	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
15–24	4	2	5	1	2
25–34	76	67	80	59	73
35–44	284	302	294	289	285
45–54	654	659	627	706	766
55–64	874	751	762	806	741
65–74	615	624	634	654	641
75–84	512	497	455	468	451
85+	225	220	240	235	189
All ages	3,244	3,122	3,097	3,218	3,418

[1] International Classification of Diseases, Ninth Revision

Note:

As cancer registration is a dynamic process, some late registrations may not be included in the figures

Source:

Scottish Cancer Intelligence Unit, ISD

Holyrood Parliament Building

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what powers the Scottish Parliament will have to *(a)* amend and *(b)* reject the Government's proposals for the Holyrood Parliament Building; and if he will make a statement. [45329]

Mr. McLeish: It is intended that responsibility for the Parliament Building at Holyrood will transfer to the Parliament's Corporate Body at an appropriate point after it is established following the elections in May 1999. The completion of the project will then be a matter for the Parliament.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of the cost of each of the options on the shortlist for the Holyrood Parliament Building. [45330]

Mr. McLeish: The intention is that whichever team of designers is chosen will produce a building which can be constructed within the building cost estimate of around £50 million announced previously.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

EU Fisheries Council

Miss Begg: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the outcome of the Fisheries Council held in Luxembourg on 8 June; and if he will make a statement. [45615]

Dr. John Cunningham: I chaired the meeting of the Fisheries Council in Luxembourg on 8 June. The Parliamentary Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) represented the United Kingdom together with my noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, Lord Sewel.

The Council agreed by qualified majority, with France and Ireland voting against and Italy abstaining, a ban on high seas drift nets. The use of drift nets to catch tuna and swordfish will be phased out by 31 December 2001. The UK favoured a shorter phase out but several delegations were sympathetic to arguments for a longer one. The compromise of 3½ years secured the necessary qualified majority and was accompanied by a commitment that in 1998 the number of vessels licensed to fish with drift nets in each Member State will be at least 40% below the number that fished in 1995, 1996 or 1997 in that Member State. In a joint statement the Council and Commission agreed to decide before the end of 1998 on compensatory measures to help fishermen adapt to the ending of the drift net fishery.

The Commission proposal on drift nets has been on the Council's table since 1994. The UK Presidency made it a priority to reach an agreement in order to protect dolphins in particular and I am delighted that, after a long and hard negotiation, this has now been achieved.

The European Commission introduced a proposal to strengthen fisheries monitoring, inspection and surveillance, together with an action plan for further improving enforcement under the Common Fisheries Policy over the next 2–3 years. In an orientation debate, the UK welcomed the prospect of more effective and consistent enforcement and called for an annual report from the Commission to enable the Council to review progress. As chairman, I concluded that there was agreement that the Commission's proposal addressed key areas where enforcement can be enhanced and a decision should be taken at the Council's next meeting in October. The action plan will be used as a framework for improving control standards.

There was also an orientation debate on a communication from the Commission on options for the future of the Community's fisheries market regime. In a wide ranging discussion, delegations, including the UK, generally shared the Commission's view that it is important to maximise the value of scarce fish resources, maintain competitive catching and processing industries in an increasingly global market and take account of consumers' concerns. Many delegations agreed that changes to both the internal and international aspects of the current market organisations are called for. The Commission will now take account of the points made in drawing up detailed proposals for consideration by the Council.

The Council considered a communication from the Commission reporting on steps taken to follow up discussions by North Sea Ministers at a meeting in Bergen in 1997. The Council unanimously agreed conclusions stressing the importance of integrating fisheries and environmental policies and of making further progress in implementing the Bergen commitments. It also invited the Commission to provide a full report on further progress next year.

The European Commission reported on preparations being made for the review of the Common Fisheries Policy in 2002.

The Council had a preliminary discussion of the implications for fisheries of the reform of the Structural Funds under Agenda 2000.

The Council also adopted a decision providing for ratification by Member States and the Community of the UN Agreement on Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Species. This will in due course add the 15 EU member states to the list of countries which have ratified the Agreement. It will become law when 30 countries have ratified.

Organic Farming

Kate Hoey: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many farms have converted to organic farming in the past year. [44870]

Mr. Morley: 134 farms have converted to organic farming in the past year in the UK.

Kate Hoey: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what percentage of United Kingdom farms is classified as organic. [44869]

Mr. Morley: The percentage of United Kingdom farms classified as organic is 0.5 per cent.

Animal Welfare

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the policy statements which he has made during the United Kingdom presidency of the European Community on the welfare of farm animals throughout the Community; and if he will make a statement. [44698]

Mr. Morley: My right hon. Friend and I have repeatedly made clear during the presidency that the Government's policy is to press for new and revised EU measures to improve standards of farm animal welfare throughout the European Community. Under our presidency we have made considerable progress in resolving the long-standing deadlock on the proposed general Directive on the welfare of animals on farm. We have also prevailed on the European Commission to bring forward its overdue proposals on the welfare of laying hens, and have opened the negotiations on these without delay.

Flood Defence

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what flood defence works for the Cumbrian coast are planned over the next four years. [44865]

Mr. Morley: While this Department has overall policy responsibility for flood and coastal defence in England and administers grant aid for capital defence schemes, the planning, design, construction, maintenance and operation of defence measures is the responsibility of local operating authorities. Full information on coastal defence plans is therefore obtainable from the Environment Agency and relevant maritime councils.

However, from information submitted to this Department, I can advise that their plans for the remainder of 1998–99 and the following three years include the following proposed capital works for which they would hope to obtain Ministry funding:

Operating authority	*Proposed works*
Allerdale Borough Council	Harrington (coast protection)
Allerdale Borough Council	Silloth Skinburness (coast protection)
Allerdale Borough Council	Maryport Harbour (coast protection)
Copeland Borough Council	Salthom Pit (coast protection)
Barrow Borough Council	Askam in Furness (coast protection)

Other works may be proposed following the completion of ongoing studies. Ministry funding of all such schemes is considered if proposals meet technical, economic and environmental criteria and achieve an appropriate priority scheme.

Fish Quotas

Mrs. Humble: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he intends to proceed with the introduction of fixed-quota allocations; and if he will make statement. [45991]

Mr. Morley: From 1 January 1999, the annual allocation of fish quotas to producer organisations, the non sector and other groups will be linked to fishing activity (catches) that took place in the reference period 1994 to 1996. These arrangements, referred to as fixed quota allocations (FQAs), will apply to all quota stocks caught in domestic waters except for North Sea herring taken as a by-catch in industrial fishing, and to certain stocks taken in external waters. The Fisheries Departments are writing to the owners of over 10 metres vessels, producer organisations and other interests to advise them of the new arrangements.

A consultative paper setting out proposals for the introduction of fixed quota allocations for domestic waters was issued by the Fisheries Departments last November and was sent to the owners of some 2,300 fishing vessels over 10 metres, as well as producer organisations and

other interests. Almost 300 replies have been received. There was strong support for a system of fixed quota allocations from producer organisations who, together, represent some two thirds of the over 10 metre fleet and catch more than 90 per cent. of the UK's quota. That was not the case with individual responses, although the vast majority of individual fishermen offered no comment. After careful consideration of all the arguments we have come to the view that there would be significant benefits to be gained from moving to fixed quota allocations although we would wish to review such a system in 3 years' time in the light of the experience gained.

Producer organisations will have a key role to play during the introduction of fixed quota allocations. There is apprehension among fishermen that moving to a fixed quota allocation system may disadvantage those whose fishing activities were curtailed during the reference period 1994 to 1996. The arrangements that are being introduced will provide scope for POs, acting with their members, to undertake internal adjustments to take account of anomalies that may have arisen in the reference period. Separate arrangements are also being made to cater for those fishermen that belong to the non sector.

Concern was expressed during the consultation exercise that fixed quota allocations would pave the way to the introduction of individual transferable quotas (ITQs) and separately could lead to increased pressure on non quota stocks. On the first point, the Government have no plans to introduce ITQs and no such action would be taken without full and proper consultation with the industry. On the second point, the Fisheries Departments will be monitoring the impact of fixed quota allocations and if necessary action to safeguard the position of non-quota stocks will be considered. In this context, and given more general concern over growing pressure on scallop stocks, we shall be consulting the fishing industry and other interests about proposals to limit future access to the scallop fisheries.

The proposals would involve the introduction of new licensing arrangements with effect from 1 January 1999. From that date, in the case of vessels over 10m in length, permission to fish for scallops would be granted only to vessels which met the qualifying criteria at 31 May 1998. These criteria may include both a track record of scallop landings prior to that date and the use of appropriate fishing gear during the corresponding period. No activity in the scallop fishery after 31 May 1998 would be taken into account. The arrangements for fishing by under 10 metre vessels would not be affected by the proposed licensing changes, although they will continue to be required to comply with the technical conservation rules applying to scallop fisheries. These rules are under separate review.

A separate consultation exercise on the application of fixed quota allocations to external waters stocks at North Norway, Svalbard and Greenland met with unanimous support. Fisheries Departments therefore intend to introduce fixed quota allocations for these fisheries on 1 January 1999 as part of the process of applying fixed quota allocations more generally. Detailed aspects will be explained in a forthcoming consultative letter on proposals for the future licensing of fishing opportunities in external waters.

Wild Boar

Mrs. Gilroy: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the plans for shooting enthusiasts to kill wild boar on private land near Tiverton, Devon; and what representations he has received on this matter. [45103]

Angela Eagle: I have been asked to reply.

The Government have not been consulted about this proposal. The responsibility for licensing the keeping of wild animals, including wild boars, rests with local authorities. The control of the keeping of firearms is a matter for the police in this context.

It is not an offence to kill a wild boar humanely. However, under the Wild Mammals (Protection) Act 1996, it would be an offence to inflict unnecessary suffering on a boar.

My Department has received an inquiry from the League Against Cruel Sports on this matter.

Milk Development Council

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when his Department's guidelines for the Milk Development Council will be published. [40106]

Mrs. Beckett: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by my hon. Friend the Minister for Science, Industry and Energy on 1 June 1998, *Official Report*, column *124*.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Damien Thorne

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Attorney-General if he will use his powers relating to unduly lenient sentences in respect of the sentence imposed on Damien Thorne on 21 May. [45216]

The Attorney-General: The Criminal Justice Act 1988 gives me power, in specific circumstances, to apply to the Court of Appeal for sentences which I consider to be unduly lenient to be reviewed. The Act imposes a twenty-eight day time-limit, starting from the date of sentence, within which an application in a particular case must be notified to the Court of Appeal. The Crown Prosecution Service is to provide me with the necessary case papers so that I can consider the sentence imposed on Damien Thorne within the statutory time-limit.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Paramilitary Violence

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list the acts of paramilitary violence carried out in April, indicating to which paramilitary organisation the police have attributed responsibility. [42162]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 18 May 1998]:* The following acts of paramilitary violence were carried out in April:

Offence	*Total number*	*By Loyalist*	*By Republican*	*Unknown*
Deaths	4	2	[1]2	—
Shooting Incidents	18	9	8	1
Bombing Incidents	5	2	2	1
Casualties as a result of paramilitary style attacks	15	9	6	—
Shootings	8	3	5	—
Assaults	7	6	1	—

[1] 1 claimed by INLA

Note:

1. The RUC advise that it is not possible at present to be more specific on attribution other than for the incident claimed by INLA. Attribution is based on the information currently available and may be subject to change or adjustment. In addition there was one further shooting incident when the RUC shot at a stolen car which tried to run down a member of a patrol
2. Care should be taken not to add all incidents together as some are included in more than one heading, e. g. all four deaths were as a result of shooting incidents as were all eight paramilitary style shooting attacks

Veterinary Students

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many Northern Ireland students are presently studying veterinary science in *(a)* the Irish Republic and *(b)* Great Britain; what estimate she has made of the number of graduates in veterinary science required in Northern Ireland in each of the next four years; and what has been the number of applicants for university places in that science from Northern Ireland in each of the last five years. [44555]

Mr. Worthington: There are 52 Northern Ireland students studying veterinary science in the Irish Republic and 115 in Great Britain. It is not possible to estimate the overall number of graduates in veterinary science required in Northern Ireland; however, it is anticipated that the Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland will require the following:

1998: 5

1999: 3

2000: 3

2001: 3.

The number of applicants for university places is:

Before 1994: No details available

1994: 110

1995: 85

1996: 90

1997: 92.

Guardsmen Fisher and Wright

Mr. MacKay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on what date she commenced her review of the cases of guardsmen Fisher and Wright. [45362]

Marjorie Mowlam: I am currently looking at the cases in light of Mr. Justice Coghlin's judicial review judgment which was delivered on 22 May. I received advice on this matter on 2 June—i.e. within 5 working days.

Correspondence

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on what dates she referred the letter of 8 April from the hon. Member for Thurrock to the RUC Chief Constable; and when she expects the Chief Constable to issue a substantive reply. [44646]

Mr. Ingram: My hon. Friend's letter dated 8 April was received in my office on 29 April 1998. The matter was referred to the RUC Chief Constable on 8 May 1998 and I received his reply on 9 June.

PRIME MINISTER

Special Advisers

Dr. Fox: To ask the Prime Minister if he will state the number of special advisers in each Government department and the total annual cost of employing each adviser, broken down by departments. [39914]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 27 April 1998]:* On the number of Special Advisers in each Government department, I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) on 13 November 1997, *Official Report*, columns *615–17*, and my answer to the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) on 5 May 1998, *Official Report*, column *278*.

In addition, one Special Adviser has been appointed to each of the following Departments: Privy Council Office, Department for Trade and Industry, Lord Chancellor's Department and Scottish Office. One Special Adviser has resigned from No.10.

In line with the practice under previous administrations, individual salaries are not detailed in order to protect the privacy of the individuals concerned.

Based on the number in post on 5 May, the total annual salary cost of employing Special Advisers in 1998–99 is estimated to be some £3.6 million.

Sierra Leone

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Prime Minister on what dates between 2 May 1997 and 4 May 1998 his Private Office received submissions or briefing notes on the situation in Sierra Leone. [42083]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 14 May 1998]:* As part of the usual flow of information on international issues, various submissions and briefing notes referring to the events in Sierra Leone were received in my Private Office during the period in question.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Prime Minister which ministers were consulted on the decision by Sir Thomas Legg QC to advertise for witnesses to the Sierra Leone investigation in a national newspaper; and if he will make a statement. [45270]

The Prime Minister: Ministers were rightly not consulted, although my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary was informed of Sir Thomas Legg's decision before the advertisement appeared.

Government Buildings

Mr. Baker: To ask the Prime Minister what is his policy in respect of the use of Government buildings for Labour party events. [44217]

The Prime Minister: Paragraph 63 of the Ministerial Code states that Government property should not generally be used for constituency work or party activities. A particular exception is recognised in the case of No. 10 and No. 11 Downing Street, Carlton House Terrace and other official residences where senior Ministers are required to live for the purpose of the job. Where Ministers host Party events in these residences or other Government property, it should be at their own or Party expense with no cost falling to the public purse. This was the practice of the previous administration and there has been no change in the arrangements.

Intelligence Services

Mr. Baker: To ask the Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the potential for increasing parliamentary accountability of the central intelligence machinery consistent with the need to protect national security. [44412]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 9 June 1998]:* The central intelligence machinery in the Cabinet Office is accountable to Ministers, and through them to Parliament, in the same way as any part of the Government service. While the nature of its task necessarily means that details of its work have to be protected, my colleagues and I seek to provide as full information about it as is consistent with the public interest.

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Prime Minister what changes have been made to the composition of the Intelligence and Security Committee. [45807]

The Prime Minister: In accordance with Section 10 of the Intelligence Services Act 1994, and after consultation with the Leader of the Opposition, I have appointed the Right Honourable the Lord Archer of Sandwell QC to be a member of the Intelligence and Security Committee as a replacement for Baroness Ramsay, who was appointed as a Minister on 2 December 1997.

Lord Archer's appointment came into effect on 30 March 1998.

Duty Free

Mr. Gale: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 3 June 1998, *Official Report*, column *215*, concerning duty free, what the stance was of Germany and Italy at the ECOFIN Council meeting on 19 May towards reversal of the decision to end the duty free trade; if support for a study into the effects of the ending of duty free trade was given by France, Spain and Greece; and if he will make a statement. [45015]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 9 June 1998]:* The Rules of Procedure of the Council of Ministers make clear that, in general, deliberations in Council meetings are covered by the rules of professional privacy. It would therefore be inappropriate to give details of the views expressed by other delegates in the Council's discussion of duty free on 19 May, at which no formal vote was taken.

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to the oral answer from the Secretary of State for Scotland of 19 May 1998, *Official Report*, column 718, if he will review the Government's policy of not disclosing details of discussions between the office of the Lord Advocate and US officials. [44905]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 10 June 1998]:* I have no intention of doing so.

Telephone Tapping

Mr. Baker: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 4 June 1998, *Official Report*, column *301*, if he will make it his policy to inform hon. Members, on a confidential basis if necessary, when an hon. Member has been party to a communication where an authorised interception is in force in respect of the other party to the communication. [45428]

The Prime Minister: No. It would be contrary to long-established policy and to common sense to notify a third party that another person's telephone was, or had been, subject to interception under warrant, and would divert the clear will of Parliament as expressed in the Interception of Communications Act, 1985.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

UK Sports Institute

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the budget for the UK Sports Institute is in the current financial year. [44728]

Mr. Banks *[holding answer 10 June 1998]:* A budget has not been set. Consistent with the competition set in motion by the previous Government, Lottery funding will be a key element and is dependent on the achievement of project milestones in order to draw down lottery funds, agreed by the Lottery Distributing Bodies, the United Kingdom Sports Council and Sheffield.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the relationship will be between the UK Sports Institute and (i) the English Sports Council and (ii) the Sports Councils for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. [44737]

Mr. Banks *[holding answer 10 June 1998]:* The Home Country Sports Councils are represented on the United Kingdom Sports Council which will provide strategic direction to the United Kingdom Sports Institute (UKSI).

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how the budget for UK Sports Institute is planned to be distributed between the central site and the network of regional sites. [44729]

Mr. Banks *[holding answer 10 June 1998]:* Public funding will come mainly from the Lottery and the decisions will be taken by the Lottery distributors. However, they have indicated that between £40 million

and £60 million of capital Lottery Sports Fund may be made available for the United Kingdom Sports Institute Headquarters development by the home Countries' Sports Councils out of £160 million which may be available for the whole network.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he has identified sites for the network of regional centres for the UK Sports Institute. [44733]

Mr. Banks *[holding answer 10 June 1998]:* The Home Country Sports Councils have been asked to identify prospective regional centres, and details of the United Kingdom Sports Institute network will be announced in due course.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps he will take to ensure the participation of sports men and women from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland in the UK Sports Institute. [44736]

Mr. Banks *[holding answer 10 June 1998]:* The intention is that sportsmen and women from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland will have the same opportunity to use the services and facilities of the United Kingdom Sports Institute Network as those from England.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many regional centres there are planned to be in the UK Sports Institute network. [44735]

Mr. Banks *[holding answer 10 June 1998]:* There are likely to be about eight regional centres planned for England, and other separate centres planned for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport which body will have responsibility for the UK Sports Institute. [44738]

Mr. Banks *[holding answer 10 June 1998]:* The United Kingdom Sports Institute (UKSI) will be subject to the strategic direction of the United Kingdom Sports Council. A separate corporate body will be agreed and set up to run the UKSI Headquarters.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when construction is planned to begin on the UK Sports Institute central site. [44730]

Mr. Banks *[holding answer 10 June 1998]:* Construction of the Headquarters building is planned to commence in May 1999.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans he has for the funding of the UK Sports Institute following the initial National Lottery grant. [44739]

Mr. Banks *[holding answer 10 June 1998]:* In addition to capital Lottery funding, the Lottery distributors have indicated that up to £9 million of revenue funding per annum may be made available to help operate the United Kingdom Sports Institute Headquarters, provided a suitable application is made to the Lottery Distributing Bodies.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how the programme of activities at the UK Sports Institute is planned to be structured. [44731]

Mr. Banks *[holding answer 10 June 1998]:* The UK Sports Council will determine the overall strategy, which will reflect the Government's key policy aims. The UK Sports Institute will deliver that national strategy and the arrangements will be decentralised with many services provided in the regional centres to standards accredited by the Headquarters in Sheffield.

Technical and support services in particular will be developed in close consultation with the governing bodies of the sports concerned, and the athletes and coaches who will use them.

There will be three main phases of development, each going forward as Lottery funding is made available. The first phase (1998–2000) will see the UK Sports Institute drawing together the threads of the World Class Performance Programme. The second phase (1999–2002) will be marked by better co-ordination nationally of these services. In phase three (2000–2004) new buildings and related facilities will be used to provide significantly more support than is possible at present.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what the criteria will be for the involvement of individual sports in the UK Sports Institute; [44732]

(2) if he will list the sports that *(a)* have agreed to participate in and *(b)* have been invited to participate in the UK Sports Institute. [44726]

Mr. Banks: All sports will be encouraged to participate. The United Kingdom Sports Institute (UKSI) will provide first class facilities for a range of Olympic and other non-commercial sports for our very best sportsmen and women.

Discussions have been taking place with eight sports—athletics, swimming, cycling (road), judo, triathlon, netball, squash and table tennis—about the development of their national training facilities at the UKSI HQ in Sheffield. Major spectator sports like football, cricket and rugby league which have plans for their own sports specific academics will also be able to tap into the top quality sports science, medicine and coaching expertise offered across the Institute's HQ facilities.

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what progress he has made in the allocation of the regional centres of excellence for the Institute of Sport. [44944]

Mr. Banks: There are likely to be about eight regional centres planned for England, and other centres planned for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The Home Country Sports Councils have been asked to identify prospective regional centres with a view to siting the centres where they are needed most. Details of the United Kingdom Sports Institute network will be announced in due course.

National Lottery

Yvette Cooper: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much National Lottery

funding has been distributed by *(a)* the National Lottery Charities Board, *(b)* the Millennium Commission, *(c)* the Heritage Lottery Fund, *(d)* the English Sports Council and *(e)* the Arts Council of England for projects in (i) Pontefract and Castleford constituency and (ii) the Yorkshire and Humberside Region. [44588]

Mr. Banks: The table shows the value and the number of Lottery awards made to date in (i) Pontefract and Castleford constituency and (ii) the Yorkshire and Humberside Region. Details of Lottery awards can be found on the Department's internet website, at *www.lottery.culture.gov.uk.*

£

Distributing body[1]	*Pontefract and Castleford*		*Yorkshire and Humberside Region*	
	Value of awards	*Number of awards*	*Value of awards*	*Number of awards*
Arts Council for England	244,933	6	54,818,541	798
National Lottery Charities Board	561,655	7	61,073,053	809
Heritage Lottery Fund	100,700	1	53,653,345	146
Millennium Commission[2]	Nil	Nil	142,272,924	18
Sports Council for England	2,016,484	6	64,601,230	264
Total	2,923,772	20	360,478,430	2,035

[1] The information for this table has been provided by the distributing bodies
[2] The Millennium Commission has set aside £200 million for 34 award partners to run the Millennium awards scheme which will benefit 15,000 individuals around the country

Minimum Wage

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations he has received on the impact of the minimum wage on the uptake of the new deal places for 18 to 24 year olds by the tourism industry. [43778]

Mr. Tom Clarke: I have received representations on the impact of the minimum wage from a number of companies and associations in the tourism, hospitality and leisure industry. The Independent Low Pay Commission, in formulating its recommendations, received written and oral evidence from a large number of individuals and organisations, including many of the industry's representative bodies. I am very impressed by the response from the tourism industry to the initiative on the New Deal. Neither at the conference my Department, the Department for Education and Employment and the British Hospitality Association hosted last November, nor in my frequent contacts with the tourism industry since, has specific representation been made to me about the impact of the minimum wage on the New Deal.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Regional Affairs Committee

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the President of the Council what plans she has to refer matters to the Standing Committee on Regional Affairs under Standing Order No. 117. [45313]

Mrs. Ann Taylor: None at present. I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins) on 14 May 1998, *Official Report*, column 533. There has been no significant demand from hon. Members for reference of matters to the Standing Committee on Regional Affairs although the Government have not ruled it out and I will consider any representations about appropriate topics.

WALES

M4

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of (x) the current traffic flows and (y) the (i) high and (ii) low predictions of traffic flow on the M4 from *(a)* Newhouse to Magor, *(b)* Magor to Coldra, *(c)* Coldra to Caerleon, *(d)* Malpas to Tredegar Park, *(e)* Tredegar Park to Castleton and *(f)* Castleton to Coryton in (1) 2000, (2) 2005, (3) 2010, (4) 2015 and (5) 2020. [44075]

Mr. Hain: The Annual Average Daily Traffic Flows (AADT) based on the current High and Low National Road Traffic Forecasts (NRTF) 1997 are given in the table:

Section	*1997 AADF*	*2000 AADF*	*2005 AADF*	*2010 AADF*	*2015 AADF*	*2020 AADF*
High Growth Forecast						
M48 Newhouse-Rogiet Jns. 2–23	10,400	11,300	12,600	13,800	15,100	16,300
M4 Rogiet-Magor Jns. 32–23A	54,900	59,600	66,300	72,700	79,400	85,800
M4 Magor-Coldra Jns. 23A-24	61,000	66,200	73,700	80,800	88,200	95,300
M4 Coldra-Caerleon Jns. 24–25	83,700	90,900	101,200	110,900	121,200	130,900
M4 Caerleon-Malpas Jns. 25–26	69,300	75,200	83,700	91,800	100,300	108,300
M4 Malpas-High Cross Jns. 26–27	91,200	99,000	110,200	120,800	132,000	142,500
M4 High Cross-Tredegar Park Jns. 27–28	85,500	92,800	103,200	113,200	123,700	133,600
M4 Tredegar Park-Castleton Jns. 28–29	89,500	97,200	108,100	118,600	129,600	140,000
M4 Castleton-Pontprennau Jns. 29–30	49,900	54,100	60,300	66,100	72,200	78,000
M4 Pontprennau-Coryton Jns. 30–32	56,700	61,500	68,400	75,100	82,000	88,600

Section	1997 AADF	2000 AADF	2005 AADF	2010 AADF	2015 AADF	2020 AADF
Low Growth Forecast						
M48 Newhouse-Rogiet Jns. 2–23	10,400	10,700	11,300	12,000	12,700	13,300
M4 Rogiet-Magor Jns. 32–23A	54,900	56,000	59,400	63,100	66,800	69,800
M4 Magor-Coldra Jns. 23A-24	61,000	62,200	66,000	70,100	74,200	77,500
M4 Coldra-Caerleon Jns. 24–25	83,700	85,400	90,700	96,300	101,900	106,500
M4 Caerleon-Malpas Jns. 25–26	69,300	70,700	75,000	79,700	84,300	88,100
M4 Malpas-High Cross Jns. 26–27	91,200	93,000	98,800	104,900	111,000	115,900
M4 High Cross-Tredegar Park Jns. 27–28	85,500	87,100	95,600	98,300	104,000	108,640
M4 Tredegar Park-Castleton Jns. 28–29	89,500	91,300	97,000	103,000	109,000	113,800
M4 Castleton-Pontprennau Jns. 29–30	49,900	50,900	54,000	57,400	60,700	63,400
M4 Pontprennau-Coryton Jns. 30–32	56,700	57,800	61,400	65,200	69,000	72,000

BSE

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many BSE cases he has recorded in 1998; and if he will make a statement. [44599]

Mr. Win Griffiths: The number of suspected cases of BSE reported in Wales in 1998 up to 29 May was 139, of which 49 cases had been confirmed.

The BSE epidemic continues in sharp decline. The number of suspected cases so far reported in 1998 in Wales is 32 per cent. less than for the same period in 1997.

Cataract Operations

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what measures he proposes to tackle waiting lists in *(a)* Wales and *(b)* North East Wales for cataract operations; and if he will make a statement. [44601]

Mr. Win Griffiths: *(a)* An additional £20 million will be spent in 1998–99 on reducing inpatient and day case waiting lists to below the level which the Government inherited. This supports the Government's commitment to reduce waiting lists over the lifetime of this Parliament by 100,000.

(b) £4.124 million of this is available to North Wales Health Authority to reduce waiting lists in its area. The Authority is also considering establishing an ophthalmic treatment centre to provide additional capacity to treat patients with cataracts.

Prostate Cancer

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he proposes to reduce the incidence of prostate cancer; how many prostate cancer deaths there were last year; and if he will make a statement. [44602]

Mr. Win Griffiths: In relation to the steps we are taking to reduce the incidence of prostate cancer, I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Ynys Mon (Mr. Jones) on 11 February 1998, *Official Report*, column 255. In 1997, there were 532 deaths in Wales from prostate cancer registered with the Office for National Statistics.

Knacker Trade

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people are employed in the knacker trade in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [45002]

Mr. Hain: The Office for National Statistics 1996 Annual Employment Survey estimated that there were 700 employees in Wales employed in industries concerned with the production and preserving of meat. No further breakdown is available.

Directors of Education

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many directors of education there were in Wales in *(a)* 1988 and *(b)* 1998; and if he will make a statement. [45006]

Mr. Hain: In 1988, there were eight, one for each of the old counties. In 1998, there are 22, one for each of the new unitary counties.

Mental Health

Ms Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what psychological therapy services are available in Wales for individuals with mental health problems. [45001]

Mr. Win Griffiths: Psychological therapies are provided on the NHS as appropriate to the needs of the individual. A wide range of therapies are available; the most common interventions include supportive psychotherapy, dynamic individual psychotherapy, group therapy, cognitive and behavioural therapy.

Electro-convulsive Therapy (Bro Taf)

Ms Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many ECT treatments were carried out in the Bro Taf Health Authority in each of the last five years; and how many of these were carried out without the consent of the patient. [45000]

Mr. Win Griffiths: Centrally held statistics are not robust for the years in question. The best indication of the number of ECT treatments comes from a Welsh Office-funded survey of the first 6 months of 1996. This showed that in the Bro Taf area over that period a total of 90 patients received this treatment. The mean number of treatments per patient was 6.75 per completed course of treatment.

ECT treatment may not be administered to informal patients without consent, and may only be administered to formally detained patients in very exceptional circumstances. The Mental Health Act Commission monitors the proper use of the Act, including the administration of ECT. The survey quoted above shows

that in the first 3 months of 1996, in all of Wales, 161 patients commenced ECT treatment, of whom 12 received it without their consent.

Health Trust Mergers

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many and which of the proposed mergers of health trusts in Wales have been subject to objections by *(a)* individuals and *(b)* organisations affected; what consultation procedures will apply to the hearing of such objections; and what is the time scale for this process. [45155]

Mr. Win Griffiths: My right hon. Friend and I have received a number of objections, in particular, to our proposals for the creation of a single trust in Carmarthenshire and a new trust for Powys and Ceredigion. We have also received a smaller number of objections to our proposals affecting other areas of Wales. I refer my hon. Friend to my previous reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) on 14 May 1998, *Official Report*, columns *159–60*, in which I gave details of the number of these objections.

Formal consultation on our proposals will commence later this month and will last for three months. My right hon. Friend and I hope that many groups and individuals will take this opportunity to make their views on these matters known. We shall consider all views we receive during this formal consultation period carefully before making final decisions, which we expect to do in the autumn.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many letters he has received from *(a)* hon. Members and *(b)* others expressing opposition to the proposed merger of health trusts in Wales. [45157]

Mr. Win Griffiths: I have received over 2,800 representations in respect of our plans to restructure NHS trusts in Wales. Eighty-seven of these have been from hon. Members. I have also received over 15,000 petition signatures on the same matter. Of these views expressed, some have opposed any restructuring, while others have opposed individual options and supported alternatives. A small number have expressed full support for the process of particular proposals.

Employment

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of public sector employment as a percentage of private sector employment in (i) 1970, (ii) 1975, (iii) 1980, (iv) 1985, (v) 1990 and (vi) 1995 in Wales. [45371]

Mr. Peter Hain: Information on public and private sector employees in Wales is available from the quarterly Labour Force Survey. The Autumn 1995 survey estimated that public sector employees as a percentage of private sector employees was 49 per cent.; there were an estimated 673,000 employees in the private sector and 331,000 in the public sector.

Comparable data for the earlier years requested are not available.

Gross Domestic Product

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish the gross domestic product per head for 1996, for each of the new unitary authorities which are being used by his Department for economic policy purposes. [45162]

Mr. Peter Hain: I will write to the right hon. Member as soon as possible and will place a copy of my reply in the Library.

Rural Areas (Social Exclusion)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what provisions are being made for the needs of rural areas within the Social Exclusion Initiative of his Department. [45160]

Mr. Win Griffiths: The Social Exclusion Programme for Wales, which I announced on 1 May, will address social exclusion in a range of geographical and cultural settings, including rural areas.

Students

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his current estimate of the number of students in *(a)* further education and *(b)* higher education in Wales broken down for (i) North Wales and (ii) South Wales and by individual institution; and if he will make a statement. [45005]

Mr. Hain: The numbers of student enrolments for the 1997–98 academic year are shown by individual institution in the table.

Institution	*Number*
Further Education Enrolments[1]	
Aberdare College	2,395
Afan College	2,756
Barry College	6,900
Bridgend College	8,201
Carmarthenshire College of Technology & Art	12,104
Coleg Ceredigion	2,178
Deeside College	7,996
Coleg Glan Hafren	10,162
Groseinon College	3,607
Gwent Tertiary College	28,312
Coleg Harlech	266
Coleg Llandrillo	13,018
Coleg Llysfasi	1,997
Coleg Meirion Dwyfor	2,424
Coleg Menai	9,937
Merthyr Tydfil College	3,496
Neath College	10,370
Pembrokeshire College	7,166
Pencoed College	849
Pontypridd College	8,123
Coleg Powys	5,043
St. Davids Sixth Form College	940
Swansea College	15,119
Welsh College of Horticulture	1,680
Workers Educational Association (North)	1,670
Workers Educational Association (South)	4,272
Yale College	9,798
YMCA	569
Ystrad Mynach College	5,575
University of Wales, Aberystwyth	906
University of Wales Institute Cardiff	512
University of Wales College, Newport	648
Swansea Institute of Higher Education	143

Institution	*Number*
University of Wales, Bangor Welsh for Adults	1,127
University of Wales, Cardiff Welsh for Adults	608
University of Glamorgan Welsh for Adults	245
North East Wales Institute	49
University of Wales, Swansea Welsh for Adults	424
Trinity College Carmarthen Welsh for Adults	22
Sponsored Institutions	395
Higher Education Enrolments[2]	
University of Glamorgan	15,179
University of Wales, Aberystwyth	6,968
University of Wales, Bangor	7,726
University of Wales, Cardiff	14,555
University of Wales, Lampeter	2,398
University of Wales, Swansea	9,635
University College of Medicine	2,777
University of Wales Institute, Cardiff	7,209
University of Wales College, Newport	7,057
North East Wales Institute of Higher Education	4,520
Swansea Institute of Higher Education	3,888
Trinity College	1,730
Welsh College of Music & Drama	549
Carmarthenshire College of Technology & Art	359
Llandrillo College	155

[1] All FE enrolments in Wales at November 1997
Source:
Further Education Funding Council Wales
[2] All HE enrolments in Wales at November 1997
Source:
Higher Education Funding Council Wales

Nurses, Midwives and Health Visitors

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what functions are ascribed to the Welsh National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting under section 6(1)(e) of the Nurses, Midwives and Health Visitors Act 1997; and if the board receives funding in respect of these functions. [45949]

Mr. Win Griffiths: The Board is required to provide training for teachers and those intending to become teachers of nurses, midwives and health visitors and also to provide information to the public about careers in the professions of nursing, midwifery and health visiting in Wales (SI 1993/614).

Funding for this is not authorised by statute and is the subject of separate approval by the Treasury until March 1999, after which new arrangements will be introduced.

Rural Transport

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the distribution to Welsh local authorities of the additional funding for rural transport announced in the Budget. [45948]

Mr. Hain: The Welsh share of the additional funding announced in the Budget is £2.5 million in 1998–99. Of this, £2.25 million is being distributed to local authorities to provide additional funding for socially necessary bus services in rural area, with the remaining £250,000 retained centrally to be used in support of rural community transport initiatives.

A Special Grant Report will shortly be laid before the House setting out the proposed allocation of the £2.25 million to local authorities and the conditions attached to the grant. Following consultation with the Welsh Local Government Association, I intend to distribute the additional resources using a formula which is based on the population of electoral wards where the population density is less than 4 persons per hectare. The provisional allocations are:

	£
Isle of Anglesey	119,523
Gwynedd	197,250
Conwy	76,293
Denbighshire	90,764
Flintshire	107,241
Wrexham	76,471
Powys	221,080
Ceredigion	125,236
Pembrokeshire	145,130
Carmarthenshire	276,750
Swansea	58,017
Neath Port Talbot	117,660
Bridgend	91,448
The Vale of Glamorgan	85,212
Rhondda Cynon Taff	95,587
Merthyr Tydfil	29,686
Caerphilly	75,782
Blaenau Gwent	23,418
Torfaen	52,151
Monmouthshire	109,472
Newport	33,443
Cardiff	42,386

Class Sizes

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of classes in *(a)* primary, *(b)* middle and *(c)* secondary schools have over (i) 30, (ii) 35 and (iii) 40 pupils in each local education authority; what has been the annual percentage change in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [45458]

Mr. Hain: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 17 December 1997, *Official Report*, column, *204–05*, in response to his question on primary school class sizes. Figures for January 1996 are the earliest available for the current local education authorities. Results from the January 1998 Schools' Census are not yet available.

There are no middle schools in Wales and no information is collected centrally about class sizes in secondary schools.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Arms Exports

Sir Peter Emery: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) how many references were made to the Restricted Enforcement Unit during the two years up to 18 February concerning breaches of regulations arising from a United Nations resolution, reinforced by British law, relating to the export of arms; [43686]

(2) how many references were made by the Foreign Office to the Restricted Enforcement Unit during the two years up to 18 February concerning breaches of regulations arising from a United Nations resolution, reinforced by British law, relating to the export of arms. [45188]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: During the two years up to and including 18 February, FCO representatives raised at meetings of the Restricted Enforcement Unit three items of information concerning possible breaches of UN arms embargoes by UK companies or individuals.

Panchen Lama

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress was made in securing the freedom of the Panchen Lama during the visit of EU ambassadors to China in May. [44234]

Mr. Fatchett *[holding answer 8 June 1998]:* During their visit to Tibet in May, the EU Troika Ambassadors expressed their concerns for the welfare of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, who has been recognised by the Dalai Lama as the reincarnation of the Panchen Lama, and asked to meet him in order to confirm his well-being. The authorities of the Tibetan Autonomous Region did not permit such a meeting, but said that the boy was in good health. We shall continue to raise his case at every appropriate opportunity.

China

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the advances in human rights in China which have followed his decision not to support a resolution against China at the United Nations Commission on Human Rights. [44233]

Mr. Fatchett *[holding answer 8 June 1998]:* Since the EU's decision on 23 February not to support a resolution on China at the Commission on Human Rights, China has announced that it is preparing a sign the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and has released Wang Dan, a leading dissident.

Club of Three

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the role of his Department in supporting the visit of the Minister without Portfolio to the Club of Three meeting of September 1997. [44999]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The Minister without Portfolio attended the Club of Three meeting in Munich in his Ministerial capacity, following an official visit to Bonn. The FCO provided him with background briefing for his official calls, and the Ambassador in Bonn accompanied him on these and to the Club of Three meeting, for which the Ambassador had a separate invitation.

World Cup Tickets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what hospitality tickets are available to officials of the European Commission for the 1998 World Cup; [45171]

(2) how many world cup tickets have been purchased at what cost by European Community institutions for *(a)* members of staff and *(b)* guests; and what guidelines determine eligibility of award of tickets. [45172]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The Foreign and Commonwealth Offices does not have this information.

General Affairs Council

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of the General Affairs Council on 8 and 9 June. [45658]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The outcome is as follows:

General Affairs Council: 8–9 June 1998

1. At the General Affairs Council in Luxembourg on 8–9 June, the Council took note of the EP Resolutions, Decisions and opinions adopted in its part-session in Strasbourg from 11–15 May, and listed in document 8459/98, copies of which will be placed in the House Library as soon as they become available. The Council adopted the A points in Document 9125/98, with the exception of point 14 which had previously been agreed by the Committee of Permanent Representatives on 3 June. A copy of this document will also be placed in the House Library.
2. We provided a draft progress report on Agenda 2000 negotiations. Foreign Ministers agreed this should go to the Cardiff European Council as a basis for discussion. Some emphasised key national concerns.
3. The Presidency set out its programme for the Cardiff European Council.
4. The Council had a detailed discussion of the deteriorating situation in Kosovo. A declaration was agreed sending a firm message (including on the possibility of Chapter VII action in the UN Security Council) that the escalation in violence and reported ethnic cleansing would not be tolerated. A Common Position was also adopted banning new investments in Serbia, with agreement to adopt a regulation on a freeze of funds belonging to the FRY and Serbian Governments as soon as possible.
5. Separately, the Council approved a Joint Action providing financial support for the mission of the EU Special Representative to the FRY, Mr. Felipe Gonzalez. The Council also welcomed the results of the recent parliamentary elections in Montenegro and agreed to consider ways to provide further assistance to Montenegro.
6. The Council agreed an EU declaration on Bosnia, and to the establishment of a Consultative Task Force. Both are aimed at fostering peace and economic regeneration by helping Bosnia in its efforts toward a closer relationship with Europe. Ministers also held a working lunch with Bosnian Foreign Minister Prlic and Deputy Foreign Ministers Zivalj and Bozanic, representing all three ethnic communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina.
7. The Council agreed that the ad hoc meeting of Euro-Mediterranean Foreign Ministers in Palermo on 3–4 June had revitalised the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. It noted that this should provide a good foundation for a successful third Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference in Stuttgart in April 1999.
8. The Council had a brief discussion of Iran. Ministers welcomed the positive report of the first exploratory meeting of the EU/Iran dialogue held in Brussels on 19 May and reaffirmed their interest in resuming substantive and comprehensive talks soon.
9. The Council issued a Declaration on the nuclear tests by India and Pakistan condemning the tests; calling upon the leaders of India and Pakistan to engage urgently in dialogue on regional stability issues, including with China, and to agree Confidence Building Measures to reduce tension; and urging India and Pakistan to take early steps to adhere to international non-proliferation regimes, including signing the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. The Council agreed it would take all necessary measures if India and Pakistan fail to comply. Member States agreed to review the advisability of IFI lending to Pakistan. The Council asked the Commission to extend its review of India's GSP preferences to Pakistan, and withdraw its earlier request to the Commission to expedite signature of an EC/Pakistan Trade and Cooperation Agreement.

10. The Council discussed the provisions for future trade arrangements between the EU and the 71 African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) States. Discussions will continue in Coreper with a view to reaching agreement on the EU's negotiating mandate at the General Affairs Council on 29 June.

11. The Council welcomed political reforms announced by President Habibie of Indonesia and called for the release of remaining political prisoners. It looked forward to early rescheduling of the visit to East Timor by EU Troika Heads of Mission in Jakarta, and called for renewed commitment to the UN sponsored talks on East Timor.

12. The Council expressed its dismay at the hostilities between Ethiopia and Eritrea, and called on both sides to cease hostilities immediately and to resume peaceful negotiations. The EU stood ready to offer assistance to this effect.

13. The inaugural Cooperation Council under the terms of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) between the EU and Ukraine took place in the margins of the GAC on 8–9 June. Over dinner on 8 June, Ministers had a useful exchange of views on foreign policy issues of mutual interest and EU/Ukraine relations in general. On 9 June, the Council discussed the implementation of the PCA and adopted the Rules of Procedure establishing the foundations for the future work of the Cooperation Council and Committee as well as the Joint Work Programme for 1998–99.

14. The ninth Council of the European Economic Area (EEA) took place on 9 June. The Council noted with satisfaction the continued expansion of the EEA agreement to include more of the EC acquis and discussed the impact EU enlargement would have for the EEA. A political dialogue was held after the main Council session.

Legg Inquiry

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are is the postal address, E-mail address, telephone number and fax number of Sir Thomas Legg's Inquiry. [44907]

Mr. Robin Cook: The details are:

Sir Thomas Legg KCB QC
Sierra Leone Arms Investigation
26 Old Queen Street
London SW1H 9HP
Fax 0171 222 3874
e-mail Sir Thomas Legg slai@btinternet.com

Nuclear Reprocessing

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will set out the arrangements by which articles 2(b), 3, and 4(1)a(i) of the Agreement between the United Kingdom and Japan for Co-operation in the Peaceful Uses of Nuclear Energy (Cm 3948, May 1998) will be put into effect in respect of Tokai Mura magnox spent fuel reprocessed with magnox fuel from British Nuclear Fuel reactors, at Sellafield; what segregation arrangements will be made; and if Article 12(g) will cover commercial confidentiality in respect of contractors. [44111]

Mr. Battle: I have been asked to reply.

The purpose of the new UK/Japan Agreement is to provide the necessary secure framework for ensuring that trade in civil nuclear materials and equipment is carried out only in conformity with the UK's nuclear non-proliferation obligations. In particular, it updates commitments concerning the application of safeguards and physical protection measures to nuclear material transferred between Japan and the UK.

Irradiated fuel from Tokai Mura and other safeguard magnox reactors has, since December 1986, been reprocessed in campaigns which are separate from those for unsafeguarded fuel. These safeguards arrangements for such sequential campaigns were agreed with the Euratom Safeguards Directorate in June 1986. Article 12(g) of the UK/Japan Agreement defines the term "unclassified information" as meaning information not classified as restricted, confidential, secret or top secret; such a term is used in the context of article 1(b) of the Agreement.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Millennium Compliance

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what progress her Department has made in compiling a directory of organisations offering solutions to the Millennium bug; how much each organisation is charged for an entry; and if she will make a statement. [44603]

Mrs. Roche: In conjunction with the Computing Services and Software Association, Action 2000 issued in January 1998 a Factsheet which registers over 50 companies which offer Year 2000 products or services. The register is also available on the CSSA website. The supplier must either be a member of the CSSA or have agreed to abide by the CSSA code of practice. The structure and content of this register are under review for a new edition of the Action 2000 Information Pack due for release in July. The intention is to collate additional data and to make the information available dynamically through the Action 2000 Helpdesk and Website. At this stage entry to the Register is free of charge.

A further, more detailed register of providers of Tools and Techniques has been drafted by Action 2000, initially as part of its support to Business Links but also as a major component of the revised Information Pack. This will be accessible in the same way and entry will also be free of charge.

Cloning

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will review the recommendation of the Banner Committee that an advisory standing committee be created with a remit covering broad ethical questions relating to current and future developments in the use of animals. [44069]

Mr. Battle: As I said in my reply to my hon. Friend's similar question on 15 January 1998, *Official Report*, column *295*, we shall be giving careful consideration to this recommendation in the light of the results of the public consultation exercise on developments in the biosciences, which is now underway.

Ecology Institutes (Merlewood and Windermere)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to the letter of 27 November from the Chief Executive of the Natural Environment Research Council to the hon. Member for Linlithgow, if she will list the new scientific opportunities arising from the merger of Merlewood and Windermere. [44046]

Mr. Battle: I am advised by NERC that the merger of the Natural Environment Research Council's (NERC) Institute of Terrestrial Ecology at Merlewood and the Institute of Freshwater Ecology at Windermere (part of NERC's Centre for Ecology and Hydrology) provides the opportunity to bring together scientists from a wider range of disciplines to pursue research in environmental microbiology, environmental chemistry, pollutant transport, surface water acidification, and environmental monitoring.

The merger will also facilitate access to workshops, chemical analytical facilities and expertise in geographical information systems.

Music (Internet)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans she has to regulate the distribution of British music over the Internet. [44987]

Mr. Ian McCartney: In general, the law applies to material sent on-line, such as over the Internet, in the same way that it does off-line. United Kingdom copyright law already covers transmission in this way, and the UK supports work at EU and international level to ensure comparable levels of protection elsewhere.

Institute of Chartered Accountants

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will list the number of complaints she has received *(a)* from hon. Members and *(b)* from others in each of the last five years about the Institute of Chartered Accountants; and how many of these relate to their arbitration scheme. [44914]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The information is not available in the form requested; the approximate number of representations made to the Department about the Institute's role as a Recognised Statutory Body for company auditors is as follows:

	Number of cases	
	MPs	*Others*
1994	10	—
1995	11	—
1996	6	6
1997	22	18
1998	14	16

Note:
The figures include ongoing representations from the same person on the same issue. Figures do not include duplicate copies

The Department's responsibility is for the effectiveness of the system of audit regulation. We do not know whether the underlying disputes with the Institute's members went to independent arbitration, nor is the information available from the Institute.

Comparable information is not available in connection with the Institute's responsibilities as an Insolvency recognised professional body.

Sierra Leone

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many export licences for the sale of weapons to Sierra Leone were granted in the last 12 months. [41177]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 8 May 1998]:* The Export Control Organisation's computer databases have been interrogated and the following results were obtained.

Between 2 May 1997 and 3 April 1998, one Standard Individual Export Licence was issued covering the export to Sierra Leone of goods subject to export control by being listed in Part III of Schedule 1 to the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994, the so-called Military List. This licence covered goods controlled under entry ML1 of the legislation. It was revoked by the Secretary of State on 16 October 1997, because of the introduction of the arms embargo against Sierra Leone in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 1132 (1997). No Open Individual Export Licences covering such exports were issued in that period.

This information does not cover Media OIELs issued during this period. Media OIELs authorise the export to all destinations of protective clothing, mainly for the protection of aid agency workers and journalists, when working in areas of conflict.

This information should be considered in light of the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister for Small Firms, Trade and Industry, to my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) on 30 October 1997, *Official Report*, columns *870–71*. For part of this period, Sierra Leone was a permitted destination on two Open General Licences:

The OGEL (Export After Exhibition: Military Goods), which covers the export after exhibition in the UK of any Military List goods except anti-personnel landmines and specially-designed components therefor; leg-irons, gangchains, shackles and electric-shock belts, specially designed for restraining human beings; portable devices designed or modified for the purpose of riot control or self-protection by the administration of an electric shock (including electric-shock batons, electric shock shields, stun guns and electric shock dart guns (tasers)) and components therefor specially designed or modified for such a purpose.

The OGEL (Military Surplus Vehicles), which covers ground vehicles and components therefor specially designed or modified for military use including trailers but excluding tanks, self-propelled guns, armed vehicles, armoured vehicles, vehicles fitted with mountings for arms, half-tracks, gun-carriers, tractors and trailers specially designed for towing or transporting ammunition or weapons systems and related load-handling equipment, mobile repair shops specially designed to service military equipment, and components specially designed or modified for military use for goods specified above.

It cannot be assumed from this that any such export to Sierra Leone actually took place. Sierra Leone was removed from both licences in accordance with Resolution 1132 on 17 October 1997.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what export licences have been granted to Sandline International in the last year. [42379]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 18 May 1998]:* The Export Control Organisation's computer databases have been interrogated and the following results were obtained. Between 2 May 1997 and 26 May 1998, no Standard or Open Individual Export Licences were issued to Sandline.

This information should be considered in light of the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister for Small Firms, Trade and Industry to my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) on 30 October 1997, *Official Report*, columns *870–871*.

During this period, there were a number of Open General Export Licences (OGELs) in force. OGELs are not issued to individual exporters but instead are valid for any exporter wishing to export the goods listed to the destinations allowed, providing they meet the restrictions and conditions of the licence. Copies of all OGELs valid at any time during the period are in the Library of the House.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what contacts *(a)* officials and *(b)* ministers in her Department have had with Sandline over the last year. [42380]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 18 May 1998]:* I am not aware of any contacts between my Department and Sandline International since this Government took office, prior to receipt by my office of a copy of the letter of 24 April to the Foreign Secretary from the company's legal representatives, S. J. Berwin & Co.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) when information was first placed in her red boxes about military intervention to restore the Government of President Kabbah of Sierra Leone; [42593]

(2) when she was first notified of the involvement of Sandline International in Sierra Leone; [42589]

(3) when information was first placed in her red boxes about the involvement of Sandline International in operations in Sierra Leone; [42595]

(4) when *(a)* she and *(b)* her Private Office first received reports of proposed military intervention to restore the Government of President Kabbah of Sierra Leone; [42591]

(5) when information was first placed in her red boxes about the Customs and Excise investigation into involvement of Sandline International in operations in Sierra Leone; [42594]

(6) when her Private Office was first informed of the involvement of Sandline International in operations in Sierra Leone; [42590]

(7) when she was first notified of the Customs and Excise investigation into the involvement of Sandline International in operations in Sierra Leone; [42588]

(8) when her Private Office was first notified of the Customs and Excise investigation into the involvement of Sandline International in operations in Sierra Leone; [42592]

(9) when she was first informed of the involvement of a British company in the restoration of the democratic Government in Sierra Leone. [42377]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 18 May 1998]:* In relation to when I first saw the letter from Sandline's solicitors, I refer the right hon. Member to my answer to the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) on 4 June 1998, *Official Report*, column *317*. In relation to more general questions about Sandline, I refer the right hon. Member to the statement by the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in the House during the debate on 18 May 1998, *Official Report*, columns 604–11, in which he announced the investigation by Sir Thomas Legg KCB QC into allegations about Government involvement with the supply of arms to Sierra Leone by UK citizens and firms, and said that the Terms of Reference would be placed in the Library of the House. The Foreign Secretary intends to publish the report of the investigation.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when she expects to answer the questions for answer on 18 May from the right hon. Member for Wokingham relating to Sandline and Sierra Leone, question numbers *(a)* 42379, *(b)* 42380, *(c)* 42588, *(d)* 42589, *(e)* 42590, *(f)* 42591, *(g)* 42592, *(h)* 42593, *(i)* 42594 and *(j)* 42595. [45720]

Mrs. Beckett: I have answered these today.

Social Chapter

Mr. Evans: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations she has received from businesses in the North West on the impact of the UK signing up to the Social Chapter. [43759]

Mr. Ian McCartney: I am not aware of having received any representations specifically from business in the North West on the impact of the UK signing up to the Social Chapter.

Unfair Dismissal

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment she has made of the impact on employment in smaller firms of proposals to reduce the qualifying period for unfair dismissal claims from two years to one year. [43789]

Mr. Ian McCartney: Reducing the qualifying period should help to promote a more flexible labour market and encourage a more committed and productive workforce. It will therefore contribute to a fair and competitive labour market which will benefit small firms as well as large.

Shipbuilders

Dr. Whitehead: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list those United Kingdom shipbuilders which have been in receipt of regional selective assistance in each of the last five years; and what is the value of the grants paid in each case. [45101]

Mrs. Roche: There have been no payments of RSA to UK shipbuilders over this period.

HEALTH

Health and Social Services (Co-operation)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps the Government have taken to promote co-operation between social care professionals and health care professionals. [44837]

Mr. Boateng: The Department encourages joint training between health and social services and fosters projects for staff from both services to share practice placements in the early years of training. We expect that the Social Services white paper, due in the summer, will further develop the theme of joint training. The proposed establishment of National Training Organisations in both the health and social care sectors offers an additional opportunity for working together.

The National Health Service White Paper calls for co-operation between the services on service delivery. In particular the establishment of Primary Care Groups, from 1 April 1999, will enable primary care and social services to call on their different local knowledge and agree programmes with local people to improve services for users, thereby ensuring closer working and cooperation between health and social care professionals and the community served by the group.

Health Targets

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what, representations he has received alleging agism in the Government's proposed targets to reduce death from heart disease, strokes and cancer among the under 65s. [45011]

Ms Jowell: We have received a substantial number of representations from both organisations and individuals suggesting extending the age limit for the targets on coronary heart disease, stroke and cancers, proposed in "Our Healthier Nation", to people aged 65 and over. These representations will receive careful consideration in the formulation of our health strategy for England, which will be outlined in a White Paper later this year.

Smoking

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the estimated gross cost of anti-smoking campaigns in England aimed at children and young people has been since 1988; and what assessment he has made of the impact of the campaigns on teenage *(a)* boys and *(b)* girls. [44018]

Ms Jowell: The gross cost of anti-smoking campaigns in England aimed at children and young people, each year since 1988 is currently being looked into and I shall write to my hon. Friend with further information, as soon as it is available.

However, all of the Government's anti-smoking campaigns are continually evaluated. The Health Education Authority make qualitative and quantitative assessments of the campaigns and the Office for National Statistics track the impact of the campaigns by monitoring national prevalence figures.

The assessments of previous campaigns will be considered as preparations continue for the forthcoming Tobacco Control White Paper.

Surplus NHS Property

Ms Jenny Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the value for money criteria used by the NHS Executive in assessing bids for the development of former hospital sites. [44964]

Mr. Milburn: Surplus National Health Service land is sold on the open market in accordance with the advice contained in the Department's Estatecode, which follows Her Majesty's Treasury rules. The criteria are that surplus NHS property should be sold as quickly as possible, at the best price which can reasonably be obtained on the open market. In order to obtain the best price, consideration should be given to obtaining planning permission for the highest value alternative use. All proceeds from sales are re-invested in the NHS.

The NHS employs, both in-house and externally, professionally qualified valuers to advise on disposal methods; to advise on which offers represent best value for money for the NHS (usually the highest bid); and to obtain information on the creditworthiness of any bidder.

Children (Employment Byelaw)

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the new Model Byelaw on the Employment of Children will be published. [45301]

Mr. Boateng: The new model byelaw on the employment of children was issued to all relevant local authorities, and copied to interested parties, on 15 April 1998.

Viagra

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he intends to licence Viagra under section 58 of the Medicines Act 1968. [45360]

Ms Jowell: The European Agency for the Evaluation of Medicinal Products is currently considering an application for a European marketing authorisation for this product. Decisions on whether to grant marketing authorisations for such products are taken by the European Commission after consultation with the competent authorities of the Member States. The United Kingdom is not, therefore, in a position to consider any application for a national authorisation under Section 58 of the Medicines Act 1968.

Podiatric Services

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy to encourage health authorities to draw up and adopt footcare strategies. [45420]

Mr. Boateng: We already encourage health authorities to give priority to services that will enable people to live as independently as possible in their own homes or in homely settings in the community. We are reviewing the provision of podiatric services to identify a strategy that will take into account examples of good practice and promote the provision of a cost-effective service.

Prescribing

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 17 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *60*, concerning administration of medication, when the review of the prescribing, supply

and administration of medicines in nursing and residential care homes will be concluded and submitted to Ministers. [45430]

Mr. Milburn: The review of prescribing, supply and administration of medicines, chaired by Dr. June Crown, is currently developing its second and final report which is expected to be submitted to Ministers later this summer. The review is not focused on nursing and residential care homes. It is looking more broadly at the current arrangements under which medicines are prescribed, supplied and administered, and considering whether health professionals inside and outside the National Health Service might take on new responsibilities with regard to those functions.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 17 November 1997, *Official Report*, column 60, concerning information technology and prescribing, over what period PRODIGY is to be evaluated; and when decisions will be made about its extension to all general practitioner practices. [45429]

Mr. Milburn: The fieldwork for phase I of PRODIGY was carried out from October 1995 to April 1996, and that for phase II from April 1997 to September 1997. The phase I final report has been completed and will be published shortly. Decisions will be made about the future of the project when the findings from both phases have been carefully considered.

Hospital Readmissions

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 23 March 1998, *Official Report*, columns *45–48*, concerning hospital readmissions, if he will publish the equivalent figures for the last quarter of 1997–98; and if he will update the table to show the percentage change from one quarter to the next since April 1996. [45173]

Mr. Milburn: The number of patients aged 75 and over who were readmitted as an emergency within 28 days of discharge for each quarter since April 1996 is shown in table 1. Table 2 shows the per cent. change from one quarter to the next since April 1996.

Table 1: The number of patients aged 75 and over who were readmitted to hospital as an emergency within 28 days of discharge for each quarter since April 1996

	1996–97				1997–98			
	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4
Northern and Yorkshire	2,154	3,283	3,380	3,713	3,691	3,147	3,712	3,802
Trent	2,916	2,785	2,752	3,031	3,056	3,173	2,973	2,932
Anglia and Oxford	1,309	1,875	2,512	2,258	2,086	2,013	2,273	2,371
North Thames	1,614	2,470	2,730	2,183	3,021	2,569	2,948	3,270
South Thames	3,645	3,107	3,190	4,251	4,007	3,563	3,871	4,029
South and West	3,637	3,511	3,285	3,125	3,093	3,389	3,481	3,496
West Midlands	792	1,650	1,809	1,894	2,087	2,108	2,241	1,809
North West	2,537	2,767	3,195	3,170	3,157	3,125	2,907	3,333
England	18,604	21,448	22,853	23,625	24,198	23,087	24,406	25,042

Table 2: The per cent. change on the previous quarter in the number of patients aged 75 and over who were readmitted to hospital as an emergency within 28 days of discharge

Per cent.

	1996–97			1997–98			
	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4
Northern and Yorkshire	52.4	3.0	9.9	–0.6	–14.7	18.0	2.4
Trent	–4.5	–1.2	10.1	0.8	3.8	–6.3	–1.4
Anglia and Oxford	43.2	34.0	–10.1	–7.6	–3.5	12.9	4.3
North Thames	53.0	10.5	–20.0	38.4	–15.0	14.8	10.9
South Thames	–14.8	2.7	33.3	–5.7	–11.1	8.6	4.1
South and West	–3.5	–6.4	–4.9	–1.0	9.6	2.7	0.4
West Midlands	108.3	9.6	4.7	10.2	1.0	6.3	–19.3
North West	9.1	15.5	–0.8	–0.4	–1.0	–7.0	14.7
England	15.3	6.6	3.4	2.4	–4.6	5.7	2.6

Direct Payments

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 23 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *46*, if he will publish the terms of reference and timetable for his Department's review of scope for extending direct payments to people over 65 years of age; and what arrangements have been made to consult older people in the course of the review. [45175]

Mr. Boateng: I announced a review of direct payments on 24 April 1998, whose scope and timetable were set out in Local Authority Social Services Letter (98)7, copies of which are available in the Library. Letters were sent inviting comments from various interested bodies and individuals, including voluntary groups such as Age Concern and Help the Aged.

Local Authorities (Pilot Schemes)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the pilot schemes announced since 1 May by his Department that involve local authorities in a lead or partnership capacity; if he will list each of the local authorities involved in each case; and what revenue and capital funding each local authority will receive through the pilot in (i) 1997–98, (ii) 1998–99, (iii) 1999–2000 and (iv) 2000–2001. [45334]

Mr. Boateng: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced the first wave of successful Health Action Zone pilots on 31 March 1998, *Official Report*, columns 1033–36. These are listed in Table 1. We have not yet announced the funding arrangements.

Table 1:

First Wave HAZs	*Local authorities*
Plymouth	Plymouth City Council
East London and the City	The Corporation of London London Borough of Hackney London Borough of Newham London Borough of Tower Hamlets
Manchester and Salford and Trafford	Manchester City Council Salford City Council Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council
Sandwell	Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
Bradford	Bradford Metropolitan Borough Council
Northumberland	Northumberland County Council Berwick District Council Alnwick District Council Castle Morpeth District Council Wansbeck District Council Blyth Valley District Council Tynedale District Council
Tyne and Wear	Gateshead Metropolitan District Council Sunderland City Council Newcastle City Council North Tyneside Metropolitan District Council
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	London Borough of Lambeth London Borough of Southwark London Borough of Lewisham
Luton	Luton Borough Council
South Yorkshire Coalfields	Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council
North Cumbria	Allerdale Borough Council Copeland Borough Council Carlisle City Council Cumbria County Council Eden District Council

Twelve of the thirty-five Best Value pilots, which started in April 1998, have a personal social services element. Table two lists the PSS pilots, which are expected to be self-financing. Successful bids were announced by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions which has the lead on Best Value in local government.

Table 2:

Authority	*Subject Area*
Birmingham	Services for the elderly
Bradford	Home care and domiciliary services; youth justice
Cumbria	Residential facilities; day care and home care
Exeter	Community care
Greenwich	Domiciliary care
Harrow	Domiciliary care
Leeds	Social services
Lincolnshire	Children in care; home care
Northamptonshire	Residential care for the elderly
Portsmouth	Social services
Redcar	Occupational therapy
Sunderland	Youth justice; After care

My hon. Friend the Minister for Public Health launched the Health Schools Initiative on 14 May 1998. Eight pilot health education partnerships will each receive £150,000 from the Healthy Schools Initiative. The partnerships are:

Cornwall

Doncaster

Durham

Hounslow

Manchester

Norfolk

Staffordshire

West Sussex.

Hospital Ventilation Systems

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the letter of 21 October 1997 from the Minister of State, the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn), to the hon. Member for Linlithgow, POH (2) 5437/17, what monitoring he has carried out of ventilation systems in hospitals with regard to bacteria testing. [44068]

Ms Jowell: The responsibility for monitoring ventilation systems in hospitals with regard to bacteria testing, in line with regulation, guidance, and in accordance with well developed good practice principles, is determined locally by National Health Service trusts.

Organ Transplants

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the oral answer of 20 May 1997, *Official Report*, column 505, concerning shortages of organs, what was the outcome of the talks with the United Kingdom Transplant Support Service Authority, the medical profession, the British Kidney Patients' Association and the National Kidney Federation; and what are the latest figures for organ shortage. [44070]

Ms Jowell: A publicity committee, including clinicians and people from the relevant voluntary organisations, has been set up to help the Department develop a new organ donation publicity campaign to start in the autumn. We are watching with interest a postal campaign being conducted by the British Kidney Patients Association. My noble Friend the Minister of State, Department of Health, Baroness Jay of Paddington, had discussions recently with the newly appointed chairman of the United Kingdom Transplant Support Service Authority (UKTSSA) who is giving urgent consideration to this problem with health officials. A review of UKTSSA is due this year. We will continue to consider options for the way forward in organ transplantation, working with the professional and voluntary organisations involved.

2,788 solid organ transplants were performed in the United Kingdom in 1997, of which 1,523 involved the transplantation of kidneys. At the end of May 1998, 6,474 people were awaiting organs, 5,684 of them for kidney transplants.

Health Authority and Trust Boards

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when he last met representatives of health authorities

and National Health Service trusts to discuss matters relating to the appointment of chairpersons and non-executive directors to these organisations; [45279]

(2) what guidance he has issued to health authorities and NHS trust boards on the appointment of chairpersons and non-executive directors to health authorities and trusts; [45281]

(3) what representations he has received from hon. Members and others regarding the appointment of chairpersons and non-executive directors to health authorities and NHS trust boards. [45280]

Mr. Milburn: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has not issued any guidance to health authorities and National Health Service trusts on appointments as he is responsible for the appointment of chairmen and non-executive members to health authority and trust boards. However, details of our new procedures for the appointment of non-executives and chairmen to trust and health authority boards are available in the Library. The Secretary of State has regular meetings with representatives of health authorities and NHS trusts at which the appointments process, among other issues, is discussed. Since we took office we have received a number of letters from hon. Members and others about different aspects of the NHS appointments process. We have also received over 1,400 recommendations from hon. Members alone in response to our requests for nominations of people to serve on the boards of NHS bodies.

Dr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his oral answer to the hon. Member for Cheadle (Mr. Day) of 2 June 1998, *Official Report*, columns 157–58, if he will list the Labour hon. Members who did not reply to his letter requesting nominations for trust boards last year. [44910]

Mr. Milburn: The overall picture for nominations by hon. Members for membership of National Health Service trust boards in the 1997 round of appointments is as follows:

	Labour	*Conservative*	*Liberal Democrat*
MPs invited to submit nominations	308	162	33
MPs submitting nominations	200	52	16
Nominations received	714	135	68
Per cent. MPs submitting nominations	64.9	32.1	48.5
Average nominations per MP	2.3	0.8	2.1

Hon. Members were invited to submit nominations where vacancies were due to arise at trusts which served their constituencies.

Hospital Services (London)

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has for a further review of hospital services in South West London. [45268]

Mr. Milburn: A review of burns and plastics currently provided at Queen Mary's Hospital, Roehampton has been completed and following objections by the Wandsworth Community Health Council, we are considering Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth Health Authority's recommendations.

Following the changes to services provided at Queen Mary's, Roehampton and the publication of the White Paper "The New NHS" a further review is underway on the configuration of services currently provided at the following trusts: Merton and Sutton Community National Health Service Trust; Wandsworth Community NHS Trust; Teddington Memorial NHS Trust; and Richmond, Twickenham and Roehampton NHS Trust.

A strategic review has also been initiated by the chairman and chief executives of the six south west London acute trusts and the two south west London health authorities to determine how the trusts can work together to improve health services and make best use of available resources.

Any major changes to health services in the area will be subject to public consideration.

NHS Ambulances

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the typical mileage covered by an NHS ambulance after it has been in service for seven years. [45332]

Mr. Milburn: Owing to the wide variations in conditions between different Ambulance National Health Service trusts, there is no typical mileage.

Paediatric Cardiac Services (Bristol)

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 4 June 1998, *Official Report*, column *337*, concerning paediatric cardiac surgery services at the United Bristol Healthcare NHS Trust, if a public inquiry is one of the options being considered. [45377]

Mr. Milburn: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 4 June 1998, *Official Report*, column *337*.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Access-to-work Scheme

15. **Mr. Russell Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the access-to-work scheme. [43770]

Mr. Alan Howarth: Independent research into the effectiveness of the Access to Work programme was carried out in 1995 and in 1997. Reports of the research have been published.

Sixth-form Colleges

19. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the Government's future funding for sixth-form colleges. [43774]

Mr. Byers: This Government have already announced an additional £100 million for the further education sector, including sixth-form colleges, over and above the plans of the previous Government for 1998–99. Funding for 1999–2000 and beyond will be announced later in the year.

21. **Mrs. Virginia Bottomley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will visit Godalming and Farnham sixth form colleges to discuss funding of sixth-form colleges. [43776]

Mr. Byers: My right hon. Friend presently has no plans to do so.

Drug Misuse

20. **Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps his Department has taken to provide information to primary schools on the dangers of drug misuse. [43775]

Ms Estelle Morris: Certain aspects of drug education remain a statutory requirement of the National Curriculum at all key stages, including the primary key stages. In support of the Government's recently published new 10-year anti-drugs strategy, the Department will be issuing further guidance on the provision of drug education to teachers, youth workers and other professionals later this year. The guidance will outline the vital role that primary schools can play in the very early stages of a child's school career in concentrating on the development of the skills they need to resist drugs before they are drawn into experimentation.

Higher Education (Access)

23. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to increase the opportunities for people to go on to higher education. [43779]

Ms Estelle Morris: The Government are committed to the principle that anyone who has the capability for higher education should have the opportunity to benefit from it. The funding package for higher education for 1998–99 includes £4 million to enable a start to be made on resuming growth at sub-degree level. Plans for later years will be announced in the light of the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review.

New Deal

24. **Mr. Gapes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what will be the nature of the help offered to unemployed people aged over 25 years in the pilot schemes announced in the Budget. [43780]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The New Deal pilots for unemployed people aged 25 and over will provide help and support for adults who have been unemployed for a year or more. The pilot provision will be individually tailored, and will give participants a range of help to get them back to work, including: a job with an employer supported by trial periods and an employment subsidy; job-related training; help into self-employment; and work in the voluntary sector. The Department is currently consulting widely on the details of the provision.

28. **Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on progress on the new deal in the pathfinder areas. [43784]

Mr. Andrew Smith: It is, of course, early days for this ambitious undertaking, but I am encouraged by the progress in the New Deal Pathfinder areas which started on 5 January. 22,851 clients have been invited to initial Gateway interview.

Of those who have left the Gateway;

1,176 have started unsubsidised jobs;

1,501 have started subsidised jobs;

955 have started on the Full Time Education and Training Option;

258 have started on the Voluntary Sector;

241 have started on the Environment Task Force.

New Deal was launched nationally on 6 April and early results are equally encouraging.

Further Education (East Sussex)

25. **Mr. Baker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on his Department's plans for the further education sector in East Sussex. [43781]

Mr. Byers: For the 1997–98 and 1998–99 financial years, East Sussex has received capital funding of some £23 million from Annual Capital rounds and the New Deal for Schools to support building improvements at its schools. Applications have been submitted in response to the Secretary of State's recent announcement of an extra £90 million to improve heating systems, remove outside toilets and reduce infant class sizes. We hope to announce decisions on this latest initiative later this month.

In England, the New Deal for Schools has enabled capital projects to proceed worth £115 million in 1997–98 and over £500 million in 1998–99. There are still three further phases of New Deal for Schools to come, by the end of which the Government expect that an extra £2 billion will have been spent on capital projects at schools.

School Exclusions and Truancy

26. **Ms Dari Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the publication of the social exclusion unit's first report on school exclusions and truancy. [43782]

Ms Estelle Morris: The report has highlighted the devastating effects of truancy and exclusions.

We are taking urgent action to implement the report's recommendations. These include new targets for reductions in truancy and exclusion; new financial incentives to schools to prevent exclusion; incentives to admit children excluded from other schools, and new statutory guidance to prevent schools from excluding for trivial reasons.

30. **Mr. Blizzard:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what measures he is taking to reduce truancy and exclusions in schools. [43786]

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what measures he is taking to reduce school exclusions and truancy. [43754]

Ms Estelle Morris: We are implementing the wide-ranging recommendations in the recently published report on Truancy and School Exclusion. A copy of this report has been placed in the Libraries.

My hon. Friend the Minister for School Standards will chair a cross-departmental Task Force in order to make swift progress.

Education Action Zones

27. **Mr. Hope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the progress made in developing education action zones. [43783]

Mr. Byers: The Department has now completed its round of visits to those proposals that are candidates for the 12 education action zones to start in September 1998 and the 13 to start in January 1999. We expect to make an announcement later this month.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment he has made of the potential of education action zones for raising standards in deprived areas. [43952]

Mr. Byers: Education Action Zones are a key part of the Government's strategy to drive up standards in schools. They will allow groups of schools in deprived areas to work in partnership with others to provide a better education for their pupils. They will test new ways of delivering that service.

After-school Clubs

31. **Mr. Drew:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the Government's strategy for encouraging after-school clubs in rural areas. [43787]

Mr. Alan Howarth: Our aim is to ensure good quality, affordable childcare for children aged up to 14 in every neighbourhood. We recognise that there may be particular problems in rural areas. The Green Paper, 'Meeting the Childcare Challenge' asks whether there are areas of the country which particularly require attention under the strategy.

Independent Schools

32. **Jackie Ballard:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to change the regulatory and inspection regime for independent boarding schools; and if he will make a statement. [43788]

Mr. Byers: All independent boarding schools are monitored to check compliance with their statutory duties to provide satisfactory standards of premises, accommodation, instruction, staffing, and pupil welfare. Following the consultations on Sir William Utting's report on safeguards for children living away from home, we will be announcing our plans to improve these arrangements.

Literacy

Gillian Merron: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what progress has been made in implementing the Government's literacy strategy in primary schools. [43758]

Mr. Goggins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what progress has been made in implementing the Government's literacy strategy in primary schools. [43777]

Mr. Byers: Since the beginning of the year, we have agreed literacy targets for 11 year olds by 2002 with every LEA in the country; allocated £59 million of Standards Funding to support training and development at LEA and school level; produced a detailed scheme of work for teaching literacy—300,000 copies have been distributed since the end of March to meet demand from schools; and prepared and distributed distance learning materials to every primary school in England. These materials will support the INSET training all primary schools will devote to literacy in the next school year.

Over 300 LEA appointed literacy consultants have been trained, and every primary school will be trained this term on the management of literacy at school level.

Education Authority Funding

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make arrangements to meet representatives of the E8 group of least-funded education authorities. [43785]

Mr. Byers: I have agreed to meet representatives from the E8 group of education authorities at a date to be arranged in due course.

Schoolchildren (Farm Visits)

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what guidance his Department has issued to schools and local authorities regarding visits to farms by schools. [45282]

Ms Estelle Morris: The Department wrote to schools and local education authorities in June 1997 with a checklist of the precautions they should take to ensure pupils' health and safety during visits to farms. A further reminder appears in the Department's more widely ranging draft guidance in *The Health and Safety of Pupils on Visits: A Good Practice Guide*, on which we are currently consulting. We intend to publish the final version for schools this autumn. The Department was also involved in the preparation of *Avoiding Ill Health at Open Farms: Advice to Teachers*, an information sheet recently published by the Health and Safety Executive.

Pre-school Groups

Miss Melanie Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the provision of interim funds for pre-school groups threatened with closure. [43764]

Ms Estelle Morris: Following discussions with the Pre-school Learning Alliance and other organisations, we shall shortly announce how eligible pre-schools and playgroups can apply for grant.

New Deal (Young People)

Ms Blears: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what progress he is making in securing the involvement of employers in the new deal for the young unemployed. [43763]

Mr. Andrew Smith: We are making excellent progress. I am pleased to announce that over 10,100 employers have now signed New Deal employer agreements, of which 128 are leading national employers, covering over 400 subsidiary businesses.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many participants in the New Deal for 18 to 24 year olds there were in each of the four categories available in each of the pilot areas. [43368]

Mr. Andrew Smith: On the 27 May, I made public the latest statistical data for the Pathfinder areas, for the period 5 January to 31 March 1998. This information has been placed in the Library. It is, of course, early days for this ambitious undertaking, but I am encouraged by the progress in the New Deal Pathfinder areas.

University Applications

Mr. Cranston: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the latest university applications figures. [43750]

Dr. Howells: The latest figures will be published tomorrow. I expect them to confirm that the gap between last year's and this year's applicant numbers has been narrowing and that the number of young home applicants is running above the 1997 level. This is a welcome sign that many prospective students and their parents now understand the fairness of our proposals.

Accountancy Students

Mr. Pearson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much was spent by the Further Education Funding Council in 1997–98 in support of students studying for accountancy qualifications. [43432]

Dr. Howells: In 1995–96, the latest year for which information is available, total expenditure by the Council in support of students studying for accountancy qualifications was £34 million.

Mr. Pearson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the current unit cost of providing Further Education Funding Council supported training for the *(a)* CIMA and *(b)* ACCA accounting qualifications. [43356]

Dr. Howells: In 1995–96, the latest year for which information is available, the Further Education Funding Council provided an average of £610 in support of CIMA accountancy qualifications and an average of £630 in support of ACCA accountancy qualifications.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps he is taking to ensure TECs are accountable for their spending [43112]

Dr. Howells: As private companies delivering public services, TECs have a responsibility to be fully accountable organisations. We believe the arrangements we have put in place, including those in the TEC contract, provide a sound basis for accounting for public funds spent through TECs. As part of the review of the future role of TECs, which the Secretary of State announced on 13 May, we will be looking at the way we fund and contract with TECs to ensure that the funding system properly supports the achievement of our objectives and provides best possible value for money.

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the role of (i) monitoring systems, (ii) evaluation and (iii) performance indicators to measure the efficiency and effectiveness of TECs; and if he will make a statement. [43110]

Dr. Howells: DfEE has implemented a research and evaluation programme on TECs as policy delivery mechanisms. Studies have been commissioned on the role of TEC Boards, relationships with stakeholders, employers' views of TECs and their services, use of local flexibility and discretionary funding. These are available in the House of Commons library. Through its monitoring systems, the Department receives monthly information on TEC programmes. Performance indicators are publicised each year on a number of measures of outcomes for trainees, including on equal opportunities.

Mr. Healey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when he expects to issue new strategic guidance to TECs. [42677]

Dr. Howells: The Government plan to issue new Strategic Guidance to TECs in the autumn.

School Inspections

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many schools in England were placed into the special measures category following OFSTED inspections in 1997. [44697]

Mr. Byers: In 1997, 242 schools in England were judged by HMCI to require special measures. Five of those schools no longer require special measures and five have been closed.

Special Educational Needs

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many referrals since 1 September 1994 have been made to his Department under section 99 of the Education Act 1993 and section 497 of the Education 1996 regarding failure of local education authorities to discharge their statutory duties towards children with special educational needs; and in how many cases action has been taken by his Department on behalf of parents which has resulted in local education authorities discharging their legal obligations. [45014]

Ms Estelle Morris: Since 1994, the Department has received annually some 1,500 letters from parents about special educational provision for their child. Few specify whether they are making a formal complaint under the legislation mentioned; some are complaints about a school rather than an LEA; but in every case the Department investigates the parent's concerns until it is clear either that there is no breach of a statutory duty, or appropriate remedial action has been taken, in some cases following a formal direction by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many children in Cumbria were statemented; and what was the total funding available for their needs in each of the last 10 years. [44863]

Ms Estelle Morris: The number of statements maintained by Cumbria in January of each year was as follows:

Statements maintained in January by Cumbria—1989–1997

Year	*Amount*
1989	1,510
1990	1,511
1991	1,708
1992	2,049
1993	2,076
1994	2,506
1995	2,660
1996	2,874
1997	2,642

Figures are taken from Cumbria Local Education Authority's returns to the Department. They include all pupils statemented by Cumbria LEA, including those placed outside Cumbria, and exclude pupils with statements maintained by other LEAs who are in Cumbria. Figures before January 1989 are not readily available.

Expenditure information is not available on a consistent basis for this period. In 1995–96, the most recent year for which Cumbria have supplied full information, their net expenditure on provision in support of pupils with statements was £11,078,000.

Further Education Funding

Mr. Michael J. Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations have been received supporting single value funding for full-time students aged 16 to 19 years. [43682]

Dr. Howells: We have received representations supporting greater equity of funding from the Further Education Sector, and right hon. Members and hon. Members.

Wheelchair Users (Welfare to Work)

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what inter-departmental meetings have been held to consider how severely-disabled people can be enabled to participate in Welfare to Work through having their clinically-assessed needs for indoor/outdoor powered wheelchairs met; [43372]

(2) what action his Department is taking to ensure that severely disabled people, with clinically-assessed needs for indoor and outdoor powered wheelchairs have these needs met to enable them to participate in Welfare to Work. [43373]

Mr. Alan Howarth: The Department has close contact with the Department of Health on a range of issues including the development of the New Deal for Disabled People.

Clinically assessed need for severely disabled people to have access to indoor/outdoor powered wheelchairs is a matter for the Department of Health. Between 1996 and 2000, the Department of Health is making an additional £50 million available to NHS wheelchair services to enable them to provide electrically powered indoor/outdoor wheelchairs for those severely disabled people who can benefit from them.

This, together with Access to Work, will help people who need such wheelchairs in order to lead a full working and independent life.

Schools (Cumbria)

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate he has made of *(a)* the extra number of teachers which will be required in Cumbria in order to reduce all class sizes to 30 and *(b)* the consequent funding required in Cumbria over the next three years. [44862]

Mr. Byers: Cumbria education authority has been allocated £146,000 to keep 600 infant pupils out of classes over 30 from this September. For future years, the LEA will have to submit to the Secretary of State in the autumn an implementation plan setting out, among other things, the number of extra teachers needed to reduce infant class sizes in the schools in its area by September 2001. Funding for the authority to reduce class sizes in those years will be determined in due course.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment which schools in Cumbria did not submit *(a)* papers and *(b)* results for the (i) Key Stage 2 tests and (ii) Key Stage 3 tests in 1997. [44864]

Ms Estelle Morris: All maintained mainstream schools in Cumbria submitted 1997 Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 National Curriculum Assessment results. It is not possible to determine the number of special schools which will not submit results, as it is impossible to differentiate between those schools whose pupils were all disapplied from the National Curriculum Assessments, and therefore had no results to return, and those schools which chose not to return results. Participation by independent schools in the National Curriculum Assessment tests is voluntary and, therefore, they have not been included in this analysis. It is not possible to differentiate between results and papers.

Graduates

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate he has made of the number of people who will graduate from United Kingdom universities and places of higher education in 1998. [44696]

Dr. Howells: Our latest published forecasts of the annual numbers of new first-degree graduates were reproduced in Chart 3.1, Report 7 of 'Higher Education in the Learning Society' produced by The National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education in July 1997. The Department produces forecasts of graduates from British institutions only.

It is estimated that around 230,000 home domiciled students will graduate from British higher education institutions in academic year 1997–98.

Further Education

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many students currently attend further education colleges *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time. [44693]

Dr. Howells: Provisional figures for 1997 are 736,800 full-time and 1,670,000 part-time students studying on 1 November 1997 in further education colleges in England.

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to end the incorporated status of further education colleges. [44695]

Dr. Howells: None.

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many local education authorities have discontinued discretionary awards to further education college students. [44798]

Dr. Howells: The latest available information on discretionary awards made by local education authorities in England and Wales to further education students is for academic year 1996–97. Provisional information indicates that four authorities did not make any discretionary awards to further education students and a further two made no new awards. In addition, four authorities were unable to supply full information.

School Leavers

Yvette Cooper: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what percentage of 18 year olds leaving further education entered *(a)* full-time or part-time education, *(b)* job-related training (Government or employer-based), *(c)* employment without a training element and *(d)* unemployment in (i) England and (ii) Wakefield Local Education Authority area in each year since 1988. [44288]

Dr. Howells: The proportion of all 18 year olds in the given categories are shown in the table. It is not possible to indicate how many of these had previously been in further education, post-16 schooling or other routes. Information on 18 year olds in Wakefield could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Participation and labour market status of 18 year olds, England, end 1988 to end 1996

Percentage

	End 1988	*End 1989*	*End 1990*	*End 1991*	*End 1992*	*End 1993*	*End 1994*	*End 1995*	*End 1996*
England									
Full-time education[1]	19	21	24	28	33	37	38	39	38
Part-time education or training excluding job related training	6	6	6	7	8	8	8	8	9
Job-related training[2]	16	16	16	15	14	14	13	13	13
of which full-time education[3]	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0
of which part-time education	8	9	9	8	7	6	5	4	4
Employment without training or study	51	48	40	34	28	26	28	27	28
ILO unemployment without training or study	6	6	10	10	12	11	8	9	7
Economically inactive without training or study[4]	2	4	5	6	5	5	5	4	6

[1] Includes those in education who are also in job related training, unemployment or inactive. The size of the overlap between education and job related training is shown at[3]
[2] Includes all in Government-supported training and employer funded training; including the overlap with those in full-time education
[3] Also shown in the full-time education category
[4] Those not in employment nor seeking work on the ILO unemployment definition
Sources:
Education Censuses, TECs' Management Information Database, the Trainee Databases and the Labour Force Survey

Yvette Cooper: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what percentage of school leavers at age 16 years entered *(a)* full-time or part-time education, *(b)* job-related training (Government or employer-based), *(c)* employment without a training element and *(d)* unemployment in (i) England and (ii) Wakefield Local Education Authority area in each year since 1988. [44287]

Dr. Howells: The proportion of 16 year olds in each category is shown in the table.

Participation of 16 year olds, England, end 1988 to 1996

Percentage

	End 1988	*End 1989*	*End 1990*	*End 1991*	*End 1992*	*End 1993*	*End 1994*	*End 1995*	*End 1996*
England									
Full-time education[1]	52	55	59	67	70	73	71	71	70
Part-time education and training excluding job related training	5	4	3	3	3	3	5	4	5
Job-related training[2]	26	26	22	19	16	14	14	13	12
of which full-time education[3]	2	2	2	2	1	1	2	1	1
of which part-time education	13	12	10	7	6	5	4	3	3
Employment without training or study	14	12	8	5	6	5	7	6	7
ILO unemployment without training or study	3	3	5	7	5	4	3	4	5
Economically inactive without training or study[4]	2	3	4	2	2	2	2	3	2

Participation of 16 year olds, England, end 1988 to 1996

Percentage

	End 1988	End 1989	End 1990	End 1991	End 1992	End 1993	End 1994	End 1995	End 1996
Wakefield LEA									
Full-time education	52	55	53	59	65	66	65	67	[5]—
Part-time education	11	10	10	8	7	7	8	4	[5]—
Government supported training	[5]—	[5]—	[5]—	[5]—	[5]—	[5]—	16	14	[5]—

[1] Includes those in education who are also in job related training, unemployment or inactive. The size of the overlap between education and job related training is shown at footnote 3.
[2] Includes all in Government-supported training and employer-funded training; including the overlap with those in full-time education.
[3] Also shown in the full-time education category
[4] Those not in employment nor seeking work on the ILO unemployment definition
[5] Not available
Sources:
Education Censuses, TECs' Management Information Database, the Trainee Databases and the Labour Force Survey

Teachers' Pay

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what factors led his Department to stage the pay award for teachers for 1998–99; and if he will make a statement. [44374]

Mr. Byers: The Government have taken a common approach to staging for all the pay review body group's recommendations this year. Public Sector pay settlements need to be fair, affordable within existing spending plans, consistent with the good inflation prospects, and responsible in terms of a general approach to pay throughout the economy that will contribute to higher growth and more jobs.

Veterinary Medicine

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many places there are for students of veterinary medicine in each university providing such courses; how many students currently studying on such courses are from *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* the EU and *(c)* overseas; what estimate he has made of the number of graduates in veterinary science required in the United Kingdom in each of the next four years; and what assessment he has made of the extent to which adequate numbers of veterinary surgeons will qualify in each of the next four years to meet demand. [44558]

Dr. Howells: The number of students on first degree veterinary medicine courses in the UK for 1997–98 is given in the table.

	Home	*EU*	*Overseas*	*Total*
Nene College	7	1	0	8
The University of Bristol	333	1	22	356
The University of Cambridge	373	9	2	384
The University of Liverpool	339	8	70	417
The Royal Veterinary College	458	6	62	526
University of Edinburgh	381	15	49	445
University of Glasgow	372	9	28	409
Total	2,263	49	233	2,545

The Government do not assess requirements for veterinary student places. Under the current funding arrangements, institutions are free to respond to market forces when deciding which courses they will offer and how many students they will enrol on each programme. However, the Royal College of Veterinary Students, the British Veterinary Association and the Society of Practising Veterinary Surgeons are jointly conducting a survey of the manpower requirements of the profession, the results of which are expected soon.

Aggregated Schools Budget (Hereford and Worcester)

Mr. Michael J. Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the aggregated schools budget for *(a)* 1992–93, *(b)* 1993–94, *(c)* 1995–96, *(d)* 1996–97 and *(e)* 1996–97 for Hereford and Worcester Local Education Authority (i) in cash terms and (ii) at 1998 prices. [44971]

Mr. Byers: The table shows the amount of the Aggregated Schools Budget for Hereford and Worcester local education authority for the financial years 1992–93 to 1997–98 inclusive, both in cash terms and at 1998 prices.

Hereford and Worcester LEA

£000

Aggregated schools budget	*Actual*	*1998 Prices*
1992–93	146,187	165,898
1993–94	146,957	162,062
1994–95	157,182	170,765
1995–96	157,335	166,316
1996–97	164,598	169,042
1997–98	168,404	168,404

Delegated Schools Budget

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the amount of the delegated schools budget spent *(a)* per primary pupil and *(b)* per secondary pupil in each local education authority area for the last 10 years for which figures are available. [44461]

Mr. Byers: The table shows, for England, the amount of the Aggregated Schools Budget per primary pupil and per secondary pupil for the financial year 1997–98, taken from the section 122 Budget Statements published

by local education authorities for that year. Figures for earlier years could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Aggregated schools budget per pupil—England—1997–98

	Primary school	Secondary school
City of London	2,968	0
Camden	2,060	2,845
Greenwich	1,909	2,604
Hackney	2,078	2,772
Hammersmith and Fulham	2,103	2,868
Islington	1,982	2,720
Kensington and Chelsea	2,384	3,241
Lambeth	2,325	3,035
Lewisham	1,995	2,810
Southwark	1,995	2,608
Tower Hamlets	2,014	2,590
Wandsworth	1,935	2,521
Westminster	2,051	2,736
Barking/Dagenham	1,790	2,332
Barnet	1,725	2,456
Bexley	1,408	2,202
Brent	1,906	2,583
Bromley	1,630	2,196
Croydon	1,715	2,379
Ealing	1,796	2,303
Enfield	1,648	2,319
Haringey	1,798	2,508
Harrow	1,827	2,625
Havering	1,598	2,478
Hillingdon	1,684	2,549
Hounslow	1,867	2,295
Kingston	1,608	2,212
Merton	1,758	2,281
Newham	1,587	2,415
Redbridge	1,553	2,378
Richmond	1,787	2,312
Sutton	1,666	2,358
Waltham Forest	1,819	2,560
Birmingham	1,716	2,313
Coventry	1,574	2,252
Dudley	1,578	2,174
Sandwell	1,496	2,134
Solihull	1,560	2,123
Walsall	1,493	2,139
Wolverhampton	1,464	2,242
Knowsley	1,570	2,191
Liverpool	1,509	2,086
St. Helens	1,452	2,154
Sefton	1,483	2,251
Wirral	1,453	2,024
Bolton	1,432	2,050
Bury	1,368	2,000
Manchester	1,463	2,218
Oldham	1,470	2,149
Rochdale	1,424	2,117
Salford	1,484	2,159
Stockport	1,458	2,015
Tameside	1,350	1,875
Trafford	1,284	2,161
Wigan	1,473	2,231
Barnsley	1,288	1,958
Doncaster	1,483	2,189
Rotherham	1,452	1,985
Sheffield	1,452	1,959
Bradford	1,479	1,752
Calderdale	1,420	2,119
Kirklees	1,412	2,043
Leeds	1,615	2,171
Wakefield	1,377	1,864
Gateshead	1,486	2,092

Aggregated schools budget per pupil—England—1997–98

	Primary school	Secondary school
Newcastle	1,485	2,112
North Tyneside	1,463	2,012
South Tyneside	1,436	1,963
Sunderland	1,525	2,107
Isles of Scilly	2,537	4,361
Bath and North East Somerset	1,615	2,235
Bristol	1,619	2,399
North Somerset	1,523	2,218
South Gloucestershire	2,239	2,242
Hartlepool	1,363	2,045
Middlesbrough	1,408	2,218
Redcar and Cleveland	1,435	2,136
Stockton on Tees	1,423	2,074
Hull	1,524	2,108
East Riding	1,503	2,128
North East Lincolnshire	1,538	2,152
North Lincolnshire	1,519	2,089
North Yorkshire	1,486	2,198
York	1,415	2,141
Luton	1,476	2,223
Milton Keynes	1,394	2,310
Derby City	1,236	2,118
Poole	1,391	2,016
Bournemouth	1,320	1,985
Darlington	1,316	1,993
Brighton and Hove	1,475	2,211
Portsmouth	1,637	2,213
Southampton	1,670	2,276
Leicester City	1,450	2,051
Rutland	1,716	0
Stoke-on-Trent	1,424	1,984
Swindon	1,376	2,079
Bedfordshire	1,447	1,965
Berkshire	1,528	2,187
Buckinghamshire	1,367	2,221
Cambridgeshire	1,389	2,030
Cheshire	1,486	2,142
Cornwall	1,473	2,042
Cumbria	1,495	2,147
Derbyshire	1,275	2,026
Devon	1,466	2,127
Dorset	1,445	1,956
Durham	1,414	2,045
East Sussex	1,498	2,257
Essex	1,518	2,264
Gloucestershire	1,435	2,008
Hampshire	1,609	2,164
Hereford/Worcester	1,456	1,943
Hertfordshire	1,500	2,247
Isle of Wight	1,544	1,925
Kent	1,480	2,142
Lancashire	1,430	2,098
Leicestershire	1,495	2,081
Lincolnshire	1,486	2,257
Norfolk	1,583	2,302
Northamptonshire	1,469	2,048
Northumberland	1,474	1,863
Nottinghamshire	1,290	2,112
Oxfordshire	1,534	2,018
Shropshire	1,394	2,249
Somerset	1,514	2,082
Staffordshire	1,367	1,936
Suffolk	1,295	2,579
Surrey	1,642	2,102
Warwickshire	1,444	2,035
West Sussex	1,505	2,191
Wiltshire	1,436	2,023
England average	1,521	2,165

Social Exclusion

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will estimate how many young people aged 18 to 24 years regarded by the Government as socially excluded are not eligible for the New Deal. [43969]

Mr. Andrew Smith: No such estimate is available. However, the Government believe that their Welfare to Work policy, of which the New Deals form part, together with the work of the Social Exclusion Unit, provide extensive help for those at risk of social exclusion. Depending on their circumstances, individuals may have access to help as part of the New Deal for the Young Unemployed, or the New Deals for Lone Parents or People with Disabilities.

Under the New Deal for the Young Unemployed, individuals likely to be particularly disadvantaged in the labour market—such as those with disabilities; returners to the labour market; ex-regulars in HM forces; ex-offenders; lone parents; people whose first language is not English, Welsh or Gaelic; those with reading, writing or numeracy problems; those who have become unemployed due to large-scale redundancies; and those who have recently left local authority care—can get early access if they are claiming Jobseeker's Allowance. The Employment Service will also have discretion to enable early access to others where their New Deal adviser believes they are at particular disadvantage in their search for work.

There are also a range of other policies being developed to tackle disadvantage and social exclusion, including the New Deal for Partners and the New Deal for Communities.

Disabled People

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list by disability for each month since December 1996 the number of people who sought Access to Work support in the first six weeks of their employment. [45031]

Mr. Alan Howarth *[holding answer 9 June 1998]:* Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its Chief Executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Peter Collins to Mr. Mark Oaten, dated 10 June 1998:

As the Employment Service is an Executive Agency, the Secretary of State has asked Leigh Lewis to reply to your question about the number of people who sought Access to Work support in the first six weeks of their employment since December 1996, listed by disability. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to Mr. Lewis as Chief Executive of the Employment Agency.

I am afraid that we do not hold information centrally on the number of people who seek Access to Work support in the first six weeks of employment broken down by disability. However, recent research carried out for the Employment Service in 1997 has provided an analysis by disability of people applying for Access to Work support. The results are set out in the attached table. It is based on a sample of 492 Access to Work applicants who applied for support between 1 February and 31 May 1997.

I am sorry that I cannot be more helpful.

Clients receiving Access to Work support by type of disability[1]

	Percentage
Problems or disabilities connected with the arms or hands	17
Problems or disabilities connected with the legs or feet	21
Problems or disabilities connected with the back or neck	29
Difficulty in seeing	18
Difficulty in hearing	18
Severe disfigurement	—[2]
Skin conditions, allergies	2
Chest or breathing problems, asthma, bronchitis	3
Heart, blood pressure or blood circulation problems	2
Stomach, liver, kidney or digestive problems	1
Diabetes	—[2]
Depression, bad nerves or anxiety	1
Epilepsy	3
Specific learning difficulties	3
Severe learning difficulties (mental handicap)	1
Mental illness or suffer from phobia, panics or other nervous diseases	1
Progressive illness not included elsewhere	7
Other health problems or disabilities	17

[1] IES Survey of ATW applicants, 1997
[2] Not sufficient numbers with this category of disability to provide a percentage

Nursery Education (Worcester)

Mr. Michael J. Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many nursery places were available for 4 year olds in Worcester in each year between 1979 and 1997. [43681]

Ms Estelle Morris: Figures for Worcester Local Education Authority (LEA) area are not available.

For Hereford and Worcester LEA area, there were 1,879 four year olds in maintained nursery schools and nursery classes in maintained primary schools in January 1997; there were 1,613 in January 1996. Figures for four year olds prior to January 1996 were not collected centrally.

Figures for pupils under five years of age in maintained nursery schools and nursery classes in maintained primary schools in the Hereford and Worcester LEA area in January 1981 through 1997 are shown in the table. Figures prior to January 1981 are not available.

Numbers of pupils under five years of age[1] *in maintained nursery schools and nursery classes in maintained primary schools January 1979–1997*

Hereford and Worcester local education authority area	*Number*
1979	—[2]
1980	—[2]
1981	719
1982	799
1983	797
1984	964
1985	941
1986	997
1987	909
1988	974
1989	998

Numbers of pupils under five years of age[1] in maintained nursery schools and nursery classes in maintained primary schools January 1979–1997

Hereford and Worcester local education authority area	*Number*
1990	1,204
1991	1,289
1992	1,274
1993	1,296
1994	1,287
1995	1,682
1996	2,179
1997	2,639

[1] Excludes those pupils who became 5 years of age by 1 January
[2] Not available

SOCIAL SECURITY

Industrial Injury Benefit (Bladder Disease)

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many applicants have been successful in claiming industrial injury disablement benefit for prescribed diseases for C23 primary neoplasm of the epithelial lining of the urinary tract in each of the last 10 years; and how many of the *(a)* successful and *(b)* unsuccessful applicants were in the printing and related industries. [44352]

Mr. Denham: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the tables.

The information on claims has only been collected in this form since 1995 and cannot be broken down by industry. The information on assessments has been collected since 1990 and can be broken down by industry.

Number of claims to industrial injury disablement benefit prescribed disease C23 (papilloma of the bladder)

Period	*Number*
April 1995-March 1996	110
April 1996-March 1997	100
April 1997-March 1998	50

Source:
DSS Analytical Services Division, 10 per cent. sample data.

Figures for assessments, i.e. those whose disablement has been assessed by a doctor are available from April 1990.

Numbers of diagnoses of prescribed disease C23 (Papilloma of the bladder)

	All industries		*Printing and related industries*	
Year	*Under 14 per cent.*	*14 per cent. or over*	*Under 14 per cent.*	*14 per cent. or over*
1990–91	5	7	0	0
1991–92	4	14	0	0
1992–93	13	19	0	0
1993–94	4	23	0	0
1994–95	10	21	0	1
1995–96	1	17	0	0
1996–97	6	22	1	1

Note:
Benefit is payable only if a person's disablement is assessed at 14 per cent. or more.
Source:
DSS Analytical Services Division 100 per cent. count.

Local Authorities (Pilot Schemes)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will list the pilot schemes announced since 1 May by her Department that involve local authorities in a lead or partnership capacity; if she will list each of the local authorities involved in each case; and what revenue and capital funding each local authority will receive through the pilot in (i) 1997–98, (ii) 1998–99, (iii) 1999–2000 and (iv) 2000–2001. [45338]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Local Authorities have an important role to play in the development of a Social Security system that promotes the wider aims of welfare reform work.

Also, in my Written Answer on 15 May 1998, *Official Report*, column *124*, we announced that the Department had begun two prototypes to test integrated service delivery, in partnership with Camden local authority and Lewisham local authority (LA).

The Camden prototype aims to provide a single point of contact to lone parents who are claiming Income Support, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit and who make applications for child support. Camden will not receive revenue or capital funding as the prototype is reciprocal and aims to provide benefits to both partners as well as for the lone parents themselves.

The Lewisham prototype aims to provide better sharing of information and will provide an integrated service to customers by the co-ordination of visits to this Department's and LA customers and the provision of advice and information from central points within the borough.

During 1997–98, Lewisham received funding of £73,500. £19,000 of this amount was required for the implementation of video-conferencing links between the Benefits Agency (BA), the Local Authority and Public Video Booths. The remainder was required for information technology development, project management, communications and training costs. A similar bid has been submitted for 1998–99 and is currently under consideration.

No other specific initiatives have been announced since these, although Local Authorities can apply for funding to be provided in relation to a number of initiatives. These include, for example, funding to assist with the resourcing of fraud investigation work, joint BA/LA anti-fraud activities and improved liaison/information sharing (e.g. installation of terminals with access to this Department's systems within LAs).

Paternity Pay

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment her Department has made of the advantages of introducing statutory paternity pay; and if she will make a statement. [43608]

Mr. Denham: The Government support a strong family-friendly culture in the workplace. Family-friendly employment policies are good for parents—mothers and fathers—good for children, good for business and good for the economy. We are working with employers, voluntary organisations and trade unions to promote family-friendly policies and encourage best practice. We are also introducing for the first time a framework of

rights for employees—these rights will include time off for mothers and fathers at the time of the birth, as well as time off for parents when their children are taken ill. We are reviewing maternity pay and considering the introduction of statutory paternity pay as part of our wider review of family-friendly working arrangements.

Sick and Disabled People

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will establish a database of case studies of good employment practices, available to disabled jobseekers and employers as part of the New Deal for Sick and Disabled People. [43557]

Mr. Denham: The evaluation of the New Deal for Disabled People will include research with employers and disabled jobseekers into employment practices affecting disabled people. The results of this research will be published, and will be available to disabled jobseekers, employers and others with an interest.

Laryngectomy Patients

Mr. Alan Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will ensure that laryngectomy patients automatically qualify for disability benefits; what representations she has received on this issue; and if she will make a statement. [44389]

Mr. Denham: We have received no recent representations from people with laryngectomies or from any organisations representing laryngectomy patients.

Normal eligibility rules apply to people with laryngectomies who claim a disability benefit. Entitlement to Disability Living Allowance and Attendance Allowance is based not on specific disabilities, but on the effects that a person's disability has on their need for help with personal care and/or mobility.

Reviews

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will list, for each of the last four years, the departmental inquiries and reviews instigated by Ministers which have been chaired by individuals outside her Department; and in each case if he will give the date of establishment and the name of the chairman. [44364]

Mr. Field: The reviews instigated by Ministers in this Department are listed in the table.

Inquiry/review	*Established*	*Chairman*
War pensions: review of the scientific basis of the assessment of noise-induced sensorineural hearing loss	June 1997	Sir Kenneth Calman, Chief Medical Officer
Pension provision group	September 1997	Tom Ross, Aon Consulting

INDEX TO THE

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

SIXTH SERIES

OFFICIAL REPORT

SESSION 1997–98

VOLUME 313

1st June—11th June 1998

SCOPE OF THE INDEX, ARRANGEMENT AND ABBREVIATIONS

This index is derived from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Information System (POLIS), and the subject terms used are based on those used in POLIS. There are often changes in column numbering, etc., between the daily part or weekly Hansard (which simply collects together the daily parts without revision) and the bound volume. The index for the bound volume is revised to take account of these changes and cannot therefore, be used in connection with the daily part or weekly Hansard. For these versions use the Fortnightly Index.

Scope and arrangement of the Index

Oral and Written Parliamentary Questions are indexed under subject headings and the names of Members asking and Ministers replying to them. Questions are not listed under the names of Departments replying. Departmental listings can be arrived at indirectly by looking under the names of the Minister(s) of that Department. There are, however, the headings 'Northern Ireland', 'Scotland', and 'Wales' under which one can find not only most Questions answered by the Northern Ireland Office, Scottish Office, Welsh Office but also Questions about these areas of the United Kingdom which are answered by other Departments. Ministerial statements are indexed under subject headings, under 'Ministerial statements' and the names of Ministers making them and Members speaking on them. General debates are indexed under broad subject headings and under the names of all Members and Ministers taking part. Debates on legislation (Bills, Orders, Regulations etc.) are indexed under the name of the Bill, Statutory Instruments etc, under subject headings and under the names of those taking part.

Rulings and Statements by Speaker and deputies are brought together under the heading 'Speaker's rulings and statements'.

Other contributions by Speaker and deputies appear under the heading Speaker.

Opposition Day Debates and Estimates Day Debates and Standing Order No. 10 applications are listed under those respective headings and under subject headings too.

The date of each item except Parliamentary Questions is inserted immediately before the reference.

Members' names are given in the form by which they prefer to be known and are printed in bold italics. Under their names, entries are arranged under one of the two headings *Debates, etc.* (to include interventions on statements, points of order and so on) or *Questions.*

Abbreviations

Bills 1R = first reading, 2R = second reading, Money res = money resolution, Comm = Committee stage, Rep = Report stage, 3R = third reading, amendt/amendts = amendment/amendments, * = matter taken formally, without debate.

Column numbers followed by the letter W refer to Written Questions. These appear at the end of each daily part or volume with their own sequence of column numbers printed in italics.

A49
Road works 155w

Abbott, Ms Diane
Debates etc.
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep adjourned (08.06.98) 809, 814, 816, 818
Questions
Hong Kong, Elections 362
Millennium Exhibition, Finance 15–6
Open government 620w
Pensioners, Means tested benefits 697

Abortion
135w, 605w

Access courses
New deal schemes 138w

Access funds
203w

Access to countryside
Liability for animals 518w

"Access to Justice with Conditional Fees Consultation Paper"
301w

"Access to the Open Countryside in England and Wales Consultation Paper"
631w

Access to work programme
543w, 692w, 707–8w
Wheelchairs 365–6w

Accidents
Customs and Excise 499
Inquiries 4w
Legal costs 4w

Accountants
Training 697w

Admission charges
Millennium Exhibition 183w

Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment
5w

Advisory services
NHS Executive 239w

Aerials
Planning permission 574–5w

Aerospace industry
Defence procurement 227–8w

Afghanistan
Arms embargoes 349w
Human rights 461w
Overseas aid 39w

Africa
Arms trade 126w
Visas 346–7w

After school clubs
New Opportunities Fund 10
Rural areas 695w

Age discrimination
Health services 685w

Agenda 2000
Rural areas 321w

Agenda 21
(03.06.98) 476–84

Aggregates
24w

Agricultural land
Waste disposal 28w, 420w

Agricultural products
Export rebates 454–5w

Agricultural subsidies
455–6w
Administrative costs 185w
Beekeeping 247–8w, 275w
Euro 453w
Northern Ireland 185w
Sheep 531w
Tobacco 344w, 530–1w

Agriculture
493
Exchange rates 492
Harmonisation of standards 491–2

Ainger, Mr Nick
Questions
Access funds 203w
Seas and oceans, Nature conservation 1–3w

Ainsworth, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
National Lottery Bill, Rep and 3R (01.06.98) 113–6
Sports (05.06.98) 674, 680

Air accidents
Chinook helicopters 183w

Air bags
Aircraft 154w

Air force bases
102w

Air pollution
Asthma 128–9w
Carbon monoxide 211w
Health education 167
Ozone 415–6w

Air pollution control
Carbon dioxide 211–2w, 299w
Fossil fuels 211w
Greenhouse effect 511–2w

Air Quality Standards Expert Panel
580w

Air routes
Regional airports 580w

Air safety
635w

Air traffic control
West Drayton 523–4w

Air transport
Transport of radioactive materials 631w

Air travel
Duty free allowances 21w, 570–1w

Aircraft
Air bags 154w

Aircraft noise
635w

Alcoholic drinks
Children 309w

Alcoholic drinks duties
Beer 326w

Alcoholism
Medical treatments 336–7w

Algeria
Human rights 611–2w
Visas 459–60w

Allan, Mr Richard
Debates etc.
House of Commons procedure (04.06.98) 565, 576–7
Referendums (03.06.98) 283–6, 291–2
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep adjourned (08.06.98) 830

Allan, Mr Richard*—*continued
Questions
Home Office, Private finance initiative 51–2w
Inquiries, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 559w
Inquiries, Dept of Social Security 712w
Inquiries, President of the Council 509w
Inquiries, Welsh Office 588–9w
Prison population, Foreigners 567–8w

Allan, Timothy
British Sky Broadcasting 91w

Allison, Clive
148w

Alternative energy
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 493w
EC action 507w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 526–8w
Non-fossil fuel obligation 228–9w
Treasury 440w

Alternative medicine
538w
East London 605w
Medical research 538w

Ambulance services
Performance standards 537w

Ambulances
692w

Amess, Mr David
Questions
Open government 620w
Retirement pensions 467w

Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Debates etc.
Electoral systems (02.06.98) 171–9, 188, 205

Anderson, Mr Donald
Debates etc.
European Council (11.06.98) 1235, 1242–6, 1281
Nuclear weapons tests (01.06.98) 25
Questions
North Korea 325–6w

Animal experiments
Cosmetics 566w
Primates 644–5w
Transport of animals 644–5w

Animal feed
Antibiotics 76w, 494

Animal products
Import controls 22w

Animal welfare
495
EC trade 248w
Livestock 659–60w
Pigs 534w
Poultry 73–4w
Protection from Harassment Act 1997 646w
Protest 646w
Slaughterhouses 533–4w

Antibiotics
495
Animal feed 76w, 494

Antismoking campaign
Northern Ireland 375w
Scotland 260–1w
Wales 324w
Young people 260–1w, 324w, 375w, 685w

Apache AH-64 helicopter
639w

"Appraisal and the Environment"
300w

Arable area payments scheme
201–2w
Suffolk 452w

Archaeological sites
Public buildings 44w

Areas of outstanding natural beauty
579w

Argentina
Arms embargoes 246w

Argyll and Bute
Educational finance 432w

Armed conflict
Kosovo 360, 1071
Museums and galleries 8

Armed forces
Germany 491w

Armed forces casualties
95–6w, 105–6w

Armed forces catering services
Beef 95w

Armed forces civilians
Skill shortages 394w

Armed forces deployment
609–11w
Bosnia-Herzegovina 609w
Iraq 607w
Persian Gulf 608–9w
Sierra Leone 97–101w, 182w, 314w

Armed forces housing
393w
Kingston 422w

Armed forces reserves
NATO countries 491–2w

Armed forces strength
Wales 492w

Armed forces training
Costs 101–2w
Defence equipment 489w, 638–9w
Germany 489w
Indonesia 102–3w

Armed forces uniforms
102w

Armed forces women
312w

Arms embargoes
Afghanistan 349w
Argentina 246w
China 246–7w
Iran 245–6w

Arms exports
Export licensing 594w

Arms to Sierra Leone Inquiry
679w

Arms trade
355, 421–3w
Africa 126w
EC action 147w, 240–1w, 488w
Indonesia 151–2w, 227w, 240w
Nigeria 459w
Restricted Enforcement Unit 317–8w, 676–7w
Sierra Leone 92w, 142–5w, 240w, 301w, 317–8w, 345–6w, 424–5w, 456–7w, 586–7w, 616–7w, 653w, 664w, 682–4w, 1068–70
Taiwan 349w
Trade promotion 422w

Armstrong, Hilary, Minister of State for Local Government and Housing, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions
Questions
Council tax, Second homes 509–10w
Leasehold housing, Service charges 158–9w
Local government finance 511w, 857–8
Non-domestic rates, Debt collection 374–5w
Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council, Government grants 579w
Standard spending assessments 512w, 861
Standard spending assessments, Leicestershire 512w

Army
607w

Army Air Force and Naval Discipline Acts (Continuation) Order 1998
Debates etc.
(08.06.98) 846

Army bases
York 103w

Army in Northern Ireland
Prisoners 359, 663w

Army strength
606w

Art works
4
Greater London 124w
VAT 3

Artificial insemination
Cattle 535–6w

Arts Council of England
2–3, 46w

Arts finance
Theatres 1–2
Wales 589w

Arts sponsorship
Scotland 581w

Asbestos
Health hazards 521–2w
Import controls 517w

Ascension Island
247w

Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Debates etc.
Electoral systems (02.06.98) 192, 194
Questions
Kosovo, Armed conflict 360, 1071

Ashford and St Peter's Hospital NHS Trust
Managers 410w

Asia
Economic situation 91w

Asia-Europe meeting
93–4w

ASSIST programme
Indonesia 487w

Assisted places scheme
628w

"Assisting and Encouraging Crime"
220–1w

Association of Chief Police Officers
381–2w
Company law 320w

Association of Chief Police Officers (Scotland)
83w, 430w

Association of Chief Police Officers (Scotland)—continued
Finance 83w

Asthma
Air pollution 128–9w
Hospital admissions 128w
Scotland 85w
Wales 62–4w

Astra Holdings
118w

Asylum
see Political refugees

Atherton, Ms Candy
Debates etc.
Restoration of Damage to Sites of Special Scientific Interest Bill, 1R (10.06.98) 1079–81
Questions
Land pollution, Industrial wastes 16–7w
Nomenclature of statistical territorial units, Population distribution 319w
Regional aid, EC grants and loans 161w, 319–20w

Atkinson, Mr David
Questions
Coastal protection 344w
Diabetes, Medical equipment 541w
Millennium compliance, Directories 680w

Atkinson, George
Prisoners (02.06.98) 270–6

Attendance allowance
470w

Attorney General
Ministerial duties 499

Audit Commission Bill (HL) 1997/98
Debates etc.
2R* and rem stages* (01.06.98) 53
Royal Assent (11.06.98) 1241

Austin, Mr John
Questions
Jubilee line 869

Autism
Children 142w
Special education 368w

Baker, Norman
Debates etc.
Business questions (11.06.98) 1223
Ports, Newhaven (03.06.98) 324–8
Questions
Animal experiments, Primates 644w
Bishops, Travelling expenses 16
China, Human rights 677w
Church Commissioners, Investment 295–7w
Drift nets 201w, 344w
Further education, East Sussex 694w
Government Information and Communication Service 619w
Intelligence services, Accountability 665w
Iran, British embassies 618w
Labour Party, Government buildings 665w
Members, Telephone tapping 301w, 666w
Millennium Exhibition, Finance 14
Panchen Lama 677w
Pigs, Animal welfare 534w
Poultry meat, Imports 248–9w
RAF Menwith Hill, Defence expenditure 96–7w
Railway fares 513w
Slaughterhouses 452w
Slaughterhouses, Animal welfare 533–4w
Slaughterhouses, Veterinary services 532–3w

***Baker, Norman**—continued*
Transport, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 47w
Transport, Northern Ireland Office 64–5w
Transport of radioactive materials 577w
Transport of radioactive materials, Air transport 631w
Transport of radioactive materials, Ferries 631–2w
Treasury, Official hospitality 584w
Treaties, Parliamentary procedure 244–5w
Welfare of Animals (Transport) Order 1997 534w
Whales, Japan 94w
Wild boar 155–6w

Baldry, Mr Tony
Debates etc.
Nuclear weapons tests (01.06.98) 28
Questions
Class sizes 1181–2
Eggs, EC action 338w
Electronic government 1062–3

Ballard, Jackie
Debates etc.
Registration of Political Parties Bill, 2R (04.06.98) 538
Questions
Aerials, Planning permission 574w
Defence land, Hunting 209w
Family credit, Child care 706
Forestry Commission, Hunting 427–8w
Non-departmental public bodies, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions 3w
Non-departmental public bodies, Dept of Trade and Industry 112w
Non-departmental public bodies, Lord Chancellor's Dept 71w
Non-departmental public bodies, Northern Ireland Office 184w
Petrol alternatives 629–30w
Private education, Inspections 695w
Public appointments, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions 3w
Public appointments, Dept of Trade and Industry 113w
Public appointments, Lord Chancellor's Dept 71–2w
Public appointments, Northern Ireland Office 184w
Public appointments, Scottish Office 77w
Tax allowances, Vocational training 654w

Bank of England
Monetary Policy Committee 329w
Seigniorage 585w

Banking supervision
Economic and monetary union 329–30w

***Banks, Mr Tony**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept for Culture Media and Sport*
Debates etc.
National Lottery Bill, Rep and 3R (01.06.98) 61, 71, 75, 96–9
Sports (05.06.98) 620–1, 628, 635, 646, 656, 661, 666, 677–82
Questions
Bradenstoke Priory Barn 427w
Cricket, Racial discrimination 48–9w
Gascoigne, Paul 7
Historic buildings 426w
National Lottery, Yorkshire and Humberside 668–9w
National Lottery, Youth clubs 302w
Sports, Disadvantaged 6–7
Sports, Finance 7
Sports, Governing bodies 48w

***Banks, Mr Tony**—continued*
Sports, Young people 42–3w
Sportsmatch, Chorley 46w
Sportsmatch, Government grants 218w
UK Sports Council 48w
UK Sports Institute 666–8w

Bar Council
see General Council of the Bar

Barley
Export subsidies 532w
USA 532w

Barnes, Mr Harry
Debates etc.
Belfast Agreement (01.06.98) 39
Electoral systems (02.06.98) 183
Questions
Business questions 505
Health education, Air pollution 167
Ministers' domestic visits, Northern Ireland 63–4w

Barnsley
Pre-school education 364w

Barristers
Legal aid 70–1w

Barron, Mr Kevin
Questions
Tobacco advertising 160

***Battle, Mr John**, Minister of State, Dept of Trade and Industry*
Debates etc.
Gas supply industry, Regulatory systems (09.06.98) 983–6
Questions
Aerospace industry, Defence procurement 227–8w
Alternative energy, EC action 507w
Alternative energy, Non-fossil fuel obligation 228–9w
Coal mining 113w
Coal mining, Compensation 505w
Corporation tax 124w
Dounreay, Nuclear fuel reprocessing 385–6w, 595–6w, 709–15
Dounreay, Nuclear safety 120w, 715
Dounreay, Uranium 594–5w
Electricity tariffs, Low incomes 503–4w
EUREKA 597w
Gas fired power stations 507w
Gas fired power stations, Planning permission 113–4w
Genetic engineering 597w
Genetic engineering, Departmental coordination 321w
Genetic engineering, Ethics 680w
Industrial investment 318w
Institute of Terrestrial Ecology 681w
Lorries, Noise control 228w
Nuclear fuels, Japan 679–80w
Nuclear power 714
Nuclear power stations, Decommissioning 713
Nuclear power stations, Health hazards 597–8w
Petroleum exploration licences 502–3w
Plant power 318w
Plutonium 162w
Plutonium, Export controls 597w
Research councils, Men 596w
Solar power, Research 122–3w
Wind power 506–7w

Bayley, Mr Hugh
Debates etc.
Channel tunnel (03.06.98) 382
Electoral systems (02.06.98) 175, 201, 242–4

***Bayley, Mr Hugh**—continued*
House of Commons accommodation, Points of order (08.06.98) 736
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep adjourned (08.06.98) 738
Questions
Armed forces housing 393w
Army bases, York 103w
International trade, Business corruption 350
Railway travel, Information services 513w

BBC
492–3w

Beard, Mr Nigel
Questions
Bees, Varroasis 496–7
Crown Prosecution Service 337w

***Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret**, President of the Board of Trade*
Questions
Arms trade, Africa 126w
Astra Holdings 118w
British Manufacturing and Research Company 226–7w
Dept of Trade and Industry, Millennium compliance 122w
Dounreay, Nuclear safety 120–1w
Duty free allowances, Redundancy 122w
EC Internal Market Council 322–3w
Export financing 321w
Government information services, Dept of Trade and Industry 126w
Green papers, Dept of Trade and Industry 126w
Milk Development Council 662w
Ministers, Information 317w
Non-departmental public bodies, Dept of Trade and Industry 112w
Power industry 117w
Public appointments, Dept of Trade and Industry 113w
Public utilities, Regulatory systems 116w
Restricted Enforcement Unit, Arms trade 317–8w
Sierra Leone, Arms trade 317w, 682–4w
Trade competitiveness 126w

Beef
Armed forces catering services 95w
Exports 339–40w, 497–8, 531–2w, 1072

Beekeeping
529–30w
Agricultural subsidies 247–8w, 275w
Scotland 275w

Beer
Alcoholic drinks duties 326w

Bees
Varroasis 247–8w, 275w, 341w, 496–7

Begg, Miss Anne
Debates etc.
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep adjourned (08.06.98) 745–6
Questions
EC Fisheries Council 658–9w

Beith, Rt Hon A J
Debates etc.
Electoral systems (02.06.98) 195, 199, 211, 260
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep adjourned (08.06.98) 775, 786, 791–2
Questions
Africa, Visas 346–7w
Sierra Leone, Governments in exile 486–7w

Belfast Agreement
Publications 481w

***Bell, Mr Stuart**, Second Church Estates Commissioner*
Debates etc.
Electoral systems (02.06.98) 208–14
Questions
Bishops, Travelling expenses 16–7
Christianity, Millennium Exhibition 34w
Church and state 35w
Church Commissioners, Investment 17–8, 34w, 295–7w
Church Commissioners, Taxation 34w
Church finance 17, 20
Church of England, Investment 18
Clergy, Pensions 17

Benefit integrity project
Disability living allowance 110w, 545–6w, 704–5

Benefits Agency
see Social Security Benefits Agency

Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Debates etc.
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep adjourned (08.06.98) 826–7

Bennett, Mr Andrew F
Debates etc.
House of Commons procedure (04.06.98) 554–5, 567–9
Questions
Fines, Greater Manchester 485–6w
Pensioners, Income support 468w
River Tame, Sewage 372–3w
Sites of special scientific interest, Countryside stewardship scheme 529w
Sites of special scientific interest, Lancashire 370–1w
Social rented housing 510–1w

Benzodiazepines
Pregnant women 463w

Bercow, Mr John
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Allocation of time motion and Lords amendts (09.06.98) 931
Human Rights Bill (HL), Com (03.06.98) 399, 406, 409
Sports (05.06.98) 610–1, 650, 654, 656, 658–63, 679
Questions
Business questions 511–2
Millennium Exhibition, Finance 60w
Museums and galleries, Finance 7–8
Sierra Leone 92w
Sierra Leone, Armed forces deployment 99–101w
Sierra Leone, Arms trade 346w, 456–7w, 664w
Winter fuel payments 707–8
World Cup, Tickets 677w

Beresford, Sir Paul
Questions
Greater London Authority 862–3
Greater London Authority, Town and country planning 513w
New deal for young people, Guildford 543–4w

Berry, Mr Roger
Questions
Disability Discrimination Act 1995 544w
New deal for disabled people 364–5w, 699–700w
New deal for disabled people, Departmental coordination 365w
Wheelchairs 336w

Best, Mr Harold
Questions
Sports, Disadvantaged 6–7

Better government programme
619w
Elderly 634–5w, 1066
Greater London Authority 634–5w

Better Regulation Task Force
Public appointments 1–2w

Better Regulation Unit
Manpower 1w

***Betts, Mr Clive**, An Assistant Whip*
Debates etc.
Late Payment of Commercial Debts (Interest) Bill, Rep and 3R (01.06.98) 126

Bicycles
Safety equipment 14w

Bilateral aid
232w

Billing
NHS trusts 539w

Biological weapons
132w

Birds
Nature conservation 30w

Birmingham Relief Road
865–6
Construction costs 209w
Contracts 865

Births and Deaths Registration Act 1953
Questions
224w

Bishops
Travelling expenses 16–7

***Blair, Rt Hon Tony**, Prime Minister, First Lord of the Treasury and Minister for the Civil Service*
Questions
Allan, Timothy, British Sky Broadcasting 91w
Army in Northern Ireland, Prisoners 359
Asia-Europe meeting 93–4w
Beef, Exports 1072
Blind, Internet 215w
Camelot Group 360–1
Computers in schools 1071–2
Crime prevention, St Helens 364
Departmental correspondence 300w
Developing countries, Debts 215–6w, 370w
Developing countries, Poverty 215w
Dounreay, Uranium 364–5
Drug crimes 1076
Duty free allowances 215w, 665–6w
Duty free allowances, Redundancy 1074
EC presidency 362
Educational finance, Derbyshire 1075
Educational finance, Suffolk 1072
Educational standards 1074
Elderly, Departmental coordination 214w, 369w
Evacuees Reunion Association 424w
Exservicemen, Departmental responsibilities 94–5w
Government information services 424w
Government information services, Prime Minister 94w
Green papers, Costs 92w
Hereditary peers, House of Lords reform 366, 1068
Hong Kong, Elections 362
Hospital waiting lists 364
Hospital waiting lists, Wiltshire 361
Hospitals, Construction 359–60

***Blair, Rt Hon Tony**—continued*
Hospitals, Cornwall 1070
Housing standards, Disadvantaged 214w
Intelligence and Security Committee 665w
Intelligence services, Accountability 665w
Interest rates, Industry 1070
Intimidation of witnesses 1075–6
IRA, Weapons 366
Kock, Stephen 213w, 425w
Kosovo, Armed conflict 360, 1071
Labour Party, Government buildings 665w
Local government corruption 1074–5
Local government corruption, Scotland 362–4
Local government reform 1070–1
Lockerbie, Bombings 666w
Medical profession, Accountability 365–6
Members, Telephone tapping 301w, 666w
Minimum wage 364
Ministerial policy advisors, Government departments 664w
Ministers' visits abroad, China 93w
North Korea 93w
Northern Ireland Assembly, Elections 369–70w
Northern Ireland government, Referendums 361–2
Political parties, Finance 95w
Pornography, Internet 425w
Primary care groups 1076
Prime Minister's questions 358–9
Sierra Leone 91–2w, 370w
Sierra Leone, Arms trade 92w, 301w, 424–5w, 664w, 1068–70
Sierra Leone, Governments in exile 92w
Smuggling, Tobacco 1076
Social Exclusion Unit, Homelessness 213–4w
Tax burden, Statistics 1072–3
Technique LLC 300w
Whales, Japan 94w

Blears, Ms Hazel
Questions
New deal for young people 696w

Blind
Internet 215w
Public libraries 560w

Blizzard, Mr Bob
Questions
Arable area payments scheme, Suffolk 452w
Better government programme, Elderly 1066
Pensioners, Poverty 699
Petroleum exploration licences 502–3w
Respite care 541w
Stray dogs 516–7w
Truancy 694–5w

***Blunkett, Rt Hon David**, Secretary of State for Education and Employment*
Debates etc.
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep adjourned (08.06.98) 805, 807–14, 833–4
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (09.06.98) 911–5, 926
Questions
Class sizes, Leicestershire 1178–80
Higher education admission 1182–3
St Austell College 401w

Blunt, Mr Crispin
Debates etc.
Eritrea (08.06.98) 735
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Allocation of time motion and Lords amendts (09.06.98) 943, 959
Millennium compliance (08.06.98) 725

***Blunt, Mr Crispin**—continued*
Sports (05.06.98) 632–3, 666–9
Questions
Connex Rail 524w
Restricted Enforcement Unit, Arms trade 317–8w
Sierra Leone 91–2w, 143w, 145–6w, 325w, 345w
Sierra Leone, Armed forces deployment 100w
Sierra Leone, Arms trade 144–5w, 345–6w, 616–7w

***Boateng, Mr Paul**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of Health*
Questions
Asthma, Hospital admissions 128w
Autism, Children 142w
Breast cancer, Screening 237w
Cancer, Medical treatments 171w
Cancer, North West region 133w
Cardiomyopathy 131w
Child workers 686w
Children, Health services 130w
Children Act 1989 133w
Children in care 174w
Children's rights 175w
Chiropody 602w, 686w
Chiropody, Elderly 132–3w, 536w
Community care, Elderly 687–8w
Cosmetic surgery 127w
Epilepsy 131–2w, 407–8w
Foster care 409–10w
Glaucoma 163–4
Glaucoma, Hospital waiting lists 164
Haemophilia, Hepatitis 135w
Handicapped, Concessionary television licences 316–7w
Health action zones, Finance 169w
Hospital discharges, Geriatric patients 170w, 466w
Kent and Canterbury Hospital, Pathology 407w
Leeds Health Authority, Finance 172w
Medical profession, Interagency cooperation 685w
Mental health, Telephone services 129w
Mental health community care 157
Mental health services, North West region 172w
Mentally disadvantaged, Data banks 539w
Mentally disturbed offenders, Homicide 407w
Mentally handicapped 408w
Mobility of disabled 132w
NHS finance 169w
Personal social services, Handicapped 132w
Pilot schemes, Dept of Health 688–90w
Residential care, Elderly 463–4w
Residential care of children, Social workers 408–9w
Respite care 541w
Secure accommodation, Greater London 181w
Suicide, Young people 156–7
Wheelchairs 334–6w

Body, Sir Richard
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Allocation of time motion and Lords amendts (09.06.98) 956, 964–5

Bombings
Lockerbie 666w

Bosnia-Herzegovina
Armed forces deployment 609w

Boswell, Mr Tim
Questions
Coal mining 113w
Crops 495–6
Customs, Postal services 328w
Gas fired power stations, Planning permission 113–4w
Inland waterways, Navigation 510w
Local government constituencies, Northamptonshire 519w
Parcelforce 115–6w
Parking 515w
Petrol, Retail trade 114–5w
Post Office, External financing limits 115w
Post Office, Reviews 319w
Postal services 115–6w
Postal services, USA 503w
Royal Mail, Complaints 116w
Teachers, Skill shortages 1183–4

Bottomley, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
Sports (05.06.98) 668
Questions
Government information services 424w
Sierra Leone 370w
Sierra Leone, Governments in exile 92w

Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Questions
Environmental health 162
Sixth form colleges, Godalming 693w

Bottomley Forum
see Ministerial Tourism Advisory Forum

Bovine spongiform encephalopathy
489–90, 493–4, 599–601w
Disease control 490
Northern Ireland 490–1
Slaughterhouses 598–9w
Wales 671w
West country 489

Bovine tuberculosis
Vaccination 529w

Bradenstoke Priory Barn
427w

***Bradley, Mr Keith**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of Social Security*
Questions
Child benefit 402w
Child Support Agency, Manpower 185–6w
Council tax benefits, Wales 551w
Family credit, Child care 706
Family income 475–6w
Fathers, Tax rates and bands 401–2w
Habitual residence test 250w
Handicap benefits, Earnings rules 109w
Housing benefits, Scotland 547w
Lone parents, Social security benefits 315–6w
Low incomes, Wales 250w
Maintenance, Children 187–9w, 552–4w
Means tested benefits 251–2w
New deal for lone parents 110–1w, 314–5w, 402w, 467w, 706
Pilot schemes, Dept of Social Security 710w
Social security, Performance standards 479–80w
Social security appeals 468–9w
Social security benefits, Children 473w
Social security benefits, Scotland 698
Social security benefits, Young people 474w
Social Security Benefits Agency, Manpower 189w

***Bradley, Mr Keith**—continued*
Social Security Benefits Agency, Personnel 472w
Working benefits campaign 546–7w

Bradley, Mr Peter
Questions
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Ministerial powers 620w
Disability living allowance 549w
Handicapped, Concessionary television licences 316–7w
Pensioners, Income support 468w

Bradshaw, Mr Ben
Questions
Church finance 17
Cycling 514w
Euro 492–3

Brady, Mr Graham
Debates etc.
Registration of Political Parties Bill, 2R (04.06.98) 519, 547, 550
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep adjourned (08.06.98) 831
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (09.06.98) 885–6, 914
Questions
Millennium Exhibition 61w
Millennium Exhibition, Admission charges 183w
Tobacco advertising 1193–4

Brake, Mr Tom
Debates etc.
Channel tunnel (03.06.98) 382
Questions
Birmingham Relief Road 865–6
Energy prices, Business premises 568–9w
Greenhouse effect, Air pollution control 512w
London Underground, Joint public-private sector ventures 515–6w
Palace of Westminster, Recycling 557–8w
Sewage, Water treatment 17w
Water abstraction 153w
Water conservation 17w

Brand, Dr Peter
Debates etc.
Community hospitals, Oxfordshire (03.06.98) 347
Domestic energy conservation (10.06.98) 1010–1, 1017–8, 1024

Brazier, Mr Julian
Questions
Pensions, Personal savings 703
Social security reform 469w

Breast cancer
499–500w
Scotland 657w
Screening 237w
Wales 166w

Breast feeding
Publicity 404–5w

Brecon Beacons National Park
Low flying 639w

Brinton, Mrs Helen
Questions
Health education, Curriculum 166–7

British dependent territories
150–1w, 243w

British embassies
Iran 618w

British Gas TransCo
see Transco

British Manufacturing and Research Company
226–7w

British nationality
Civil servants 620–2w

British residents abroad
Tax allowances 652w

British Road Federation
Finance 515w

British Sky Broadcasting
Allan, Timothy 91w

Bro Taf Health Authority
Electroconvulsive therapy 672–3w

Broadcasting
45w

Bromsgrove
Playing fields (08.06.98) 848–54

Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Debates etc.
Belfast Agreement (01.06.98) 38
Economic policy (11.06.98) 1209
National Lottery Bill, Rep and 3R (01.06.98) 76–9, 94–6, 98
Questions
Business questions 507
Film industry, Taxation 43w
National Lottery, Tourism 11

***Brown, Rt Hon Gordon**, Chancellor of the Exchequer*
Debates etc.
Economic policy, Ministerial statements (11.06.98) 1195–215
Questions
Bank of England, Monetary Policy Committee 329w
EC Finance Council 225–6w
Ministers' visits abroad, Indonesia 89w
Ministers' visits abroad, Korea 89w
Treasury, Official hospitality 584w

Brown, Mr Russell
Questions
Access to work programme 692w
NHS, Performance standards 171w

Browne, Mr Desmond
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland (Sentences) Bill, 2R (10.06.98) 1093, 1138–41
Questions
Repatriation, Offenders 53w

Browning, Mrs Angela
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Allocation of time motion and Lords amendts (09.06.98) 936
Questions
United Bristol Healthcare NHS Trust, Inquiries 337w, 692w
Viagra 686w

Bruce, Mr Ian
Questions
Beef, Exports 497–8
Mental health community care 157
Ministers, Electronic mail 624w
Nigeria, Arms trade 459w
Regional development agencies, South West region 509w
Road construction, Dorchester 297w
Sierra Leone, Overseas aid 236w

Bruce, Mr Malcolm
Debates etc.
Economic policy (11.06.98) 1205

***Bruce, Mr Malcolm**—continued*
Questions
Consultants, Northern Ireland Office 183w
Economic policy, Public sector debt 650w
Government departments, Operating costs 651w
Official hospitality, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 47–8w
Public sector earnings 392w
Repairs and maintenance, Scottish Office 77–8w
Tax burden, Statistics 224w

Buck, Ms Karen
Debates etc.
Leasehold housing (10.06.98) 992–6
Questions
Defence Secondary Care Agency, Performance standards 395–6w
Employment schemes, Ethnic minorities 1185

Building regulations
Housing construction 575–6w

Bulgaria
EC aid 459w
Overseas aid 459w

Burden, Mr Richard
Debates etc.
Electoral systems (02.06.98) 172, 185, 197, 211, 219–24, 257

Burma
Overseas aid 41w
Refugees 168–9w

Burnett, Mr John
Debates etc.
Crown Prosecution Service (01.06.98) 48
Questions
Customs and Excise, Prosecutions 498–9

Burns, Mr Simon
Questions
Class sizes, Essex 401w
Driving tests, Chelmsford 156w
Litter, Chelmsford 299w
New deal for lone parents 696
Non-departmental public bodies, Northern Ireland Office 183–4w
Pupil exclusions, Chelmsford 626w
Vacancies, Chelmsford 367–8w

Burstow, Mr Paul
Questions
Asthma, Scotland 85w
Asthma, Wales 62–4w
Children Act 1989 133w
Chiropody 686w
Chiropody, Elderly 132–3w
Community care, Elderly 687–8w
Disability living allowance, Benefit integrity project 110w, 545–6w
Disabled facilities grants 416w
Disabled facilities grants, Elderly 17w
Elderly, Departmental coordination 214w
Exhaust emission controls 871
Greater London Authority, Better government programme 634–5w
Homicide 220–1w
Homicide, Children 222w
Hospital admissions, Geriatric patients 688w
Hospital waiting lists 133w
Industrial accidents 634w
Metropolitan Police 645–6w
Mobility of disabled 132w
National Institute for Clinical Excellence 178w
Personal social services, Handicapped 132w
Pilot schemes, Dept of Health 688–90w

***Burstow, Mr Paul**—continued*
Pilot schemes, Dept of Social Security 710w
Pilot schemes, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions 632–4w
Police stations, Epsom 646w
Political refugees, Category A prisoners 222w
Political refugees, Immigrant detainees 221w
Prodigy prescribing system 687–8w
Residential care, Drugs 686–7w
Residential care, Elderly 463–4w

Bury
Schools 1180–1

Bus lanes
Motorcycles 519w

Bus services
Performance standards 514w

Business
Millennium Exhibition 14–5

Business corruption
International trade 350

Business Link London North West
Finance 161–2w

Business motions
(01.06.98) 119, 143

Business premises
Energy prices 568–9w

Business questions
505–13

Business statements
503–5, (11.06.98) 1216–26

Butter
EC law 454w

Butterfill, Mr John
Questions
Sierra Leone, Arms trade 92w

***Byers, Mr Stephen**, Minister for School Standards, Dept for Education and Employment*
Debates etc.
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep adjourned (08.06.98) 738–44, 746–9, 752–3, 778
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (09.06.98) 886–91, 893–4
Questions
Assisted places scheme 628w
Class sizes, Cumbria 700w
Class sizes, Essex 401w
Cost per pupil 704–6w
Education action zones 695w
Education development plans 204–5w
Educational finance, Hereford and Worcester 704w
Educational finance, Worcestershire 1187–8
Educational standards 698w
Further education, East Sussex 694w
Grammar schools, Voting methods 256w
Grant maintained schools 139–40w, 627–8w
Literacy, Primary education 695–6w
Local education authorities 696w
Music education 625w
Primary education, School population 626w
Private education 1178
Private education, Inspections 695w
Private education, Surrey 1178
School administration 141w
School closures 626w
School closures, Rural areas 255–6w

Byers, Mr Stephen*—*continued
Schools 399–400w
Schools, Bury 1180–1
Sixth form colleges 692w
Sixth form colleges, Godalming 693w
Student loans, Part-time education 1186–7
Teachers, Pay 624w, 703w
Tuition fees, Higher education admission 1192–3
Village schools 626w

C17 aircraft
421w

Cable, Mr Vincent
Questions
Agricultural subsidies, Euro 453w
Beekeeping 529–30w
Disability living allowance 547–8w
EC Finance Council, Economic and monetary union 88–9w
Economic and monetary union 88w
Economic and monetary union, Information technology 193w
Feltham Young Offender Institution and Remand Centre, Prison staff 52w
Health services, Age discrimination 685w
Heathrow Airport 7–8w
Heathrow Airport, Public inquiries 8w
Housing benefits, Finance 575w
Pharmacists, Primary care groups 537–8w
Physiotherapists, Greater London 403–4w
Radioactive waste disposal, River Thames 525w
Schools 399–400w
Secure accommodation, Greater London 181w
Self-assessment of tax 650w
Special education, Training 366–7w
Water charges 855

Cable television
Local broadcasting 163–4w

***Caborn,Mr Richard**, Minister for the Regions Regeneration and Planning, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions*
Questions
Compulsory purchase 631w
Deprivation indicators 157w
Derelict land 510w
Dredging, Licensing 525–6w
Heathrow Airport, Public inquiries 8w, 512w, 863–4
Housing, South Devon 524w
Housing construction, Derelict land 510w
Regional government 30w

Cambodia
Export licensing 117–8w

Camelot Group
360–1

Cameroon
617w
Political refugees 642–3w
Road construction 447w

Campbell, Mr Alan
Debates etc.
Electoral systems (02.06.98) 251–3

Campbell, Mrs Anne
Debates etc.
Electoral systems (02.06.98) 177–8
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep adjourned (08.06.98) 805, 815
Questions
Cycling 867–8
Food standards 485
Heart diseases 171–2w
Higher education admission 693w, 1183

Campbell, Mr Menzies
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Allocation of time motion and Lords amendts (09.06.98) 954
European Council (11.06.98) 1229, 1238
Nuclear weapons tests (01.06.98) 24
Questions
Armed forces deployment 609–11w
Armed forces deployment, Bosnia-Herzegovina 609w
Armed forces deployment, Iraq 607w
Armed forces deployment, Persian Gulf 608–9w
Arms exports, Export licensing 594w
Army 607w
Army strength 606w
Helicopters 394w
Microbiology, Exports 604w
Military aircraft 421w
Navy, Fuels 607w
Navy strength 606w
Western European Union 606–7w

Campbell-Savours, Mr Dale
Debates etc.
Electoral systems (02.06.98) 172, 218
Nuclear weapons tests (01.06.98) 28
Private notice question intervention (08.06.98) 711
Questions
British Manufacturing and Research Company 226–7w
Dounreay, Nuclear fuel reprocessing 714
Fertility, Medical treatments 169w
Information technology, Cumbria 1063
Interest rates 493
Kock, Stephen 213w, 425w
Meat Hygiene Service, Intimidation 341–3w, 451–2w
Phoenix companies, Prosecutions 338w
Private education 1178
Technique LLC 300w

Canada
Cattle 454w

Canavan, Mr Dennis
Debates etc.
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep adjourned (08.06.98) 790–1, 802–4, 834–5
Questions
Epilepsy 407–8w
International Whaling Commission 340w
Open government 1067
Student numbers, Scotland 383w
Tuition fees, Scotland 383w

Cancer
see (also) Breast cancer

Cancer
156
Death 155–6
Handicap benefits 711–2w
Hospital waiting lists 155
Medical treatments 171w
Men 155–6
North West region 133w
Thyroid gland 444w
Wales 671w
Young people 444w

Candidate selection
European Parliament Members 436w

Cann, Mr Jamie
Debates etc.
Magistrates' courts, Suffolk (10.06.98) 1043–4

Cannabis
Medical research 464w

Capital gains tax
195w
Pensioners 195w

Capital receipts initiative
89w

Caplin, Mr Ivor
Debates etc.
National Lottery Bill, Rep and 3R (01.06.98) 60
Sports (05.06.98) 624, 655–9
Sportsgrounds, Town and country planning (10.06.98) 1036
Questions
Cable television, Local broadcasting 163–4w
EC Culture Council 165w
Electricity tariffs, Low incomes 503–4w
Funerals, Consumer protection 161w
Industrial health and safety, Curriculum 130w
Open government 1065
Public utilities, Regulatory systems 116w
Social security, Performance standards 479–80w

Caravan sites
Travelling people 574w

Caravans
Consumer protection 126–7w

Carbon dioxide
Air pollution control 211–2w, 299w
Speed limits 211–2w

Carbon monoxide
Air pollution 211w

Cardiff Bay
Property development 545w

Cardiff Prison
Operating costs 483–4w

Cardiff Summit
(11.06.98) 1242–84

Cardiomyopathy
131w

Carers
Pensions 700–1

Carlisle Airport
519w
Transport of radioactive materials 572–3w

Casale, Mr Roger
Debates etc.
European Council (11.06.98) 1235
Review of Health Care in London Independent Advisory Panel (03.06.98) 311–5
Questions
Agenda 2000, Rural areas 321w
Arms trade, EC action 488w
Computers in schools 1071–2
Health, Disadvantaged 168

Cash, Mr William
Debates etc.
Electoral systems (02.06.98) 172–3
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Allocation of time motion and Lords amendts (09.06.98) 933, 949, 962
House of Commons procedure (04.06.98) 553, 556
Questions
Club of Three 677w
Tobacco advertising 159–60

Category A prisoners
Political refugees 222w

Catering
Work permits 141–2w

Cattle
Artificial insemination 535–6w
Canada 454w

Cattle tracing system
489

Cellular phones
Driving offences 303–4w
Health warnings 439–40w

Central government borrowing
654–5w

Central Railway
30w

Central Science Laboratory
496

Centre for Environment Fisheries and Aquaculture Science
74w

Chairman of Committee of the Whole House
Debates etc.
Amendments and new clauses (03.06.98) 388, 413, 415, 426, 437, 464–5
Conduct of proceedings (03.06.98) 406, 417, 444, 455–6, 460, 466

Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster
Green papers 2w
Ministerial powers 620w
Open government 620w

Chancellor of the Exchequer
see Treasury

"Changes to Enforcement and Levying of Distress for Non-domestic Rate Debts Consultation Paper"
374–5w

Channel Four
Privatisation 4–5

Channel Islands
European Convention on Human Rights 55w
Personal savings 652w

Channel tunnel
Ministerial statements (03.06.98) 367–84
Railway network 13w, 117w, 573–4w
Transport of radioactive materials 631–2w

Chapman, Mr Ben
Questions
Cannabis, Medical research 464w
Intimidation of witnesses 1075–6
Medicines Control Agency 605w
New deal for young people 693–4w
New Opportunities Fund, After school clubs 10
Open government 1067–8
Whales 340w

Chapman, Sir Sydney,
Debates etc.
Business questions (11.06.98) 1221–2
Millennium compliance (08.06.98) 724
Review of Health Care in London Independent Advisory Panel (03.06.98) 301–2
Questions
Clergy, Pensions 17
Developing countries, Debts 230w
Higher education admission 1182–3
Performing arts, Finance 9
Portcullis House, Expenditure 557w
Post Office 594w

Charities
Overseas aid 356

Chaytor, Mr David
Questions
Algeria, Visas 459–60w

Chelmsford
Driving tests 156w
Litter 299w
Pupil exclusions 626w
Vacancies 367–8w

Chelsea-Hackney railway line
568w

Chemical and biological warfare
Iraq 149–50w

Chemicals
Industrial health and safety 17–8w

Chevening scholarship programme
612–6w

Chidgey, Mr David
Questions
Animal welfare, EC trade 248w
Homeworking, Fees and charges 117w
Official receiver, County courts 318–9w

Child benefit
402w
Tax yields 651w
Taxation 392w

Child care
Family credit 706

Child Support Agency
Manpower 185–6w

Child workers
234w, 686w

Children
Alcoholic drinks 309w
Autism 142w
Health services 130w
Homicide 222w
Maintenance 187–9w, 552–4w
Press 43w
Social security benefits 473w

Children Act 1989
Questions
133w

Children in care
174w

Children's rights
175w

China
Arms embargoes 246–7w
Human rights 677w
Ministers' visits abroad 93w
Trade missions 341w

Chinook helicopters
Air accidents 183w

Chiropody
602w, 686w
Elderly 132–3w, 536w

Chisholm, Mr Malcolm,
Questions
Multiple occupation, Scotland 331w

Chlamydiosis
Screening 181w

Chlorofluorocarbons
Refrigeration 15w

Chorley
Sportsmatch 46w

Christianity
Millennium Exhibition 34w

Chronic fatigue syndrome
605w

Church and state
35w

Church Commissioners
Annual reports 295–6w
Investment 17–8, 34w, 295–7w
Taxation 34w

Church finance
17, 20

Church of England
Investment 18

Circuses
Nature conservation 22w

Cities (Process and Criteria for Designation) Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
1R (02.06.98) 169–70

Civil engineering
Water storage 159w

Civil proceedings
Personal injury 69w

Civil servants
British nationality 620–2w
Northern Ireland Office 65w

Civil service agencies
Food standards 75w
Members' correspondence 1060

Civil service recruitment
Scottish Office 264–5w

Civil wars
Sudan 460–1w

Clapham, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Business questions (11.06.98) 1220
Lowery, David (11.06.98) 1286–8
Questions
Multinational companies, Human rights 349

Clappison, Mr James
Debates etc.
Human Rights Bill (HL), Com (03.06.98) 388–93, 400, 408, 412–6, 423, 425–8, 433–4
Questions
Driving offences, Drug abuse 434–5w
Drug abuse, Night clubs 434w
Ecstasy, Drug abuse 320w, 433–4w, 568w
Electronic tagging, Contracts 303w, 648w
Forensic Science Service 435w
Home detention curfews 57–8w, 304w
Home detention curfews, Costs 433w, 565w
Home detention curfews, Sexual offences 57w
Prisoners, Self-mutilation 382w
Prisoners, Television 639–40w
Prisoners' incentives and earned privileges scheme 640w
Young offenders 482–3w

Clark, Rt Hon Alan
Debates etc.
Channel tunnel (03.06.98) 381
Intervention during ministerial statement (03.06.98) 370
Leasehold housing (10.06.98) 1003–4
Referendums (03.06.98) 281

Clark, Rt Hon Dr David, *Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster*
Debates etc.
Millennium compliance, Ministerial statements (08.06.98) 716–27
Questions
Better government programme 619w

Clark, Rt Hon Dr David*—*continued
Better Regulation Task Force, Public appointments 1–2w
Better Regulation Unit, Manpower 1w
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Ministerial powers 620w
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Open government 620w
Civil servants, British nationality 620–2w
Committee on Standards in Public Life 2w
Crown copyright 623w
Electronic government 1062–4
Information technology, Cumbria 1063
Ministers, Electronic mail 624w
Ministers' domestic visits, Lancaster 1059
Open government 619–20w, 1061–2, 1065–8
Open government, Codes of practice 629w

Clark, Mr Paul
Debates etc.
Channel tunnel (03.06.98) 377
Questions
Channel tunnel, Railway network 117w
Health services 173w

Clarke, Mr Charles
Questions
Regional airports, Local government borrowing 637–8w

Clarke, Rt Hon Tom, Minister for Film and Tourism, Dept for Culture Media and Sport
Questions
Alternative energy, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 493w
Energy consumption, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 558w
English Tourist Board 11–2, 493w
Film industry 43–4w
Film industry, Taxation 43w
Inquiries, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 559w
Ministerial Tourism Advisory Forum, Public appointments 560–4w
National Lottery, Film industry 164w
National Lottery, Tourism 11, 493–4w
New Opportunities Fund, After school clubs 10
Official hospitality, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 47–8w
Royal parks, Festivals and special occasions 44w
Small businesses, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 45w
Tourism 10–1
Tourism, Coastal areas 45w
Tourism, Harrow 11
Tourism, New deal for young people 669w
Transport, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 47w
Travelling expenses, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 558w

Class sizes
1179, 1181–2
Cumbria 700w
Essex 401w
Leicestershire 1178–80
Scotland 282w
Wales 676w

Cleaner Vehicles Task Force
16w

Clergy
Pensions 17

Clifton-Brown, Mr Geoffrey
Debates etc.
Nuclear weapons tests (01.06.98) 30

Clifton-Brown, Mr Geoffrey*—*continued
Questions
Delegated legislation 557w
Kashmir, UN resolutions 392w
National Audit Office 19
New Opportunities Fund, After school clubs 10
Pensions 467w
Taxation, Quarrying 494w
Vitamin B6 486

Closed circuit television
439w

Club of Three
677w

Clwyd, Ann
Questions
Afghanistan, Overseas aid 39w
Armed forces training, Indonesia 102–3w
Arms trade 421–2w
Arms trade, EC action 147w
Arms trade, Trade promotion 422w
Chevening scholarship programme 612–6w
Church Commissioners, Investment 17–8
Defence equipment, Exhibitions 385w, 504w
Defence Military Assistance Fund 422w
East Timor, EC external relations 355w
Export licensing, Cambodia 117–8w
Export licensing, Indonesia 440w
Indonesia, Arms trade 227w, 240w
Indonesia, ASSIST programme 487w
Millennium Exhibition, Sports 60w
Sudan, Overseas aid 352, 449w
Turkey, Human rights 146w

Coaker Mr Vernon
Debates etc.
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep adjourned (08.06.98) 777, 788, 820, 827–9
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (09.06.98) 890, 920–1
Questions
Arms trade, EC action 240–1w

Coal mining
113w
Compensation 505w

Coastal areas
Tourism 45w

Coastal protection
344w, 601w

Cohen, Mr Harry
Questions
Armed forces training, Costs 101–2w
Astra Holdings 118w
Breast feeding, Publicity 404–5w
Economic Community of West African States Military Observer Group 101w
Fathers, Pay 710–1w
Industrial health and safety, Chemicals 17–8w
Intelligence services, Personal records 52w
National Lottery, Youth clubs 302w
Patients, Nutrition and health 179w
Sentencing 167w
Sexual offences, Interagency cooperation 303–4w

Collins, Mr Tim
Debates etc.
Belfast Agreement (01.06.98) 41
National Lottery Bill, Rep and 3R (01.06.98) 57–8, 69–71
Questions
Allison, Clive 148w
Occupational pensions 692

Colman, Mr Tony
Debates etc.
Review of Health Care in London Independent Advisory Panel (03.06.98) 300–3, 313, 318
Questions
Greater London Authority, Roads 636w

Colombia
Human rights 241–2w, 458w

Colvin, Mr Michael
Questions
Child workers 686w
Discretionary student grants 701–2w
Diseases, Travel 603w
Further education colleges 701w
Further education colleges, Student numbers 701w
Vaccination, Travel requirements 602–3w

Commercial television
12

Commission for Health Improvement
178w

Committee of Selection
(08.06.98) 691

Committee on Standards in Public Life
2w

Common agricultural policy
488
Green rates 531w
Tobacco 161

Common fisheries policy
74w

Common land
374w

Community care
Elderly 687–8w

Community Care (Residential Accommodation) Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
Royal Assent (11.06.98) 1241

Community hospitals
604w
Oxfordshire (03.06.98) 341–8
Wales 62w

Community Legal Service
301w

Community service orders
482w

Community transport
Coventry 519–20w
West Midlands 519–20w

Company law
Association of Chief Police Officers 320w

Competition law
Ice cream 124w

Complaints against police
Scotland 77–9w

Comptroller and Auditor General
see National Audit Office

Compulsory purchase
631w

Computers in schools
1071–2

Concessionary television licences
Handicapped 316–7w

Conditional fee agreements
70w
General Council of the Bar 583w
Personal injury 69w

Confiscation of Alcohol (Young Persons) Act 1997
Questions
223w

Connex Rail
524w

Construction costs
Birmingham Relief Road 209w

Construction materials
Fire prevention 297–9w

Consultants
Northern Ireland Office 183w

Consumer protection
Caravans 126–7w
Funerals 123w, 161w

Contraceptives
136w, 180w, 238–9w, 462–3w
Publicity 536w

Contracting Out (Functions Relating to National Savings) Order 1998
Debates etc.
(08.06.98) 840–3

Contracts
Birmingham Relief Road 865
Electronic tagging 303w, 648w

Contracts for services
National Savings Agency (08.06.98) 840–3

Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction
656w

Convictions
Road traffic offences 307–9w

Cook, Rt Hon Robin, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs
Debates etc.
European Council (11.06.98) 1227–34, 1237–8, 1240
Nuclear weapons tests, Ministerial statements (01.06.98) 21–32
Questions
Arms to Sierra Leone Inquiry 679w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Inquiries 152w
Sierra Leone 143–6w, 345w
Sierra Leone, Arms trade 142–5w, 240w, 345–6w, 456–7w, 616–7w
Sierra Leone, Departmental correspondence 346w

Cooper, Ms Yvette
Debates etc.
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep adjourned (08.06.98) 830–1
Questions
National Lottery, Yorkshire and Humberside 668–9w
School leaving 701–3w
Shipping accidents 870
Unemployment, Educational qualifications 498–9w

Copthorne Barracks
105w

Corbett, Mr Robin
Questions
Drift nets 344w
Film industry 43–4w
Intelligence and Security Committee 665w
Multiple sclerosis, Health services 163
Police national computer, Probation and aftercare 52–3w

Corbyn, Mr Jeremy
Debates etc.
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep adjourned (08.06.98) 823, 830
Questions
Church and state 35w
Colombia, Human rights 241–2w
South Asia, Nuclear weapons tests 242–3w

Cormack, Sir Patrick
Debates etc.
Business questions (11.06.98) 1225
House of Commons procedure (04.06.98) 566, 585–9
Questions
Members' correspondence, Administrative delays 1060–1

Cornwall
Hospitals 1070

Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Health Authority
238w

Coroners
Judges 56w

Corporation tax
124w

Cosmetic surgery
127w

Cosmetics
Animal experiments 566w

Cost per pupil
704–6w

Cost per student
Further education 699w
Wales 229w

Cotter, Mr Brian
Debates etc.
Late Payment of Commercial Debts (Interest) Bill, Rep and 3R (01.06.98) 131–3, 138–9
Questions
Mediation UK 567w
Shipping, Government assistance 18w

Council housing
Scotland 330–1w

Council of Ministers
350–4w

Council tax
Second homes 509–10w, 576w

Council tax benefits
Wales 551w

Council tax capping
Derbyshire 420w, 635–6w

Counselling
Exservicemen 606w

Countryside
Public petitions (04.06.98) 595

Countryside stewardship scheme
Sites of special scientific interest 529w

County courts
Official receiver 318–9w

Court Funds Office
302w

Court of Protection
Loans 69w
Public Trust Office 69w

Court rules and procedures
584w

Courts
Information technology 584w

Cousins, Mr Jim
Debates etc.
Human Rights Bill (HL), Com (03.06.98) 473
Questions
Office for National Statistics, Public sector borrowing requirement 586w
Public sector borrowing requirement, Statistics 585–6w

Coventry
Community transport 519–20w

Cox, Mr Tom
Questions
Air force bases 102w
Armed forces, Germany 491w
Armed forces women 312w
Cycleways, Greater London 414w
Driving offences, Cellular phones 303–4w
Food standards, Civil service agencies 75w
Housing, Wandsworth 373w
Metropolitan Police, Ethnic minorities 305–6w
Priority routes, Greater London 18w
Prison population, Young offenders 382w
Prisoners, Suicide 306w
Road construction, Greater London 18w

Cran, Mr James
Questions
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food, Members' correspondence 199w, 451w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food, Serials 197–8w

Cranston, Mr Ross
Debates etc.
Crown Prosecution Service (01.06.98) 50
Questions
Court rules and procedures 584w
General Council of the Bar, Conditional fee agreements 583w
Higher education admission 697w
Judiciary, Training 584w
Legal aid 583w

Crawley
New deal schemes 1188

Creative Industries Task Force
44w

Cricket
Racial discrimination 48–9w
Wales 591w

Crime and Disorder Bill (HL) 1997/98
Questions
219–20w

Crime prevention
St Helens 364

Crimes of violence
Health service staff 181w

Crops
495–6
Genetically modified organisms 417–8w

Crown copyright
623w

Crown Prosecution Service
337w, 500–2
Harmonisation of standards 499–500
Information technology 338w
Ministerial statements (01.06.98) 42–52

Cryer, Mrs Ann
Questions
Export credit guarantees, Indonesia 121w
Museums and galleries, Public transport 376w
Railway land 19w

Cryer, Mr John
Debates etc.
Business questions (11.06.98) 1221

Cultural heritage
UNESCO 560w

Cumbria
Class sizes 700w
Dentists 540w
Flood control 660w
Housing improvement 571w
Housing policy 571w
Information technology 1063
Road works 416w
Special education 699w
Standard assessment tasks 700w

Cummings, Mr John
Questions
Breast cancer, Screening 237w

Cunliffe, Mr Lawrence
Questions
Cancer, North West region 133w
Death, North West region 86–7w
Non-alcoholic drinks, Prices 868

Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack, *Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food*
Questions
Beef, Exports 497–8
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 493–4
Common agricultural policy 488
Drift nets 344w
EC Agriculture Council 202–3w
EC Fisheries Council 658–9w
Food standards 485
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food, Members' correspondence 199w, 451w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food, Serials 197–8w
Supermarkets, Food prices 486
Trade missions, China 341w
Vitamin B6 486

Cunningham, Mr Jim
Questions
Air safety 635w
Aircraft noise 635w
Carbon dioxide, Air pollution control 211–2w, 299w
Carbon monoxide, Air pollution 211w
Channel tunnel, Railway network 573w
Community transport, West Midlands 519–20w
Cycleways 19w
Dental students, Higher education admission 140w
Elderly, Departmental coordination 369w
Film industry 43w
Fossil fuels, Air pollution control 211w
Health Service Commissioner 174w
Heavily indebted poor countries initiative 42w
Plutonium, Export controls 597w
Police, Manpower 437w
Police, Public holidays 437w
Pollution control, Prosecutions 299w
Rough sleepers initiative, West Midlands 19–20w
Social Exclusion Unit, Homelessness 213–4w
Transport of radioactive materials 577–8w

Cunningham, Ms Roseanna
Questions
Dounreay, Nuclear safety 120w
Dounreay, Uranium 594–5w
Radioactive materials, Export controls 119–20w

Cunningham, Ms Roseanna—continued
Road traffic offences, Scotland 196–7w

Curriculum
Health education 166–7
Industrial health and safety 130w

Curry, Rt Hon David
Debates etc.
Channel tunnel (03.06.98) 379
Electoral systems (02.06.98) 237–9
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Allocation of time motion and Lords amendts (09.06.98) 936

Curtis-Thomas, Ms Claire
Debates etc.
Herring, Raymond (10.06.98) 1049–56

Customs
Postal services 328w

Customs and Excise
Accidents 499
Inquiries 142–3w
Prosecutions 498–9

Cycleways
19w
Greater London 414w
West Midlands 19w

Cycling
514w, 867–8

Cyprus
Peace negotiations 457–8w
Visas 168w

Dafis, Mr Cynog
Questions
School transport 1191
Water meters 855–6

Dairy farming
Farm incomes 341w
Wales 324–5w

Dalyell, Mr Tam
Debates etc.
Business questions (11.06.98) 1219
Channel tunnel (03.06.98) 381
Economic policy (11.06.98) 1209–10
Eritrea (08.06.98) 734
European Council (11.06.98) 1229, 1232, 1271–4, 1282
Millennium compliance (08.06.98) 726
Northern Ireland (Sentences) Bill, 2R (10.06.98) 1083
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep adjourned (08.06.98) 795, 810–1
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (09.06.98) 883, 889, 898, 913, 919
Questions
Aircraft, Air bags 154w
Animal experiments, Primates 644–5w
Animal welfare, Protest 646w
Archaeological sites, Public buildings 44w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 494
Business questions 508
Dounreay, Nuclear fuel reprocessing 711–2
Genetic engineering, Ethics 680w
Guyana, Rain forests 648w
Hospitals, Ventilation 690w
Institute of Terrestrial Ecology 681w
Iraq, International assistance 231w
Lockerbie, Bombings 666w
Nature conservation, Departmental coordination 520w
Organ donors 690w
Scottish Parliament, Parliamentary buildings 657–8w
Social security benefits, Scotland 698
South Africa, Higher education 648w
Temporary employment, Research 1194

Dalyell, Mr Tam—continued
West coast railway line, Investment 520w

Darling, Mr Alistair, *Chief Secretary to the Treasury*
Questions
Capital investment 652w
Capital receipts initiative 89w
Economic policy, Public sector debt 650w
Government departments, Operating costs 651w
Government loans 494w
Local government finance 224w
Private finance initiative 223–4w
Public sector earnings 392w

Darvill, Mr Keith
Debates etc.
Review of Health Care in London Independent Advisory Panel (03.06.98) 306–9

Data banks
Government buildings 1064–5
Mentally disadvantaged 539w

Data Protection Act 1984
Questions
52w

Davey, Mr Edward
Debates etc.
Millennium compliance (08.06.98) 720

Davey, Mrs Valerie
Debates etc.
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (09.06.98) 907, 921

Davidson, Mr Ian
Debates etc.
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep adjourned (08.06.98) 777
Questions
Water storage, Civil engineering 159w

Davies, Rt Hon Denzil
Questions
Hospital waiting lists, Wales 229w
NHS, Wales 61–2w
Public sector employment, Wales 673w

Davies, Mr Geraint
Debates etc.
Economic policy (11.06.98) 1209
Questions
National Air Traffic Services 637w

Davies, Mr Quentin
Debates etc.
European Council (11.06.98) 1261–2
Grantham and Kesteven General Hospital, Maternity services (10.06.98) 1170–5
Questions
New deal for lone parents 402w
Occupational pensions 108w
Stakeholder pensions 701

Davies, Rt Hon Ron, *Secretary of State for Wales*
Questions
Arts finance, Wales 589w
Cardiff Bay, Property development 545w
Cricket, Wales 591w
Football Trust, Wales 166w
Inquiries, Welsh Office 588–9w
Millennium Commission, Wales 590w
Museums and galleries, Wales 591w
Orchestras, Wales 589–90w
Theatres, Wales 590w

Davis, Rt Hon David
Debates etc.
Economic policy (11.06.98) 1208
Millennium compliance (08.06.98) 721–2

Dawson, Mr Hilton
Debates etc.
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep adjourned (08.06.98) 813, 832
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (09.06.98) 905–6
Questions
Foster care 409–10w
Ministers' domestic visits, Lancaster 1059
Play groups, Government grants 257w
Residential care of children, Social workers 408–9w
Retirement pensions, Equal opportunities 111w
Roads, Lancashire 863

Day, Mr Stephen
Debates etc.
Electoral systems (02.06.98) 210
Questions
NHS trusts, Public appointments 157–8

Day nurseries
Tax allowances 693–4

Deaf
Juries 213w

Dean, Mrs Janet
Questions
EC Development Council 236w
Health education, Men 170w

Death
Cancer 155–6
Methadone 225w, 323w
North West region 86–7w

Death rate
86–7w

Debt collection
Non-domestic rates 374–5w

Debts
Developing countries 35w, 89–91w, 215–6w, 230–1w, 234w, 354–8, 370w, 588w
Rwanda 232w

Debts written off
Developing countries 494–6w

Defamation Act 1996
Questions
71w

Defence contracts
313w
EC law 313w
Security vetting 638w

Defence Dental Agency
Performance standards 396–7w

Defence equipment
Armed forces training 489w, 638–9w
Exhibitions 385w, 504w

Defence expenditure
RAF Menwith Hill 96–7w

Defence land
Hunting 209w
Land reclamation 207–9w

Defence Medical Training Organisation
Performance standards 394–5w

Defence Military Assistance Fund
422w

Defence Pay and Personnel Agency
see Pay and Personnel Agency

Defence procurement
Aerospace industry 227–8w
Lockheed Martin 101w
Military aircraft 227–8w

Defence research
Uranium 182w

Defence Secondary Care Agency
Performance standards 395–6w

Delegated legislation
557w

Democratic Republic of the Congo
244w

***Denham, Mr John**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of Social Security*
Questions
Dept of Social Security, Reviews 192w
Disability living allowance 470–2w, 547–9w, 705–6
Disability living allowance, Benefit integrity project 110w, 545–6w, 704–5
Disability living allowance, Departmental publications 549–50w
Disability living allowance, Social security recipients 548w
Fathers, Pay 710–1w
Handicap benefits 470w
Handicap benefits, Cancer 711–2w
Handicap benefits, Earnings rules 109w
Handicap benefits, Social security benefits rules 109w
Handicap benefits, Social security recipients 190–2w
Handicap benefits, Taxation 469w
Incapacity benefit, Medical examinations 476–7w
Incapacity benefit, Social security claims 253w
Incapacity benefit, Warrington 253–4w
Industrial injuries disablement benefit, Urinary system disorders 709w
National insurance contributions 467–8w
National Insurance Fund 550w
New deal for disabled people 112w, 473w, 711w
Occupational pensions 108w, 469w, 692
Occupational pensions, Scotland 551w
Pension Provision Group 552w
Pensioners, Income distribution 550–1w
Pensioners, Income support 468w, 707
Pensioners, Poverty 699–700
Pensioners, Scotland 477–80w
Pensions 551–2w, 701–2
Pensions, Carers 700–1
Pensions, Personal savings 703
Pensions Education Working Group 552w
Pensions review 702
Personal injury compensation, Social security benefits overpayment 550w
Personal pensions 700
Retirement pensions 111–2w, 467w, 546w
Retirement pensions, Equal opportunities 111w
Social Fund, Floods 187–9w
Social security recipients 189–90w
Stakeholder pensions 701–3
Vaccine damaged children, Compensation 250w, 550w
War pensions 252–3w
Widowers' benefits 250–1w
Widows' benefits 314w, 402–3w
Winter fuel payments 402w, 554–6w, 707–8
Winter fuel payments, Worcester 554–6w

Dental students
Higher education admission 140w

Dentists
239w
Cumbria 540w
Norfolk 129w

Departmental coordination
Elderly 214w, 369w
Genetic engineering 321w
Departmental coordination—continued
Nature conservation 520w
New deal for disabled people 365w

Departmental correspondence
300w, 1059–60
Dept of Social Security 552w
Sierra Leone 346w

Departmental forms
Firearms 220w, 310w, 431w
Integrated administration and control system 492

Departmental publications
Disability living allowance 549–50w

Departmental responsibilities
Exservicemen 94–5w
Human rights 647w, 656w

Deprivation indicators
157w

Dept for Culture Media and Sport
Alternative energy 493w
Energy consumption 558w
Inquiries 559w
Official hospitality 47–8w
Small businesses 45w
Transport 47w
Travelling expenses 558w

Dept for Education and Employment
Government information services 255w
Small businesses 140w

Dept for International Development
EC staff 446–7w
Ministerial policy advisors 37–8w

Dept for the Environment Transport and the Regions
see Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions

Dept of Health
Green papers 334w
Pilot schemes 688–90w
Small businesses 135w

Dept of Social Security
Departmental correspondence 552w
Inquiries 712w
Pilot schemes 710w
Reviews 192w

Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions
Government buildings 623w
Non-departmental public bodies 3w
Pilot schemes 632–4w
Public appointments 3w
Public bodies 629w
Small businesses 29–30w

Dept of Trade and Industry
Economic and monetary union 122w
Government information services 126w
Green papers 126w
Millennium compliance 122w
Non-departmental public bodies 112w
Public appointments 113w
Small businesses 160–1w

Derbyshire
Council tax capping 420w, 635–6w
Educational finance 1075
Magistrates' courts 212w

Derelict land
510w, 859–60
Housing construction 510w, 858–60
Scotland 428–9w

Derringham School
357w

Developing countries
Debts 35w, 89–91w, 215–6w, 230–1w, 234w, 354–8, 370w, 588w
Debts written off 494–6w
Poverty 215w
Religious freedom 233w
Security industry 232–3w

Development Policy Forum
648–9w

Devon
Pest control 157–8w

***Dewar, Rt Hon Donald**, Secretary of State for Scotland*
Questions
Class sizes, Scotland 282w
Direct labour departments, Scotland 580–1w
Educational assessment, Scotland 265w
Educational finance, Scotland 262–4w
Government information services, Scottish Office 84w
Green papers, Scottish Office 259w
Housing finance, Scotland 331–2w
Legal aid scheme, Scotland 279–80w, 502w
Ministerial policy advisors, Scottish Office 260w
Moray College 332–3w
Mortgage defaulters, Scotland 291–3w
Pre-school education, Scotland 268–9w, 271–5w
Public appointments, Scotland 78w
Rented housing, Glasgow 333w
Rented housing, Scotland 333w
Repairs and maintenance, Scottish Office 77–8w
School population, Scotland 282–9w
Scottish Office, Civil service recruitment 264–5w
Scottish Office, Private finance initiative 278w
Scottish Office, Public appointments 384w
Scottish Office, Publicity 266–7w
Student loans, Scotland 275–8w
Unemployment, Dundee 332w
Youth employment, Dundee 581–2w

Diabetes
Medical equipment 541w

Diet and disease
Food labelling 249w

Digital television
5, 45w

Diplomatic service
St Helena 247w

Dir85/337/EEC
502–3w

Dir91/271/EEC
517w

Dir97/11/EC
525–6w

Direct labour departments
Scotland 580–1w

Director of Public Prosecutions
see Crown Prosecution Service

Directories
Millennium compliance 680w

Disability Discrimination Act 1995
Questions
138w, 544w

Disability living allowance
470–2w, 547–9w, 705–6
Benefit integrity project 110w, 545–6w, 704–5

Disability living allowance*—*continued
Departmental publications 549–50w
Social security recipients 548w

Disabled facilities grants
416w
Elderly 17w

Disabled person's tax credit
650–1w

Disabled workers
Wheelchairs 699–700w

Disadvantaged
Health 168
Housing standards 214w
Sports 6–7

Disaster relief
231–2w, 355–6

Discretionary student grants
205w, 701–2w

Disease control
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 490
Dogs 530w

Diseases
Travel 603w

Dismore, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Crown Prosecution Service (01.06.98) 52
Leasehold housing (10.06.98) 995, 1005–6
Questions
"Access to Justice with Conditional Fees Consultation Paper" 301w
Community Legal Service 301w
EU Justice and Home Affairs Council 378–80w
Health education, Men 170w
Multilateral Agreement on Investment 234w

Distributive trade
Petrol 115w

Dobbin, Mr Jim
Questions
Health education, Men 161–2

***Dobson, Rt Hon Frank**, Secretary of State for Health*
Questions
Health, Disadvantaged 168
Health authorities, Greater Manchester 541w
Hospital discharges 165–6
Hospital waiting lists 158–9
NHS, Social services 165
NHS trusts, Public appointments 157–9

Doctors' list of patients
130–1w

Dogs
Disease control 530w

Domestic appliances
Energy conservation 7w

Domestic energy conservation
(10.06.98) 1010–32

Domestic violence
Immigration rules 167w
Women 476w, 703–4

Donaldson, Mr Jeffrey M
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland (Sentences) Bill, 2R (10.06.98) 1114, 1129–34

Doncaster
Pre-school education 364w

Dorchester
Road construction 297w

Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Debates etc.
Economic policy (11.06.98) 1207

Double taxation
Tax allowances 391w

Dounreay
Nuclear fuel reprocessing 385–6w, 595–6w, 709–15
Nuclear Installations Inspectorate 120w
Nuclear safety 120–1w, 715
Uranium 364–5, 594–5w

Dredging
Licensing 525–6w

Drew, Mr David
Debates etc.
Agenda 21 (03.06.98) 476–80
Domestic energy conservation (10.06.98) 1021–2, 1030
Electoral systems (02.06.98) 216
Questions
After school clubs, Rural areas 695w
Derelict land 859
Smallholdings, Local government land 339w

Drift nets
201w, 344w

Drinking and driving
868
Road accidents 20w, 22–3w

Drinks Containers (Redemption) Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
1R (03.06.98) 385–7

Driving licences
Post Office 125w

Driving offences
Cellular phones 303–4w
Disqualifications 309w
Drug abuse 434–5w

Driving tests
Chelmsford 156w

Drug abuse
180w
Driving offences 434–5w
EC action 568w
Ecstasy 320w, 433–4w, 568w
Entertainment licensing 434w
Medical treatments 336–7w, 464–5w
Night clubs 434w
Primary education 693w
Prisoners 310–1w
Road accidents 20w

Drug and Alcohol Misuse Welsh Advisory Committee
see Welsh Advisory Committee on Drug and Alcohol Misuse

Drug crimes
1076
Prison visits 439w

Drugs
Expenditure 130w
Prices 177–8w
Residential care 686–7w

Duncan, Mr Alan
Debates etc.
Review of Health Care in London Independent Advisory Panel (03.06.98) 316–9
Questions
Hospital waiting lists, Worcestershire 154

Duncan Smith, Mr Iain
Questions
Dept of Social Security, Reviews 192w
Handicap benefits, Social security recipients 190–2w
NHS trusts, Greater London 408w
Pensioners, Means tested benefits 697–8
Social security recipients 189–90w
Working benefits campaign 546–7w

Dundee
Unemployment 332w
Youth employment 581–2w

Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Debates etc.
Crown Prosecution Service (01.06.98) 49
House of Commons procedure (04.06.98) 551, 565–6, 568–9, 571–4, 578, 584, 592
House of Commons procedure, Points of order (10.06.98) 1077
Members' correspondence, Points of order (04.06.98) 514
Questions
Church Commissioners, Taxation 34w
Civil service agencies, Members' correspondence 1060
Crown Prosecution Service 500
Glaucoma 164
School transport 1190

Duty free allowances
194w, 215w, 665–6w
Air travel 21w, 570–1w
Ferries 328w, 417w
Redundancy 122w, 1074

E coli
Milk 601w

Eagle, Angela, *Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions*
Debates etc.
Agenda 21 (03.06.98) 480–4
Domestic energy conservation (10.06.98) 1024, 1027–32
Questions
Access to countryside, Liability for animals 518w
Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment 5w
Animal products, Import controls 22w
Asbestos, Import controls 517w
Birds, Nature conservation 30w
Carbon dioxide, Air pollution control 211–2w, 299w
Carbon monoxide, Air pollution 211w
Chlorofluorocarbons, Refrigeration 15w
Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions, Public bodies 629w
East Midlands Regional Development Agency 630–1w
EC grants and loans, Wales 4w
Energy conservation 574w
Energy conservation, Domestic appliances 7w
Environment Agency, Government buildings 856
Fossil fuels, Air pollution control 211w
Frogs, Import controls 373–4w
Genetically modified organisms, Crops 417–8w
Genetically modified organisms, Environment protection 5–7w
Genetically modified organisms, Maize 524–5w
Ground water, Pollution 31–2w
Hedges and ditches 630w
Hydrofluorocarbons 15w
Hydrofluorocarbons, Refrigeration 14–5w
Industrial accidents 634w
Eagle, Angela—continued
Industrial health and safety, Chemicals 17–8w
Industrial health and safety, Fuels 518–9w
Industrial health and safety, Hazardous materials 520–3w
Inland waterways, Navigation 510w
Land pollution, Industrial wastes 16–7w
Land reclamation 9w, 13w
Litter, Chelmsford 299w
Local authorities, Millennium compliance 4–5w
Mediation UK 13–4w
Millennium Exhibition, Flood control 33w
Millennium Exhibition, Land pollution 30–1w
National air quality strategy 417w
National parks 518w
Nature conservation, Circuses 22w
Nature conservation, Departmental coordination 520w
New Forest, National parks 518w
Non-departmental public bodies, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions 3w
Ozone, Air pollution 415–6w
Pennine Way 569–70w
Pilot schemes, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions 632–4w
Pollution control, Prosecutions 299w
Pollution monitoring 9–13w
Public appointments, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions 3w
Regional development agencies 509w
Regional development agencies, Liverpool 509w
Regional development agencies, South West region 509w
Rights of way 23w
River Tame, Sewage 372–3w
Rivers, Sites of special scientific interest 572w
Seas and oceans, Nature conservation 1–3w
Sewage, Water treatment 17w, 517w
Sewers 32w
Sheep dipping 536w
Sites of special scientific interest 579w
Sites of special scientific interest, Lancashire 370–1w
Small businesses, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions 29–30w
South Downs 14w, 636w
Stray dogs 516–7w
Waste disposal, Agricultural land 28w, 420w
Water abstraction 153w
Water conservation 17w
Water storage, Civil engineering 159w
Wild boar 155–6w, 662w

Eagle, Maria
Debates etc.
Eritrea (08.06.98) 735
Millennium compliance (08.06.98) 721
Questions
Accidents, Inquiries 4w
Court Funds Office 302w
EC Telecommunications Council 162–4w
Legal costs, Public inquiries 72w
Open government 1061
Prescription drugs 171w
Regional development agencies, Liverpool 509w

Early retirement
NHS pensions 407w
Teachers 358–63w

Earnings rules
Handicap benefits 109w

East London
Alternative medicine 605w

East Midlands Regional Development Agency
630–1w

East Sussex
Further education 694w

East Timor
EC external relations 355w
Ministers' visits abroad 355–6w

Easter
Sunday trading 168w

EC action
Alternative energy 507w
Arms trade 147w, 240–1w, 488w
Drug abuse 568w
Eggs 338w
Fisheries (01.06.98) 143
Food surpluses 455w
Tibet 149w
Women 473–4w

EC Agriculture Council
202–3w

EC aid
Bulgaria 459w
Disclosure of information 446w
Sierra Leone 236w
Sudan 36w
Sustainable development 447w

EC countries
Public sector debt 327–8w

EC Culture Council
165w

EC Development Council
236w, 447w

EC Draft 6123/98
(01.06.98) 143

EC Education and Social Affairs Council
450–1w

EC external relations
East Timor 355w
Israel 347–8w
Palestinians 243w

EC external trade
Israel 149w

EC Finance Council
193w, 225–6w
Economic and monetary union 88–9w

EC Fisheries Council
658–9w

EC Foreign Affairs Council
354–5w, 678–9w

EC grants and loans
508w
Administrative costs 261w, 481w
Nomenclature of statistical territorial units 384w
Northern Ireland 481w
Regional aid 161w, 319–20w
Scotland 261w
Wales 4w, 146w, 193w, 425–6w, 507–8w

EC Internal Market Council
322–3w

EC law
Butter 454w
Defence contracts 313w
Food labelling 453w
Milk 534w

EC Monetary Committee
442w

EC presidency
362

EC Social Charter
North West region 684w

EC staff
Dept for International Development 446–7w

EC Telecommunications Council
162–4w

EC trade
Animal welfare 248w

Economic and monetary union
88w, 496w
Banking supervision 329–30w
Dept of Trade and Industry 122w
EC Finance Council 88–9w
Information technology 193w
Italy 584–5w
Seigniorage 442w
Wales 589w

Economic Community of West African States Military Observer Group
101w

Economic policy
Ministerial statements (11.06.98) 1195–215
Public sector debt 650w

Economic situation
Asia 91w

Ecstasy
Drug abuse 320w, 433–4w, 568w

Education action zones
695w

Education development plans
204–5w

Educational assessment
Scotland 265w

Educational equipment
Tax allowances 654w

Educational finance
Argyll and Bute 432w
Derbyshire 1075
Hereford and Worcester 704w
National insurance contributions 137w
Scotland 262–4w
Suffolk 1072
Worcestershire 1187–8

Educational publications
Scotland 502w

Educational qualifications
Unemployment 498–9w

Educational standards
698w, 1074

Educational visits
Farms 696w

Edwards, Mr Huw
Questions
Defence Medical Training Organisation, Performance standards 394–5w
Farm incomes, Retail trade 487
Medical Supplies Agency, Performance standards 395w
NHS trusts, Wales 166w
Open government 619–20w
Rural transport, Wales 675–6w
Welsh National Board for Nursing Midwifery and Health Visiting 675w

Eggs
EC action 338w

Elderly
Better government programme 634–5w, 1066

Elderly—continued
Chiropody 132–3w, 536w
Community care 687–8w
Departmental coordination 214w, 369w
Disabled facilities grants 17w
Population projection 442–3w
Residential care 463–4w

Elections
Hong Kong 246w, 362
Northern Ireland Assembly 369–70w

Electoral systems
Opposition days (02.06.98) 171–268

Electricity tariffs
Low incomes 503–4w

Electroconvulsive therapy
Bro Taf Health Authority 672–3w

Electronic government
1062–4

Electronic mail
Ministers 624w

Electronic tagging
Contracts 303w, 648w

Elgin Marbles
3–4, 302w

Ellman, Mrs Louise
Questions
Compulsory purchase 631w
Creative Industries Task Force 44w
Drugs, Expenditure 130w
Drugs, Prices 177–8w
Hospital beds, Liverpool 540w
Regional airports, Air routes 580w

Emergency planning
Local government finance 436–7w

Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Debates etc.
Eritrea (08.06.98) 733
Questions
Restricted Enforcement Unit, Arms trade 676–7w

Employment
86w

Employment agencies
NHS 602w

Employment schemes
Ethnic minorities 1185–6
Lancashire 1188–9

Empty property
NHS 686w

Energy conservation
574w
Domestic appliances 7w

Energy consumption
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 558w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 528w
Ministry of Defence 107w, 492w
Treasury 440–1w

Energy prices
Business premises 568–9w

English Sports Council
National Lottery 6–7

English Tourist Board
11–2, 493w

Ennis, Mr Jeff
Questions
Dredging, Licensing 525–6w
Pre-school education, Barnsley 364w

Entertainment licensing
Drug abuse 434w

Entry clearances
Manpower 356–7w
Nigeria 306–7w
Sri Lanka 53w

Environment Agency
Government buildings 856
Sea level 341w

Environment protection
Genetically modified organisms 5–7w
Government Office for Eastern Region 300w

Environmental health
162

Environmentally sensitive areas
Overseas investment 42w

Epilepsy
131–2w, 407–8w, 537w

Epsom
Police stations 646w

Equal opportunities
Retirement pensions 111w

Eritrea
Ministerial statements (08.06.98) 728–35

Essex
Class sizes 401w

Ethics
Genetic engineering 680w

Ethnic minorities
Employment schemes 1185–6
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 487–8w
Magistrates 484–5w
Metropolitan Police 305–6w
New deal schemes 1177
Northern Ireland 184–5w

EU Justice and Home Affairs Council
378–80w

EUREKA
597w

Euro
441w, 492–3, 496w
Agricultural subsidies 453w
Publicity 585w
Teaching aids 457w

European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages
350w

European Communities
see (also) EC headings

European Communities
Conferences 616w
Wales 426w

European Communities (Amendment) Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
Allocation of time motion and Lords amendts (09.06.98) 930–79
Royal Assent (11.06.98) 1241

European Convention on Human Rights
311w
Channel Islands 55w

European Council
Furniture 461–2w

European Development Fund
UK contributions to EC budget 448w

European Parliament Members
Candidate selection 436w

European voluntary service for young people
137w

Eurostar
579w

Evacuees Reunion Association
424w

Evans, Mr Nigel
Debates etc.
Business questions (11.06.98) 1224
Electoral systems (02.06.98) 186, 206
Referendums (03.06.98) 284
Registration of Political Parties Bill, 2R (04.06.98) 527, 541–5, 547
Questions
Armed forces casualties 105–6w
Business questions 512–3
EC Social Charter, North West region 684w
Employment schemes, Lancashire 1188–9
Milk, Production quotas 341w
Road accidents, Drinking and driving 20w
Road accidents, Drug abuse 20w
Road traffic 209–10w
Road traffic offences, Lancashire 53w

Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Questions
Beekeeping, Agricultural subsidies 247–8w, 275w
Bees, Varroasis 247–8w, 275w
Class sizes, Scotland 282w
Council housing, Scotland 330–1w
Defence contracts 313w
Defence contracts, EC law 313w
Direct labour departments, Scotland 580–1w
East Timor, Ministers' visits abroad 355–6w
Educational assessment, Scotland 265w
Educational finance, Scotland 262–4w
Export credit 504–5w
Financial institutions, Jersey 443–4w
Fireworks, Safety measures 162w
Hospital waiting lists, Scotland 289–90w
Housing finance, Scotland 429–30w
Legal aid scheme, Scotland 279–80w
Lone parents, Social security benefits 315–6w
Means tested benefits 251–2w
Merchant seamen, Medical examinations 578–9w
Moray College 332–3w
Mortgage defaulters, Scotland 291–3w
Negligence, Scotland 280w
NHS, Administrative costs 265–6w
NHS finance, Scotland 197w
NHS trusts, Executives 266w
NHS trusts, Expenditure 264w
Pre-school education, Scotland 268–75w
Prison population, Scotland 280–2w
Private finance initiative 223–4w
School population, Scotland 282–9w
Scottish Office, Civil service recruitment 264–5w
Scottish Office, Private finance initiative 278w
Scottish Office, Publicity 266–7w
Student loans, Scotland 275–8w
Unemployment, Dundee 332w
War pensions 252–3w
Youth employment, Dundee 581–2w

Exchange rates
Agriculture 492

Executives
NHS trusts 266w

Exhaust emission controls
871

Exhibitions
Defence equipment 385w, 504w

Expert Panel on Air Quality Standards
see Air Quality Standards Expert Panel

Export controls
Plutonium 597w
Radioactive materials 119–20w

Export credit
504–5w

Export credit guarantees
593w
Indonesia 121w

Export financing
321w

Export licensing
125–6w
Arms exports 594w
Cambodia 117–8w
Indonesia 440w

Export rebates
Agricultural products 454–5w

Export subsidies
41w
Barley 532w

Exports
Beef 339–40w, 497–8, 531–2w, 1072
Indonesia 121w
Microbiology 604w

Exservicemen
Counselling 606w
Departmental responsibilities 94–5w

Ex-Services Mental Welfare Society
422w

External financing limits
Post Office 115w

Extradition
USA 643–4w

Eye disorders
Wales 671w

Eye tests
542w
Glaucoma 176–7w

Faber, Mr David
Questions
Import duties, Israel 327w
Israel, EC external relations 347–8w
Palestinians, EC external relations 243w
Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration 411–2w
Public Trust Office 68–9w, 411–2w
Sierra Leone, Arms trade 144w

Fabricant, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Human Rights Bill (HL), Com (03.06.98) 474–5
Referendums (03.06.98) 278, 281, 287
Questions
Business questions 512
Crown Prosecution Service 500–1
Employment schemes, Ethnic minorities 1185–6
Farmers, Bureaucracy 491
House of Commons procedure, Disclosure of information 558w
Standard spending assessments 861

Fallon, Mr Michael
Questions
Evacuees Reunion Association 424w
Personal savings, Channel Islands 652w

Families
Women's employment 708
Working hours 692–3

Family credit
Child care 706

Family income
475–6w

Family planning
129–30w
Northern Ireland 65–6w

Farm incomes
340w, 486–7
Dairy farming 341w
Interest rates 487–8
Retail trade 487

Farmers
Bureaucracy 491

Farms
Educational visits 696w
Furs 72–3w

***Fatchett, Mr Derek**, Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office*
Debates etc.
Atkinson, George, Prisoners (02.06.98) 272–6
Lowery, David (11.06.98) 1288–92
Western Sahara (03.06.98) 336–40
Questions
Afghanistan, Arms embargoes 349w
Afghanistan, Human rights 461w
Africa, Visas 346–7w
Algeria, Human rights 611–2w
Algeria, Visas 459–60w
Allison, Clive 148w
Arms trade, EC action 240–1w
Ascension Island 247w
British dependent territories 150w
Chevening scholarship programme 612–6w
China, Arms embargoes 246–7w
China, Human rights 677w
Colombia, Human rights 241–2w
Democratic Republic of the Congo 244w
East Timor, EC external relations 355w
East Timor, Ministers' visits abroad 355–6w
Entry clearances, Manpower 356–7w
European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages 350w
Hong Kong, Elections 246w
India, Nuclear weapons tests 152w
Indonesia, Arms trade 151–2w, 240w
Indonesia, ASSIST programme 487w
Indonesia, Human rights 146–7w
Iran, Arms embargoes 245–6w
Iran, British embassies 618w
Kashmir, UN resolutions 392w
Ottawa Convention 356w
Panchen Lama 677w
St Helena, Diplomatic service 247w
St Helena, Migrant workers 356w
Sierra Leone, Governments in exile 486–7w
Small businesses, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 149w
Sudan, Civil wars 460–1w
Sudan, Genocide 460w
Sudan, Human rights 612w
Taiwan, Arms trade 349w
Thailand, Overseas aid 168–9w
Tibet, EC action 149w
Travelling expenses, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 168w
Turks and Caicos Islands, Ministers' visits abroad 348–9w
Turks and Caicos Islands, Overseas aid 349w
Venezuela, Prisoners 618w
Western Sahara, Referendums 239w
Yemen, Journalists 617–8w

Fathers
Pay 710–1w
Tax rates and bands 401–2w

Feltham Young Offender Institution and Remand Centre
Prison staff 52w

Ferries
Duty free allowances 328w, 417w
Transport of radioactive materials 631–2w

Fertility
Medical treatments 169w
North Cumbria Health Authority 169w

Festivals and special occasions
Royal parks 44w

***Field, Rt Hon Frank**, Minister of State, Dept of Social Security*
Questions
Dept of Social Security, Departmental correspondence 552w
Housing benefits, Social security abuse 478–9w
Housing benefits, Social security benefits overpayment 253w
Inquiries, Dept of Social Security 712w
Members' correspondence, Administrative delays 112w
Pensioners, Means tested benefits 697–8
Social security, Expenditure 475w
Social security reform 469w
Stakeholder pensions 697

Film industry
43–4w
National Lottery 164w
Taxation 43w

Finance and Services Select Committee
(05.06.98) 682

"Finance for UK Capital Goods and Project Exports"
321w

Financial institutions
Jersey 443–4w

Fines
Greater Manchester 485–6w
Lincolnshire 67w
Road traffic offences 309w

Fire prevention
Construction materials 297–9w

Fire services
Northern Ireland (08.06.98) 846

Fire Services (Amendment) (Northern Ireland) Order 1998
Debates etc.
(08.06.98) 846

Firearms
Compensation 438–9w, 566–7w
Departmental forms 220w, 310w, 431w

Fireworks
Import controls 162w
Safety measures 162w

Fish conservation
Scotland 582w

***Fisher, Mr Mark**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept for Culture Media and Sport*
Debates etc.
National Lottery Bill, Rep and 3R (01.06.98) 64, 77–80, 109–11
Questions
Archaeological sites, Public buildings 44w
Art works, VAT 3
Arts Council of England 2–3
BBC 492–3w

***Fisher, Mr Mark**—continued*
Cable television, Local broadcasting 163–4w
EC Culture Council 165w
Elgin Marbles 302w
Museums and galleries, Public transport 376w
National Lottery, Performing arts 9
Performing arts, Finance 9
Performing arts, Kettering 5–6
Public libraries, Blind 560w
Public libraries, Information technology 165w
S4C 302w
Theatres, Arts finance 1–2
UNESCO, Cultural heritage 560w

Fisheries
EC action (01.06.98) 143

Fishery protection
Spain 106w

Fishing grounds
75w

Fishing quotas
660–1w

Fitzpatrick, Jim
Debates etc.
Channel tunnel (03.06.98) 382–3
Leasehold housing (10.06.98) 987–90, 1005
Questions
Colombia, Human rights 458w
Greyhound racing 435–6w

Fitzsimons, Lorna
Debates etc.
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep adjourned (08.06.98) 829–30
Questions
Health authorities, Greater Manchester 541w
Hospitals, Construction 171w
Pay and Personnel Agency, Performance standards 488w
Women's employment, Families 708

Flexible working
Manufacturing industries 508w

Flight, Mr Howard
Questions
Dept of Trade and Industry, Millennium compliance 122w
Economic and monetary union, Italy 584–5w
Housing construction, West Sussex 9w
Occupational pensions 469w
Taxation, Child benefit 392w
Teachers, Pay 624w, 703w
Terminal care 174w
Tuition fees, Higher education admission 1192–3

Flint, Caroline
Debates etc.
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep adjourned (08.06.98) 768, 778, 817
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (09.06.98) 908, 923–4
Questions
Coal mining, Compensation 505w
Women, EC action 473–4w

Flood control
Cumbria 660w
Millennium Exhibition 33w

Floods
Northampton 187–9w
Social Fund 187–9w

Flynn, Paul
Debates etc.
Electoral systems (02.06.98) 171
Questions
Antismoking campaign, Young people 260–1w, 324w, 375w, 685w
Benzodiazepines, Pregnant women 463w
Business questions 511
Cardiff Prison, Operating costs 483–4w
Dept of Social Security, Departmental correspondence 552w
Drug abuse 180w
Drug abuse, Medical treatments 336–7w, 464–5w
M4, Road traffic 670–1w
Methadone, Death 225w, 323w
National Insurance Fund 550w
Nuclear power 714
Nuclear power stations, Health hazards 597–8w
Ottawa Convention 356w
Pension Provision Group 552w
Pensions 551–2w
Pensions Education Working Group 552w
Prescription drugs, Wales 545w
Prison population 223w
Prisoners, Drug abuse 310–1w
Prisons, Private sector 382–3w
Retirement pensions 546w
Smoking, Young people 136w, 260w, 323–4w
Stakeholder pensions 702–3
Sudan, Genocide 460w
Tobacco, Agricultural subsidies 344w
Tobacco, Retail trade 505w
Tobacco duties 327w
Welsh Advisory Committee on Drug and Alcohol Misuse, Public appointments 376–8w

Food hygiene
Inspections 535w

Food labelling
340w
Diet and disease 249w
EC law 453w
Genetically modified organisms 498

Food poisoning
535w
Untreated milk 76w

Food prices
Supermarkets 486

Food standards
485
Civil service agencies 75w

Food Standards Agency
339w

Food surpluses
EC action 455w

Football Trust
Wales 166w

Foreign and Commonwealth Office
Ethnic minorities 487–8w
Inquiries 152w
Small businesses 149w
Travelling expenses 168w

Foreigners
Prison population 567–8w

Forensic Science Service
435w

Forestry Commission
Hunting 427–8w

Forth, Mr Eric
Debates etc.
Electoral systems (02.06.98) 174

***Forth, Mr Eric**—continued*
House of Commons procedure (04.06.98) 555–6
Late Payment of Commercial Debts (Interest) Bill, Rep and 3R (01.06.98) 121–2, 124, 130, 139–41
Referendums (03.06.98) 277, 279–81
Registration of Political Parties Bill, 2R (04.06.98) 539–40
Questions
Art works 4
Business questions 513
Members' correspondence, Administrative delays 1066
Taxis, Greater London 565w

Fossil fuels
Air pollution control 211w

Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Questions
Employment schemes, Ethnic minorities 1186
Interest rates, Industry 1070
New deal for lone parents 706

Foster, Mr Don
Debates etc.
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep adjourned (08.06.98) 751–3, 775, 810, 824–6
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (09.06.98) 890–1
Questions
Class sizes 1179
General Certificate of Secondary Education 624–5w
Teachers, Early retirement 358–63w

***Foster, Mr Michael**, (Hastings and Rye)*
Questions
Business questions 511

***Foster, Mr Michael John**, (Worcester)*
Questions
Educational finance, Hereford and Worcester 704w
Further education, Cost per student 699w
Hospitals, Worcestershire 154–5
Magistrates' courts, Worcester 412w
Motor vehicles, Lighting 20–1w
Pre-school education, Hereford and Worcester 708–9w
School crossing patrols 21w
Teacher training, Student numbers 363w
Television, Sports 46–7w
Urban areas, Management 20w
Winter fuel payments, Worcester 554–6w

Foster care
409–10w

***Foulkes, Mr George**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development*
Questions
Niger, Overseas aid 231w
Overseas aid 231w
Overseas aid, Charities 356
Sudan, Overseas aid 355–6, 449w

Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Debates etc.
Registration of Political Parties Bill, 2R (04.06.98) 524–8, 546
Questions
Immigration Service (Ports), Manpower 646w
Police, Finance 646w
Political refugees, Expenditure 643w
Political refugees, Work permits 437–8w

***Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman**—continued*
Ports, Passengers 646–7w

Fox, Dr Liam
Debates etc.
Electoral systems (02.06.98) 256–60, 264
Questions
Ministerial policy advisors, Government departments 664w

France
Transport of radioactive materials 414w

Fraser, Mr Christopher
Debates etc.
National Lottery Bill, Rep and 3R (01.06.98) 64–8, 71, 90–1
Referendums (03.06.98) 288–90
Questions
Educational standards 698w
Graduates 700–1w
Livestock, Animal welfare 659–60w
Overseas investment, Russia 505–6w

Fraud
Motor vehicles 16w

Free school meals
Scotland 431w

Frogs
Import controls 373–4w

Fuels
Industrial health and safety 518–9w
Navy 607w

Funerals
Consumer protection 123w, 161w

Furniture
European Council 461–2w

Furs
Farms 72–3w

Further education
Cost per student 699w
East Sussex 694w
Wales 63w

Further education colleges
701w
Student numbers 701w

Future large aircraft
421w

Fyfe, Maria
Debates etc.
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep adjourned (08.06.98) 786, 822
Questions
Student grants, Scotland 428w
Women, Government departments 694–5

G8
see Group of Eight

***Galbraith, Mr Sam**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Scottish Office*
Questions
Antismoking campaign, Young people 260–1w
Arts sponsorship, Scotland 581w
Asthma, Scotland 85w
Breast cancer, Scotland 657w
Hospital waiting lists, Scotland 289–90w
Negligence, Scotland 280w
NHS, Administrative costs 265–6w
NHS finance, Scotland 197w
NHS trusts, Executives 266w
NHS trusts, Expenditure 264w
Pre-school education, Scotland 269–71w
Scottish National Sleep Laboratory 81–2w
Secure accommodation, Scotland 429w
Smoking, Young people 260w

Gale, Mr Roger
Questions
Duty free allowances 215w, 665–6w
Duty free allowances, Redundancy 122w
Ferries, Duty free allowances 417w
Firearms, Compensation 438–9w
New deal schemes, Thanet 449–50w

Gangmasters
339w, 527–9w

Gapes, Mr Mike
Debates etc.
Channel tunnel (03.06.98) 384
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Allocation of time motion and Lords amendts (09.06.98) 938
European Council (11.06.98) 1237, 1241, 1255–9
Nuclear weapons tests (01.06.98) 31–2
Questions
New deal for long term unemployed 693w
New deal schemes 1189

Gardiner, Mr Barry
Debates etc.
Gas supply industry, Regulatory systems (09.06.98) 980–3
Leasehold housing (10.06.98) 998–1003
Questions
Business Link London North West, Finance 161–2w
Leasehold housing, Service charges 158–9w

Garnier, Mr Edward
Debates etc.
Human Rights Bill (HL), Com (03.06.98) 398, 401, 407, 411, 437–45, 450, 460–1
Questions
Business questions 513
Civil proceedings, Personal injury 69w
Conditional fee agreements 70w
Crown Prosecution Service 500
Defamation Act 1996 71w
Legal aid, Barristers 70–1w
Legal aid, Personal injury 69w
Legal aid, Solicitors 70w
Open government 1067
Theatres, Market Harborough 6

Garth Prison
Prison accommodation 439w

Gas fired power stations
507w
Planning permission 113–4w

Gas supply industry
Regulatory systems (09.06.98) 980–6

Gascoigne, Paul
7

General Certificate of Secondary Education
624–5w

General Council of the Bar
Conditional fee agreements 583w

General practitioners
Primary care groups 181w

Genetic engineering
597w
Departmental coordination 321w
Ethics 680w

Genetically modified organisms
496
Crops 417–8w
Environment protection 5–7w
Food labelling 498
Maize 524–5w
Public opinion 535w

Genocide
Sudan 460w

George, Mr Andrew
Questions
Council tax, Second homes 509–10w

Geriatric patients
Hospital admissions 688w
Hospital discharges 170w, 466w

Germany
Armed forces 491w
Armed forces training 489w
Costs 638–9w
Territorial Army 489–91w

Gerrard, Mr Neil
Debates etc.
House of Commons procedure (04.06.98) 573–6
Questions
Children, Health services 130w
Electronic government 1062
Greater London Authority 862
Political refugees, Immigration appeals 55w
Political refugees, Legal representation 167w

Gibb, Mr Nick
Questions
Capital investment 652w
Double taxation, Tax allowances 391w
Government loans 494w
Tax allowances, British residents abroad 652w
Tax allowances, Interest payments 390–1w
Tax avoidance 649w
Tax credits 88w, 391–2w
Tax credits, Pensioners 87–8w

Gibraltar
Identity cards 148w

Gibson, Dr Ian
Debates etc.
House of Commons accommodation, Points of order (08.06.98) 736
Questions
Chlamydiosis, Screening 181w
Derelict land 510w
EUREKA 597w
Genetic engineering 597w
Housing construction, Derelict land 859
Industrial injuries disablement benefit, Urinary system disorders 709w
Land reclamation 9w, 13w
Pollution monitoring 9–13w
Scientists, Women 204w
Smoking, Health education 465w

Gifts and endowments
Tax allowances 654w

Gill, Mr Christopher
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Allocation of time motion and Lords amendts (09.06.98) 960, 966–8
Questions
Common fisheries policy 74w
Fishery protection, Spain 106w
Fishing grounds 75w
Public sector debt, EC countries 327–8w

Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Debates etc.
Late Payment of Commercial Debts (Interest) Bill, Rep and 3R (01.06.98) 120–1, 125–34, 139, 141–2
Questions
Hospital waiting lists 364

Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Debates etc.
Domestic energy conservation (10.06.98) 1014–6, 1023, 1026
Questions
Naval Bases and Supply Agency, Performance standards 397w
Ships Support Agency, Performance standards 397–8w
Wild boar 662w

Glasgow
High rise flats 84w
Rented housing 333w

Glaucoma
163–4
Eye tests 176–7w
Hospital waiting lists 164

Gloucestershire
Local government constituencies 212w

Godalming
Sixth form colleges 693w

Godman, Dr Norman A
Debates etc.
Electoral systems (02.06.98) 182
Eritrea (08.06.98) 733
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Allocation of time motion and Lords amendts (09.06.98) 931, 935, 940, 952–5, 973
Northern Ireland (Sentences) Bill, 2R (10.06.98) 1082–3, 1110–1, 1117–22
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep adjourned (08.06.98) 789–91, 794–5
Questions
Dounreay, Nuclear safety 715
Industrial health and safety, Hazardous materials 520–3w

Godsiff, Mr Roger
Debates etc.
Nuclear weapons tests (01.06.98) 26
Questions
Entry clearances, Nigeria 306–7w

Goggins, Mr Paul
Debates etc.
Economic policy (11.06.98) 1213–4
Questions
Literacy, Primary education 695–6w
Overseas aid 231w

"Good Practice Guide on Managing the Use of Common Land"
374w

Goodlad, Rt Hon Sir Alastair
Questions
Export subsidies 41w
Group of Eight, Overseas aid 40w
Kosovo, Overseas aid 41–2w
No Mans Heath bypass 154w
Overseas aid, Human rights 37w
Overseas aid, Non-governmental organisations 38–9w
Overseas aid, Rule of law 36w
Police training 36w
Sierra Leone 325w
Sierra Leone, Arms trade 586–7w, 653w
Sierra Leone, Military intervention 587w
Sierra Leone, Overseas aid 445–6w, 587w
Solar power, Research 122–3w
Sudan, EC aid 36w
UN agencies, UK contributions 38w
UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 147–8w

Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Allocation of time motion and Lords amendts (09.06.98) 942
Questions
Organophosphates 127–8w

Gorrie, Mr Donald
Debates etc.
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep adjourned (08.06.98) 776–9
Questions
Children's rights 175w
Complaints against police, Scotland 77–9w
Greenbelt, Scotland 79–81w
Occupational pensions, Scotland 551w
Pensioners, Income distribution 550–1w
Pensioners, Scotland 477–80w

Governing bodies
Sports 48w

Government buildings
Data banks 1064–5
Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions 623w
Environment Agency 856
Labour Party 665w
Political activities 665w

Government departments
Ministerial policy advisors 664w
Operating costs 651w
Women 694–5

Government Information and Communication Service
619w

Government information services
424w
Dept for Education and Employment 255w
Dept of Trade and Industry 126w
Prime Minister 94w
Scottish Office 84w
Treasury 85w
Women 691–2

Government loans
494w

Government Office for Eastern Region
Environment protection 300w

Governments in exile
Sierra Leone 92w, 486–7w

Graduates
700–1w

Grammar schools
Voting methods 256w

Grampian Police
83w

Grant maintained schools
139–40w, 627–8w

Grantham and Kesteven General Hospital
Maternity services (10.06.98) 1170–6

Gray, Mr James
Debates etc.
Referendums (03.06.98) 282
Questions
Bees, Varroasis 497
Closed circuit television 439w
Hospital waiting lists, Wiltshire 361
Local government finance 511w

Greater London
Art works 124w
Cycleways 414w
Health service staff 181w

Greater London*—*continued
Methicillin resistant staphylococcus aureus 539–40w
NHS trusts 408w
Physiotherapists 403–4w
Priority routes 18w
Road construction 18w
Secure accommodation 181w
Sports 42–3w
Taxis 565w

Greater London Authority
861–3
Better government programme 634–5w
Roads 636w
Town and country planning 513w

Greater Manchester
Fines 485–6w
Health authorities 541w

Green, Mr Damian
Debates etc.
Channel tunnel (03.06.98) 377–8
National Lottery Bill, Rep and 3R (01.06.98) 71–4, 91–3
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep adjourned (08.06.98) 760–2, 774, 817, 831–3
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (09.06.98) 891, 898–903, 908–11, 925
Questions
Digital television 5
Disability living allowance 705
EC presidency 362
Millennium Exhibition, Finance 60w
New deal schemes 1189

Green papers
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 2w
Costs 92w
Dept of Health 334w
Dept of Trade and Industry 126w
Northern Ireland Office 64w
Scottish Office 259w

Green rates
Common agricultural policy 531w

Greenbelt
Scotland 79–81w

Greenhouse effect
Air pollution control 511–2w

Greenway, Mr John
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland (Sentences) Bill, 2R (10.06.98) 1085–6
Registration of Political Parties Bill, 2R (04.06.98) 550

Greyhound racing
435–6w

Grieve, Mr Dominic
Debates etc.
Electoral systems (02.06.98) 232, 236, 254, 262
Human Rights Bill (HL), Com (03.06.98) 395–7, 404, 408, 414, 418–9, 422, 424, 428–9,454, 457–8
Northern Ireland (Sentences) Bill, 2R (10.06.98) 1087–8, 1115, 1148, 1156–7
Referendums (03.06.98) 283–4

Griffiths, Jane
Debates etc.
Cities (Process and Criteria for Designation) Bill, 1R (02.06.98) 169–70
Questions
Argentina, Arms embargoes 246w
China, Arms embargoes 246–7w
Families, Working hours 692–3
Hong Kong, Elections 246w

Griffiths, Jane*—*continued
Iran, Arms embargoes 245–6w

Griffiths, Mr Nigel*, *Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of Trade and Industry
Questions
Caravans, Consumer protection 126–7w
Ecstasy, Drug abuse 320w
Fireworks, Safety measures 162w
Funerals, Consumer protection 123w, 161w
Ice cream, Competition law 124w
Insolvency 384–6w
Money lenders, Licensing 229w
Monopolies and Mergers Commission 123w
More Group, JC Decaux 123w
Official receiver, County courts 318–9w
Petrol, Distributive trade 115w
Petrol, Retail trade 114–5w
Post Office Users' National Council 159–60w
Post Office Users' National Council, Public appointments 124w

Griffiths, Mr Win*, *Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Welsh Office
Questions
Antismoking campaign, Young people 324w
Asthma, Wales 62–4w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Wales 671w
Breast cancer, Wales 166w
Bro Taf Health Authority, Electroconvulsive therapy 672–3w
Cancer, Wales 671w
Community hospitals, Wales 62w
Dairy farming, Wales 324–5w
Economic and monetary union, Wales 589w
Eye disorders, Wales 671w
Health service staff, Occupational health 62w
Hospital waiting lists, Wales 229w
Housing improvement, Wales 592–3w
Incontinence, Wales 377–8w
Local government constituencies, Wales 591–2w
Local government reform, Wales 545w
Local government social services, Wales 545w
NHS, Wales 61–2w
NHS trusts, Wales 166w, 673w
Prescription drugs, Wales 545w
Psychiatry, Wales 672w
Sites of special scientific interest, Wales 62w
Slums, Wales 592w
Smoking, Young people 323–4w
Social Exclusion Unit, Wales 674w
Welsh Advisory Committee on Drug and Alcohol Misuse, Public appointments 376–8w
Welsh National Board for Nursing Midwifery and Health Visiting 675w

Grimsby Hospital
Performance standards 170w

Grocott, Mr Bruce
Questions
Sports, Finance 7

Ground water
Pollution 31–2w

Group of Eight
Overseas aid 40w

Guildford
New deal for young people 543–4w

Gummer, Rt Hon John
Debates etc.
Electoral systems (02.06.98) 175, 187, 189, 199–200, 205, 221, 229–31, 263
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Allocation of time motion and Lords amendts (09.06.98) 934, 939, 947–52, 961
Human Rights Bill (HL), Com (03.06.98) 438, 443, 445–9, 456
Magistrates' courts, Suffolk (10.06.98) 1044–5, 1047

Gunnell, Mr John
Debates etc.
Channel tunnel (03.06.98) 379–80

Guyana
Rain forests 648w

Habitual residence test
250w

Haemophilia
Hepatitis 135w

Hague, Rt Hon William,
Questions
Army in Northern Ireland, Prisoners 359
Local government corruption, Scotland 362–4
Sierra Leone, Arms trade 1068–70
Tax burden, Statistics 1072–3

Hain, Mr Peter*, *Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Welsh Office
Questions
Class sizes, Wales 676w
Cost per student, Wales 229w
EC grants and loans, Wales 425–6w
European Communities, Wales 426w
Further education, Wales 63w
Local education authorities, Wales 672w
M4, Road traffic 670–1w
National income, Wales 674w
Public sector employment, Wales 673w
Rendering industry, Wales 671–2w
Rural transport, Wales 675–6w
Small businesses, Welsh Office 61w
Student numbers, Wales 674–5w
Tourism, Wales 591w

Hamilton, Mr Fabian
Questions
Cameroon 617w
Political refugees, Cameroon 642–3w

Hammersmith bridge
517–8w

Hammond, Mr Philip
Debates etc.
Business questions (11.06.98) 1219
Questions
Court of Protection, Loans 69w
Lloyd's of London 328–9w
Public Trust Office 67–8w
Public Trust Office, Court of Protection 69w

Hancock, Mr Mike
Questions
Aerospace industry, Defence procurement 227–8w
Algeria, Human rights 611–2w
Civil servants, British nationality 620–2w
Defence contracts, Security vetting 638w
Defence research, Uranium 182w
Exservicemen, Counselling 606w
Exservicemen, Departmental responsibilities 94–5w
Ex-Services Mental Welfare Society 422w
Food labelling, EC law 453w
HMS Ocean 638w

Hancock, Mr Mike—continued
International Whaling Commission 199–201w
Parishes 415w
Petrol alternatives 630w
Regional development agencies 509w
Uranium 107–8w

Handicap benefits
470w
Cancer 711–2w
Earnings rules 109w
Social security benefits rules 109w
Social security recipients 190–2w
Taxation 469w

Handicapped
Concessionary television licences 316–7w
Personal social services 132w
Railway travel 864–5

Hanson, Mr David
Debates etc.
Eritrea (08.06.98) 731
Questions
Deprivation indicators 157w
Hereditary peers, House of Lords reform 366
Housing benefits, Social security abuse 478–9w
Open government 619–20w
St Austell College 401w
Suicide, Young people 156–7

***Harman, Rt Hon Harriet**, Secretary of State for Social Security*
Questions
Day nurseries, Tax allowances 693–4
Families, Working hours 692–3
New deal for lone parents 695–6
Pensions 254–5w, 467w
Women, EC action 473–4w

Harmonisation of standards
Agriculture 491–2
Crown Prosecution Service 499–500

Harris, Dr Evan
Debates etc.
Community hospitals, Oxfordshire (03.06.98) 341–5, 348
Questions
Health service staff, Occupational health 405–6w
NHS pensions, Early retirement 407w
NHS trusts, Industrial health and safety 406w
NHS trusts, Performance standards 237w
NHS trusts, Public appointments 691w

Harrow
Tourism 11

Harvey, Mr Nick
Questions
Housing construction, Derelict land 510w
Insects, Pest control 157–8w

Haskins Task Force
see Better Regulation Task Force

Hawkins, Mr Nick
Debates etc.
Sports (05.06.98) 635, 656–7, 671–7
Questions
Railway safety 872

Hayes, Mr John
Debates etc.
Electoral systems (02.06.98) 189, 231, 249–51, 262
Grantham and Kesteven General Hospital, Maternity services (10.06.98) 1171
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep adjourned (08.06.98) 819–21, 827–8

Hayes, Mr John—continued
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (09.06.98) 883–4, 907
Questions
Access to work programme 543w
Fines, Lincolnshire 67w
Handicap benefits, Taxation 469w

Hazardous materials
Industrial health and safety 520–3w

Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Questions
Developing countries, Debts 356–7
NHS finance 169w

Heald, Mr Oliver
Debates etc.
Countryside, Public petitions (04.06.98) 595
Electoral systems (02.06.98) 188
Human Rights Bill (HL), Com (03.06.98) 400, 402–3, 407–12
Structure plans, Hertfordshire (04.06.98) 601–2, 604, 607–8

Healey, Mr John
Questions
Access to work programme, Wheelchairs 365–6w
NHS, Performance standards 536–7w
Skill shortages, Regional development agencies 203w
Training and enterprise councils 698w
Training and enterprise councils, Finance 203w
Wheelchairs 336w

Health
Disadvantaged 168

Health action zones
Finance 169–70w

Health and Safety at Work Etc Act 1974
Questions
406w

Health authorities
Greater Manchester 541w

Health education
Air pollution 167
Curriculum 166–7
Men 161–2, 170w
Smoking 465w

Health hazards
Asbestos 521–2w
Mesothelioma 521w
Nuclear power stations 597–8w
Silica 520–1w

Health Service Commissioner
174w

Health service staff
Crimes of violence 181w
Greater London 181w
Manpower 466w
Northern Ireland 323w
Occupational health 62w, 175–6w, 323w, 405–6w
Vacancies 406w
Wales 62w

Health services
173w
Age discrimination 685w
Children 130w
Multiple sclerosis 163
Worcestershire 153–4

Health warnings
Cellular phones 439–40w

Heart diseases
171–2w

Heath, Mr David
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Allocation of time motion and Lords amendts (09.06.98) 960–4
European Council (11.06.98) 1245–8, 1280, 1283
Sports (05.06.98) 629
Questions
Glaucoma 163–4
Government buildings, Data banks 1064–5
National Audit Office, Non-departmental public bodies 18–9
School transport 1189–90

Heathrow Airport
7–8w
Public inquiries 8w, 512w, 863–4

Heavily indebted poor countries initiative
42w, 225w
Millennium 60–1w

Hedgerow Regulations 1997
Questions
630w

Hedges and ditches
630w

Helicopters
394w

Hemp
454w

***Henderson, Mr Doug**, Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office*
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Allocation of time motion and Lords amendts (09.06.98) 930–7, 940, 970
European Council (11.06.98) 1278–84
Questions
Bulgaria, Overseas aid 459w
Club of Three 677w
Council of Ministers 350–4w
Cyprus, Peace negotiations 457–8w
EC Foreign Affairs Council 354–5w, 678–9w
EC grants and loans, Wales 146w
Euro, Teaching aids 457w
European Communities, Conferences 616w
European Council, Furniture 461–2w
Gibraltar, Identity cards 148w
Israel, EC external relations 347–8w
Israel, EC external trade 149w
Lome Convention, Human rights 458–9w
Palestinians, EC external relations 243w
Turkey, Human rights 146w
World Cup, Tickets 677w

Hepatitis
Haemophilia 135w

Heppell, Mr John
Debates etc.
Channel tunnel (03.06.98) 379
Questions
Development Policy Forum 648–9w
Prison Service, Performance standards 380–1w
Women, Domestic violence 703–4

Hereditary peers
House of Lords reform 366, 1068

Hereford and Worcester
Educational finance 704w
Pre-school education 708–9w

Heritage Lottery Fund
43w

Herring, Raymond
(10.06.98) 1049–58

Hertfordshire
Structure plans (04.06.98) 596–608

Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Questions
Disability living allowance, Departmental publications 549–50w

High rise flats
Glasgow 84w
Scotland 84–5w

Higher education
Manpower 398–9w
South Africa 648w

Higher education admission
693w, 697w, 1182–3
Dental students 140w
Tuition fees 1192–3

Hill farming
487

Historic buildings
426w

HM Prison Service
see Prison Service

HMS Cornwall
97–100w, 182w

HMS Monmouth
100–1w

HMS Nottingham
100–1w

HMS Ocean
638w

Hodge, Ms Margaret
Debates etc.
Channel tunnel (03.06.98) 378
Review of Health Care in London Independent Advisory Panel (03.06.98) 317, 322
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep adjourned (08.06.98) 762, 771–6, 780, 782

Hoey, Miss Kate
Debates etc.
Belfast Agreement (01.06.98) 38
Questions
Construction materials, Fire prevention 297–9w
Money lenders, Licensing 229w
Organic farming 659w

Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Debates etc.
Electoral systems (02.06.98) 202–3
Grantham and Kesteven General Hospital, Maternity services (10.06.98) 1173
Human Rights Bill (HL), Com (03.06.98) 395, 398–9, 402–4, 406, 409–10, 412, 417–8, 421–2, 424–5, 429, 431–2
Questions
Dounreay, Nuclear fuel reprocessing 715
Sierra Leone, Departmental correspondence 346w

Home Affairs Select Committee
(08.06.98) 846

Home detention curfews
57–8w, 304w
Costs 433w, 565w
Sexual offences 57w

Home Office
Private finance initiative 51–2w
Small businesses 54w

Home Robertson, Mr John
Debates etc.
Referendums (03.06.98) 282–3, 286, 288, 292, 295, 298

Homelessness
Social Exclusion Unit 213–4w

Homeworking
484w
Fees and charges 117w

Homicide
220–1w
Children 222w
Lawrence, Stephen 302w
Legal aid 302w
Mentally disturbed offenders 407w

Homosexuality
Local Government Act 1988 28w

Hong Kong
Elections 246w, 362

***Hoon, Mr Geoffrey**, Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Dept*
Debates etc.
Human Rights Bill (HL), Com (03.06.98) 390, 392, 394, 399, 401–5, 411, 413–5, 431–3, 451, 454, 458–60
Magistrates' courts, Suffolk (10.06.98) 1046–8
Questions
"Access to Justice with Conditional Fees Consultation Paper" 301w
Civil proceedings, Personal injury 69w
Community Legal Service 301w
Conditional fee agreements 70w
Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction 656w
Court Funds Office 302w
Court of Protection, Loans 69w
Court rules and procedures 584w
Defamation Act 1996 71w
Fines, Greater Manchester 485–6w
Fines, Lincolnshire 67w
General Council of the Bar, Conditional fee agreements 583w
Human rights, Departmental responsibilities 656w
Judges, Members' correspondence 485w
Judiciary, Training 584w
Juries, Deaf 213w
Lawrence, Stephen, Homicide 302w
Legal aid 583w
Legal aid, Barristers 70–1w
Legal aid, Northern Ireland 655–6w
Legal aid, Parent and child 412–3w
Legal aid, Personal injury 69w
Legal aid, Solicitors 70w
Legal Aid Board, Training 413w
Magistrates, Ethnic minorities 484–5w
Magistrates' courts, Derbyshire 212w
Magistrates' courts, Public transport 212w
Magistrates' courts, Worcester 412w
Magistrates' courts committees 213w
Mentally disadvantaged 413w
Non-departmental public bodies, Lord Chancellor's Dept 71w
Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration 411–2w
Public appointments, Lord Chancellor's Dept 71–2w
Public Trust Office 67–9w, 411–2w
Public Trust Office, Court of Protection 69w

Hope, Mr Phil
Debates etc.
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep adjourned (08.06.98) 821

***Hope, Mr Phil**—continued*
Questions
Education action zones 695w
Sudan, Overseas aid 233w

Hospital admissions
Asthma 128w
Geriatric patients 688w

Hospital beds
Liverpool 540w

Hospital discharges
165–6
Geriatric patients 170w, 466w

Hospital waiting lists
133w, 158–9, 364, 466w
Cancer 155
Glaucoma 164
North Yorkshire 541w
Scotland 289–90w
Wales 229w
Wiltshire 361
Worcestershire 154

Hospitals
Construction 171w, 359–60
Cornwall 1070
South West London 691–2w
Ventilation 690w
Worcestershire 154–5

House of Commons
Expenditure 557w

House of Commons procedure
(04.06.98) 551–94
Disclosure of information 558w
Speaker's rulings and statements (03.06.98) 281–2

House of Commons Modernisation Select Committee
see Modernisation of the House of Commons Select Committee

House of Commons questions
Speaker's rulings and statements (11.06.98) 1226

House of Commons times of sittings
159w

House of Lords reform
Hereditary peers 366, 1068

Households
Single people 154–5w

Housing
South Devon 524w
Tewkesbury 30w
VAT 328w
Wandsworth 373w

Housing Act 1996
Questions
158–9w

Housing benefits
511w
Finance 575w
Scotland 547w
Social security abuse 478–9w
Social security benefits overpayment 253w

Housing construction
24–6w, 859
Building regulations 575–6w
Derelict land 510w, 858–60
Playing fields 511w
Vacant land 510w
West Sussex 9w

Housing Corporation
Operating costs 569w
Pay 569w

Housing finance
Scotland 331–2w, 429–30w

Housing improvement
Cumbria 571w
Wales 592–3w

Housing insulation
(10.06.98) 1078

Housing policy
Cumbria 571w

Housing standards
Disadvantaged 214w

Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Allocation of time motion and Lords amendts (09.06.98) 932, 937–42, 962, 975
European Council (11.06.98) 1234–41, 1247, 1279, 1282–3
Nuclear weapons tests (01.06.98) 22–3
Sandline, Point of order (09.06.98) 873–4
Questions
Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Inquiries 152w
Sierra Leone 143–5w
Sierra Leone, Arms trade 142–4w, 240w

Howarth, Mr Alan, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept for Education and Employment
Questions
Access to work programme 543w, 692w, 707–8w
Access to work programme, Wheelchairs 365–6w
After school clubs, Rural areas 695w
Disability Discrimination Act 1995 138w, 544w
Employment schemes, Ethnic minorities 1185–6
New deal for disabled people 138–9w, 364–5w, 699–700w
New deal for disabled people, Departmental coordination 365w
Supported employment programme 140w
Temporary employment, Research 1194
Vacancies, Chelmsford 367–8w
Work permits, Catering 141–2w

Howarth, Mr George, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office
Debates etc.
Electoral systems (02.06.98) 261–5
Referendums (03.06.98) 281, 297–9
Registration of Political Parties Bill, 2R (04.06.98) 539, 545–50
Questions
Alcoholic drinks, Children 309w
Animal experiments, Cosmetics 566w
Animal experiments, Primates 644–5w
Animal welfare, Protest 646w
Coroners, Judges 56w
Drug abuse, Night clubs 434w
Ecstasy, Drug abuse 433–4w, 568w
Emergency planning, Local government finance 436–7w
European Parliament Members, Candidate selection 436w
Greyhound racing 435–6w
Intelligence services, Personal records 52w
Prison visits, Drug crimes 439w
Prisoners, Drug abuse 310–1w
Sunday trading, Easter 168w

Howarth, Mr Gerald
Debates etc.
House of Commons accommodation, Points of order (08.06.98) 736

Howarth, Mr Gerald—continued
Human Rights Bill (HL), Com (03.06.98) 433, 438, 455–7
Questions
Bilateral aid 232w
Heathrow Airport, Public inquiries 863–4
More Group, JC Decaux 123w

Howells, Dr Kim, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept for Education and Employment
Debates etc.
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep adjourned (08.06.98) 756–60, 763–5, 767–8
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (09.06.98) 881, 886, 896–9, 901–2, 908, 921–2
Questions
Access funds 203w
Accountants, Training 697w
Dental students, Higher education admission 140w
Discretionary student grants 205w, 701–2w
Educational finance, National insurance contributions 137w
Further education, Cost per student 699w
Further education colleges 701w
Further education colleges, Student numbers 701w
General Certificate of Secondary Education 624–5w
Government information services, Dept for Education and Employment 255w
Graduates 700–1w
Higher education, Manpower 398–9w
Higher education admission 697w
Printing industry, Training 364w
School leaving 701–3w
Scientists, Women 204w
Skill shortages, Regional development agencies 203w
Staffordshire Training and Enterprise Council 358w
Student loans, Privatisation 256–7w
Teachers, Early retirement 358–63w
Training and enterprise councils 357–8w, 698w
Training and enterprise councils, Finance 203w, 697–8w
Training and enterprise councils, Performance standards 698w
Training and enterprise councils, West Midlands 140–1w
Tuition fees 204w
Tuition fees, Administrative costs 138w
Veterinary medicine, Student numbers 703–4w

Hoyle, Mr Lindsay
Questions
Air travel, Duty free allowances 21w
Animal products, Import controls 22w
Armed forces training, Defence equipment 489w, 638–9w
C17 aircraft 421w
Camelot Group 360–1
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Open government 620w
Channel tunnel, Railway network 13w
Duty free allowances 194w
Education action zones 695w
Exports, Indonesia 121w
Future large aircraft 421w
International Whaling Commission 199–201w
Nature conservation, Circuses 22w
Prison Officers' Association, Private sector 55–6w
Prisoners of war, Japan 107w
Railway travel, Compensation 523w

Hoyle, Mr Lindsay—continued
Sportsmatch, Chorley 46w
Sportsmatch, Government grants 218w
Tibet, EC action 149w
Whales 201w
Wymott Prison, Prison accommodation 439w

Hughes, Ms Beverley
Debates etc.
House of Commons procedure (04.06.98) 570, 577–9
Questions
Internet Watch Foundation 506w
Museums and galleries, Armed conflict 8
Pornography, Internet 425w
Public libraries, Information technology 165w

Hughes, Mr Simon
Debates etc.
Domestic energy conservation (10.06.98) 1016–21, 1024–5, 1028
Electoral systems (02.06.98) 176
Preventative Healthcare and Home Insulation Bill, 1R (10.06.98) 1078
Review of Health Care in London Independent Advisory Panel (03.06.98) 303–6, 320
Questions
Church of England, Investment 18
Local government finance 857
Mental health, Telephone services 129w
Millennium, Heavily indebted poor countries initiative 60–1w
Music, Internet 681w
NHS trusts, Public appointments 158

Human rights
Afghanistan 461w
Algeria 611–2w
Annual reports 147w
China 677w
Colombia 241–2w, 458w
Departmental responsibilities 647w, 656w
Indonesia 146–7w
Lome Convention 458–9w
Multinational companies 349
Overseas aid 37w
Sudan 352–3, 612w
Turkey 146w

Human Rights Bill (HL) 1997/98
Debates etc.
Programme motion* (01.06.98) 143–4
Programme motion* and Com (03.06.98) 387–475

Humble, Mrs Joan
Questions
Fishing quotas 660–1w
Magistrates, Ethnic minorities 484–5w

Hunter, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland (Sentences) Bill, 2R (10.06.98) 1083, 1095, 1099, 1106–7, 1115–7

Hunting
Defence land 209w
Forestry Commission 427–8w

Hurst, Mr Alan
Debates etc.
Electoral systems (02.06.98) 247–9
Questions
Community service orders 482w
Mentally handicapped 408w
Milk, Prices 453–4w

Hutton, Mr John
Questions
Hospitals, Construction 359–60

Hutton, Mr John—continued
Pensioners, Income support 707

Hydrocarbon oil duties
194w

Hydrofluorocarbons
15w
Refrigeration 14–5w

I Spy Strangers
(04.06.98) 594

Ice cream
Competition law 124w

Iddon, Dr Brian
Debates etc.
Leasehold housing (10.06.98) 1005, 1007
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep adjourned (08.06.98) 794, 813
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (09.06.98) 897
Questions
Child Support Agency, Manpower 185–6w
Disability living allowance, Benefit integrity project 705
Fireworks, Safety measures 162w
Higher education, Manpower 398–9w
NHS, Performance standards 169w

Identity cards
Gibraltar 148w

Illegal immigrants
Turks and Caicos Islands 243w

Illsley, Mr Eric
Questions
Motor vehicles, Petrol additives 516w

Immigrant detainees
Political refugees 221w

Immigration
49–50w

Immigration appeals
Political refugees 55w

Immigration applications
55w

Immigration controls
Kidnapping 647w

Immigration rules
Domestic violence 167w

Immigration Service (Ports)
Manpower 646w

Immobilisation of vehicles
153w

Import controls
Animal products 22w
Asbestos 517w
Fireworks 162w
Frogs 373–4w

Import duties
Israel 327w

Imports
Poultry meat 248–9w

Incapacity benefit
Medical examinations 476–7w
Social security claims 253w
Warrington 253–4w

Income distribution
Pensioners 550–1w
Scotland 550–1w

Income support
Pensioners 468w, 707

Income tax
194–5w, 386–9w

Incontinence
Wales 377–8w

Independent Advisory Panel Review of Health Care in London
see Review of Health Care in London Independent Advisory Panel

Independent Commission on Policing for Northern Ireland
216–7w

Independent Television Commission
12

India
Nuclear weapons 40w
Nuclear weapons tests 152w

Indonesia
Armed forces training 102–3w
Arms trade 151–2w, 227w, 240w
ASSIST programme 487w
Export credit guarantees 121w
Export licensing 440w
Exports 121w
Human rights 146–7w
Ministers' visits abroad 89w
Overseas aid 235–6w

Industrial accidents
634w

Industrial health and safety
Chemicals 17–8w
Curriculum 130w
Fuels 518–9w
Hazardous materials 520–3w
NHS trusts 406w
Offshore fixed platforms 578–9w

Industrial injuries disablement benefit
Urinary system disorders 709w

Industrial investment
318w

Industrial tribunals
NHS trusts 134w

Industrial wastes
Land pollution 16–7w

Industry
Interest rates 1070

Inflation
195–6w

Information
Ministers 317w

Information services
Railway travel 513w

Information technology
Courts 584w
Crown Prosecution Service 338w
Cumbria 1063
Economic and monetary union 193w
Public libraries 165w

Ingram, Mr Adam, Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland (Sentences) Bill, 2R (10.06.98) 1095–6, 1160–5
Questions
Lisnevin Training School, Prison riots 432–3w
Members' correspondence, Administrative delays 664w
Petrol, Smuggling 66w
Small businesses, Northern Ireland Office 67w
Terrorism, Northern Ireland 662–3w

Inheritance tax
Tax rates and bands 586w

Inland waterways
Navigation 510w

Insects
Pest control 157–8w

Insolvency
384–6w
Scotland 431–2w

Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales
681–2w

Institute of Freshwater Ecology
681w

Institute of Terrestrial Ecology
681w

Integrated administration and control system
Departmental forms 492

Intelligence and Security Committee
665w

Intelligence services
Accountability 665w
Personal records 52w

Interagency cooperation
Medical profession 685w
Sexual offences 303–5w

Interdepartmental Working Group on Vulnerable or Intimidated Witnesses
see Vulnerable or Intimidated Witnesses Interdepartmental Working Group

Interest payments
Tax allowances 390–1w

Interest rates
445w, 493
Farm incomes 487–8
Industry 1070

International Bank for Reconstruction and Development
see World Bank

International trade
Business corruption 350

International Union for Conservation of Natural Resources
520w

International Whaling Commission
199–201w, 340w

Internet
Blind 215w
Music 681w
Pornography 425w
Women 691–2

Internet Watch Foundation
506w

Intimidation
Meat Hygiene Service 341–3w, 451–2w

Intimidation of witnesses
1075–6

IRA
Weapons 366

Iran
Arms embargoes 245–6w
British embassies 618w

Iraq
Armed forces deployment 607w
Chemical and biological warfare 149–50w
International assistance 231w

Israel
EC external relations 347–8w
EC external trade 149w
Import duties 327w
Orange juice 327w

Italy
Economic and monetary union 584–5w
Milk 344–5w

Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Questions
Farm incomes, Interest rates 487–8
Prison Service, Property transfer 307w

***Jackson, Ms Glenda**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions*
Debates etc.
Ports, Newhaven (03.06.98) 328–32
Questions
A49, Road works 155w
Accidents, Inquiries 4w
Air safety 635w
Air travel, Duty free allowances 21w, 570–1w
Aircraft, Air bags 154w
Aircraft noise 635w
Bicycles, Safety equipment 14w
Birmingham Relief Road, Construction costs 209w
British Road Federation, Finance 515w
Carlisle Airport 519w
Carlisle Airport, Transport of radioactive materials 572–3w
Central Railway 30w
Channel tunnel, Railway network 13w, 573–4w
Chelsea-Hackney railway line 568w
Cleaner Vehicles Task Force 16w
Community transport, West Midlands 519–20w
Connex Rail 524w
Cycleways 19w
Cycleways, Greater London 414w
Cycling 514w
Driving tests, Chelmsford 156w
Ferries, Duty free allowances 417w
Greater London Authority, Roads 636w
Hammersmith bridge 517–8w
Heathrow Airport 7–8w
Heathrow Airport, Public inquiries 8w
Immobilisation of vehicles 153w
Lead free petrol, Motor vehicles 16w
Legal costs, Public inquiries 72w
London and Continental Railways 579w
London Underground, Joint public-private sector ventures 515–6w
M4, Motorway service areas 29w
M62, Road traffic 156w
Merchant seamen, Medical examinations 578–9w
Millennium Exhibition, Transport 33–4w
Motor vehicles, Fraud 16w
Motor vehicles, Lighting 20–1w
Motorcycles, Bus lanes 519w
Motorcycles, Transport policy 28w, 157w
Motorway service areas 519w
No Mans Heath bypass 154w
Pedestrians, Multiply handicapped 3–4w
Petrol alternatives 629–30w
Piracy 210w
Polegate bypass, Compensation 33w
Priority routes, Greater London 18w
Railway fares 513w
Railway land 19w
Railway network, Finance 23w
Railway network, Leeds 514w
Railway safety 872
Railway travel, Compensation 523w
Railway travel, Information services 513w
Railway travel, Mobility of disabled 29w
Regional airports, Air routes 580w
Road accidents 22w
Road accidents, Drinking and driving 20w, 22–3w
Road accidents, Drug abuse 20w

***Jackson, Ms Glenda**—continued*
Road construction, Dorchester 297w
Road construction, Greater London 18w
Road finance 516w
Road safety 156w
Road signs 572w
Road signs, Rural areas 572w
Road traffic 209–10w
Road works 153w
Road works, Cumbria 416w
Roads, Lancashire 863
School crossing patrols 21w
Shipping, Government assistance 18w
Shipping accidents 870
Swanwick Air Traffic Control Centre 31w, 523–4w
Train operating units, Performance standards 513w
Transport of radioactive materials 577–8w
Transport of radioactive materials, Air transport 631w
Transport of radioactive materials, Ferries 631–2w
Transport of radioactive materials, France 414w
West coast railway line, Investment 520w

Jackson, Helen
Debates etc.
House of Commons procedure (04.06.98) 567
Questions
Families, Working hours 692–3
NHS, Performance standards 173w
Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council, Government grants 579w

***Jamieson, Mr David**, An Assistant Whip*
Debates etc.
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep adjourned (08.06.98) 743, 767

Japan
Nuclear fuels 679–80w
Prisoners of war 107w
Whales 94w

JC Decaux
More Group 123w

Jenkin, Mr Bernard
Debates etc.
Domestic energy conservation (10.06.98) 1010, 1022–7
Questions
Monopolies and Mergers Commission 123w
Royal Deeside Partnership 262w
Transport policy 867

Jenkins, Mr Brian
Questions
Church finance 20
Civil servants, Northern Ireland Office 65w
Educational visits, Farms 696w
NHS, Public appointments 690–1w
Staffordshire Training and Enterprise Council 358w
Training and enterprise councils 357–8w
Training and enterprise councils, Finance 697–8w
Training and enterprise councils, Performance standards 698w
Training and enterprise councils, West Midlands 140–1w

Jersey
Financial institutions 443–4w

Johnson, Mr Alan
Questions
Derringham School 357w

***Johnson, Mr Alan**—continued*
Handicap benefits, Cancer 711–2w
Midwives 237w
Midwives, Vacancies 178w

Johnson, Miss Melanie
Debates etc.
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep adjourned (08.06.98) 815–9
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (09.06.98) 918
Questions
Genetic engineering, Departmental coordination 321w
Pre-school education 696w

Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Questions
Millennium Exhibition, Tickets 15

Joint public-private sector ventures
London Underground 515–6w

Joint Service Command and Staff College
Shrivenham 423w

Jones, Mr Barry
Debates etc.
Crown Prosecution Service (01.06.98) 50
Questions
Armed forces strength, Wales 492w
Arts finance, Wales 589w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Wales 671w
Cancer, Wales 671w
Cricket, Wales 591w
Eye disorders, Wales 671w
Local education authorities, Wales 672w
Local government reform, Wales 545w
Local government social services, Wales 545w
Millennium Commission, Wales 590w
Museums and galleries, Wales 591w
Open government 1061–2
Orchestras, Wales 589–90w
Rendering industry, Wales 671–2w
Student numbers, Wales 674–5w
Sudan, Overseas aid 355–6
Theatres, Wales 590w
Tourism, Wales 591w
Transport aircraft 639w

Jones, Ms Fiona
Debates etc.
Grantham and Kesteven General Hospital, Maternity services (10.06.98) 1173–6
Questions
Gangmasters 527–9w
Prisoners' incentives and earned privileges scheme 50–1w

Jones, Helen M
Debates etc.
Winwick, Public petitions (02.06.98) 269
Questions
Export financing 321w
Heritage Lottery Fund 43w
Incapacity benefit, Social security claims 253w
Incapacity benefit, Warrington 253–4w
M62, Road traffic 156w
Nurses 337w
Offences against children, Young people 304–5w
Prison medical services 56w
Pupil exclusions, Warrington 367w
Social Security Benefits Agency, Manpower 189w
Social Security Benefits Agency, Personnel 472w
Student loans, Privatisation 256–7w

Jones, Ms Jenny
Questions
Housing Corporation, Operating costs 569w
Housing Corporation, Pay 569w
Methicillin resistant staphylococcus aureus, West Midlands 539–40w
NHS, Empty property 686w

Jones, Dr Lynne
Debates etc.
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep adjourned (08.06.98) 773, 785, 795, 803, 816–7
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (09.06.98) 921
Questions
Ambulance services, Performance standards 537w
Housing benefits 511w
Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales 681–2w
Local authorities, Millennium compliance 4–5w
Registration of births deaths and marriages 224w

Jones, Mr Nigel
Debates etc.
Sports (05.06.98) 629–36
Questions
Asthma, Air pollution 128–9w
Asthma, Hospital admissions 128w
Cancer, Thyroid gland 444w
Cost per pupil 704–6w
Funerals, Consumer protection 123w
Local government finance 511w

Journalists
Yemen 617–8w

Jowell, Ms Tessa, Minister for Public Health, Dept of Health
Debates etc.
Grantham and Kesteven General Hospital, Maternity services (10.06.98) 1174–6
Questions
Abortion 135w, 605w
Alternative medicine 538w
Alternative medicine, East London 605w
Alternative medicine, Medical research 538w
Antismoking campaign, Young people 685w
Asthma, Air pollution 128–9w
Benzodiazepines, Pregnant women 463w
Biological weapons 132w
Breast feeding, Publicity 404–5w
Cancer 156
Cancer, Death 155–6
Cannabis, Medical research 464w
Chlamydiosis, Screening 181w
Chronic fatigue syndrome 605w
Contraceptives 136w, 238–9w, 462–3w
Contraceptives, Publicity 536w
Diseases, Travel 603w
Drug abuse 180w
Drug abuse, Medical treatments 336–7w, 464–5w
Environmental health 162
Epilepsy 537w
Family planning 129–30w
Fertility, Medical treatments 169w
Green papers, Dept of Health 334w
Health education, Air pollution 167
Health education, Curriculum 166–7
Health education, Men 161–2, 170w
Health services 173w
Health services, Age discrimination 685w
Heart diseases 171–2w
Hospitals, Ventilation 690w

Jowell, Ms Tessa—continued
Industrial health and safety, Curriculum 130w
Medicines Control Agency 605w
Methicillin resistant staphylococcus aureus, West Midlands 539–40w
Microbiology, Exports 604w
NHS 162
Nutrition and health, Schools 167
Organ donors 690w
Organophosphates 127–8w
Small businesses, Dept of Health 135w
Smoking, Health education 465w
Smoking, Young people 136w
Tobacco, Common agricultural policy 161
Tobacco, Production 160
Tobacco advertising 159–61
Tobacco advertising, Sports sponsorship 134w
Toxocariasis 601–2w
Tuberculosis 238w
Vaccination, Travel requirements 602–3w
Viagra 686w
Whooping cough, Vaccination 133–4w

Jubilee 2000
234w

Jubilee line
868–70

Judges
Coroners 56w
Members' correspondence 485w

Judgments
Mental health services 541w

Judiciary
Training 584w

Junior hospital doctors
Working hours 180w

Juries
Deaf 213w

Kashmir
UN resolutions 392w

Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Debates etc.
Electoral systems (02.06.98) 182–3, 197–203
Nuclear weapons tests (01.06.98) 23
Questions
Members' correspondence, Administrative delays 482w

Keeble, Ms Sally
Questions
Business questions 509
Social Fund, Floods 187–9w
Supported employment programme 140w
Young offenders, Police custody 483w

Keen, Mr Alan
Debates etc.
Sports (05.06.98) 636–9
Questions
Joint Service Command and Staff College, Shrivenham 423w

Keetch, Mr Paul
Questions
Bees, Varroasis 344w
New deal for young people, Social security benefits reductions 255w
Tuberculosis 238w

Kennedy, Mr Charles
Debates etc.
Knoydart Estate, Land ownership and tenure (05.06.98) 684–5, 688
Questions
Farm incomes 487

Kent and Canterbury Hospital
Pathology 407w

Kent County Council
419w, 577w

Kettering
Performing arts 5–6

Key, Mr Robert
Questions
Chinook helicopters, Air accidents 183w
Defence land, Land reclamation 207–9w
Military exercises, Macedonia 393w
Porton Down 207w
Sierra Leone, Armed forces deployment 182w
Tactical reconnaissance armoured combat equipment requirement 638w

Khabra, Mr Piara S
Debates etc.
Nuclear weapons tests (01.06.98) 27

Kidnapping
Immigration controls 647w

Kidney, Mr David
Questions
Capital receipts initiative 89w
Common land 374w
Crown Prosecution Service 501–2
Driving offences, Disqualifications 309w
Hedges and ditches 630w
Housing standards, Disadvantaged 214w
Mediation UK 13–4w
Petrol, Distributive trade 115w
Police, Road traffic control 223w
Post Office Users' National Council 159–60w
Post Office Users' National Council, Public appointments 124w
Railway network, Finance 23w
Rights of way 23w
Road accidents 22w
Road traffic offences, Convictions 307–9w
Road traffic offences, Fines 309w
Social rented housing, Investment 14w
Women, Domestic violence 476w

Kidney patients
North West region 133w

Kilfoyle, Mr Peter, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of Public Service
Questions
Better government programme, Elderly 1066
Civil service agencies, Members' correspondence 1060
Departmental correspondence 1059–60
Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions, Government buildings 623w
Government buildings, Data banks 1064–5
Government Information and Communication Service 619w
Green papers, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 2w
Homeworking 484w
Members' correspondence, Administrative delays 1060–1, 1066
Open government 1061

King, Mr Andy
Questions
Doctors' list of patients 130–1w

King, Ms Oona
Debates etc.
Leasehold housing (10.06.98) 994–5
Questions
Cardiomyopathy 131w
Metropolitan Police, Training 58w

King, Rt Hon Tom
Debates etc.
Belfast Agreement (01.06.98) 40
Nuclear weapons tests (01.06.98) 25
Questions
Households, Single people 154–5w
Housing construction 24–6w
Structure plans, Public appointments 26–7w
VAT, Housing 328w

King Committee
see Intelligence and Security Committee

Kingham, Ms Tess
Debates etc.
Western Sahara (03.06.98) 333–6
Questions
Defence Dental Agency, Performance standards 396–7w
NHS, Social services 165
Women, EC action 474w

Kingston
Armed forces housing 422w

Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Debates etc.
Playing fields, Bromsgrove (08.06.98) 848–52
Questions
Mass media, Ownership 4–5
Winter fuel payments 402w

Kirkwood, Mr Archy
Questions
EC Education and Social Affairs Council 450–1w
House of Commons, Expenditure 557w
Portcullis House 49w
Sudan, Overseas aid 350–1

Knoydart Estate
Land ownership and tenure (05.06.98) 683–90

Kock, Stephen
213w, 425w

Korea
Ministers' visits abroad 89w

Kosovo
Armed conflict 360, 1071
Overseas aid 41–2w

Kray, Reginald
167w

Kumar, Dr Ashok
Questions
Education development plans 204–5w
School administration 141w
Tuition fees 204w

Labour Party
Government buildings 665w

Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Questions
Animal feed, Antibiotics 76w
Duty free allowances, Ferries 328w
Kent and Canterbury Hospital, Pathology 407w
Road accidents, Drinking and driving 22–3w

Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Debates etc.
Electoral systems (02.06.98) 220
Questions
Sierra Leone, Overseas aid 354
Standard spending assessments 512w

Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Debates etc.
Channel tunnel (03.06.98) 380–1

Lait, Mrs Jacqui*—*continued
Leasehold housing (10.06.98) 990–3
Questions
Beef, Exports 339–40w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 494
Channel tunnel, Railway network 573w
London and Continental Railways 579w
NHS trusts, Billing 539w
Smuggling, Tobacco 1076
Taxation, Pay 654w

Lancashire
Employment schemes 1188–9
Low pay 497w
Road traffic offences 53w
Roads 863
Sites of special scientific interest 370–1w

Lancaster
Ministers' domestic visits 1059

Land ownership and tenure
Knoydart Estate (05.06.98) 683–90

Land pollution
Industrial wastes 16–7w
Millennium Exhibition 30–1w

Land reclamation
9w, 13w
Defence land 207–9w
Winterbourne Gunner 207–9w

Landlords
299–300w

Lansley, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
National Lottery Bill, Rep and 3R (01.06.98) 107–8
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (09.06.98) 884–5
Questions
Animal experiments, Cosmetics 566w

Late Payment of Commercial Debts (Interest) Bill (HL) 1997/98
Debates etc.
Rep and 3R (01.06.98) 120–42
Royal Assent (11.06.98) 1241

Law Officers' Dept
see Attorney General

Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Questions
Breast cancer, Wales 166w
Incontinence, Wales 377–8w
Sports, Young people 42w

Lawrence, Stephen
Homicide 302w

Lead free petrol
Motor vehicles 16w

Leasehold housing
(10.06.98) 987–1009
Service charges 158–9w

Leeds
Railway network 514w

Leeds Health Authority
Finance 172w

Legal aid
583w
Barristers 70–1w
Homicide 302w
Northern Ireland 655–6w
Parent and child 412–3w
Personal injury 69w
Solicitors 70w

Legal Aid Board
Training 413w

Legal aid scheme
Scotland 279–80w, 502w

Legal costs
Accidents 4w
Public inquiries 72w

Legal representation
Political refugees 167w

Legg Inquiry
see Arms to Sierra Leone Inquiry

Leicestershire
Class sizes 1178–80
Standard spending assessments 512w

Leigh, Mr Edward
Debates etc.
Human Rights Bill (HL), Com (03.06.98) 397–401, 405–6, 411, 428–30, 442, 449, 454
Members' correspondence, Points of order (04.06.98) 513–4
Questions
Business questions 508
Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions, Government buildings 623w
Disability living allowance, Benefit integrity project 705
New deal schemes, Lincolnshire 1192
Set-aside schemes 338w

Lepper, Mr David
Questions
Local Government Act 1988, Homosexuality 28w
South Downs 14w
Western Sahara, Referendums 239w

Leslie, Mr Christopher
Debates etc.
Drinks Containers (Redemption) Bill, 1R (03.06.98) 385–7
Millennium compliance (08.06.98) 724
Questions
Air Quality Standards Expert Panel 580w

"Less Waste More Value Consultation Paper"
419–20w

Letwin, Mr Oliver
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Allocation of time motion and Lords amendts (09.06.98) 967–8
Playing fields, Bromsgrove (08.06.98) 850
Referendums (03.06.98) 288, 294–7, 299
Questions
Butter, EC law 454w
Cattle, Canada 454w
Direct labour departments, Scotland 581w
Hemp 454w
Hospital waiting lists 466w
New deal for lone parents 467w
Prescriptions 465w

Levitt, Mr Tom
Debates etc.
Electoral systems (02.06.98) 213
Questions
Access to countryside, Liability for animals 518w
Beef, Exports 531–2w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Slaughterhouses 598–9w
Common agricultural policy, Green rates 531w
Dogs, Disease control 530w
Juries, Deaf 213w
Livestock, Waste disposal 452–3w
Milk, Peak District 530w
Ozone, Air pollution 415–6w
Pedestrians, Multiply handicapped 3–4w
Sheep, Agricultural subsidies 531w
Sheep dipping 536w

Levitt, Mr Tom*—*continued
Tobacco, Agricultural subsidies 530–1w
Toxocariasis 601–2w
Waste disposal, Agricultural land 28w, 420w

Lewis, Mr Ivan
Questions
NHS trusts, Public appointments 158
Schools, Bury 1180–1

Lewis, Dr Julian
Debates etc.
Belfast Agreement (01.06.98) 40
National Lottery Bill, Rep and 3R (01.06.98) 95–6
Nuclear weapons tests (01.06.98) 29–30
Questions
Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions, Public bodies 629w
Disaster relief 231–2w
Independent Television Commission 12
Members' correspondence, Administrative delays 413w
Mentally disturbed offenders, Homicide 407w
NHS administration 542w
Occupational pensions 469w
Personal pensions 700

Liability for animals
Access to countryside 518w

Liddell, Mrs Helen, Economic Secretary to the Treasury
Questions
Alternative energy, Treasury 440w
Bank of England, Seigniorage 585w
Breast cancer 499–500w
Cancer, Thyroid gland 444w
Central government borrowing 654–5w
Death, North West region 86–7w
Debts, Developing countries 89–91w
Debts written off, Developing countries 494–6w
EC Finance Council, Economic and monetary union 88–9w
EC grants and loans, Wales 193w
EC Monetary Committee 442w
Economic and monetary union 88w, 496w
Economic and monetary union, Banking supervision 329–30w
Economic and monetary union, Information technology 193w
Economic and monetary union, Italy 584–5w
Economic and monetary union, Seigniorage 442w
Economic situation, Asia 91w
Employment 86w
Energy consumption, Treasury 440–1w
Euro 441w, 496w
Euro, Publicity 585w
Financial institutions, Jersey 443–4w
Government information services, Treasury 85w
Heavily indebted poor countries initiative 225w
Inflation 195–6w
Interest rates 445w
Lloyd's of London 328–9w
Low pay, Pendle 497w
Methadone, Death 225w
Office for National Statistics, Public sector borrowing requirement 586w
Ombudsman, Investment 193–4w
Population projection, Elderly 442–3w
Public sector borrowing requirement, Statistics 585–6w
Public sector debt, EC countries 327–8w
Registration of births deaths and marriages 224w

Liddell, Mrs Helen*—*continued
Small businesses, Treasury 195w
Travelling expenses, Treasury 326–7w
UK contributions to EC budget 496w
Unemployment, Educational qualifications 498–9w

Lighting
Motor vehicles 20–1w

Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Debates etc.
Structure plans, Hertfordshire (04.06.98) 596–601, 603
Questions
Debts written off, Developing countries 494–6w
Income tax 194–5w
Open government, Parliamentary questions 653w
Sierra Leone, Arms trade 653w
Tax burden, Statistics 224w

Lincolnshire
Fines 67w
New deal schemes 1191–2

Linton, Mr Martin
Debates etc.
Electoral systems (02.06.98) 189, 202, 218, 254–6
Oral question time intervention (01.06.98) 9
Referendums (03.06.98) 286–8
Registration of Political Parties Bill, 2R (04.06.98) 528–30
Questions
Armed forces catering services, Beef 95w
Chelsea-Hackney railway line 568w
National Lottery, Performing arts 9

Lisnevin Training School
Prison riots 432–3w

Literacy
Primary education 695–6w

Litter
Chelmsford 299w

Liverpool
Hospital beds 540w
Regional development agencies 509w

Livestock
Animal welfare 659–60w
Waste disposal 452–3w

Livingstone, Mr Ken
Debates etc.
Economic policy (11.06.98) 1208
Questions
Contraceptives 462–3w
Contraceptives, Publicity 536w
Furs, Farms 72–3w

Livsey, Mr Richard
Questions
Corporation tax 124w
Housing improvement, Wales 592–3w
Local government constituencies, Wales 591–2w
Low flying, Brecon Beacons National Park 639w
Milk Development Council 662w
Slums, Wales 592w

Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Debates etc.
Electoral systems (02.06.98) 224–6, 235

Lloyd, Mr Tony, Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office
Debates etc.
Eritrea, Ministerial statements (08.06.98) 728–35

Lloyd, Mr Tony*—*continued
Questions
Argentina, Arms embargoes 246w
Arms trade, EC action 147w, 488w
British dependent territories 150–1w, 243w
Cameroon 617w
Colombia, Human rights 458w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Ethnic minorities 487–8w
Human rights, Annual reports 147w
Iraq, Chemical and biological warfare 149–50w
Members' correspondence, Administrative delays 393w
Mercenaries, Treaties 459w
Nigeria, Arms trade 459w
Ottawa Convention 488w
Restricted Enforcement Unit, Arms trade 676–7w
South Asia, Nuclear weapons tests 242–3w
Treaties, Parliamentary procedure 244–5w
Turks and Caicos Islands 150w
Turks and Caicos Islands, Illegal immigrants 243w
UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 147–8w

Lloyd's of London
328–9w

Lloyd's TSB Bill (HL) 1996/97
Debates etc.
3R order read (04.06.98) 485, (11.06.98) 1177

Llwyd, Mr Elfyn
Debates etc.
Crown Prosecution Service (01.06.98) 49
Questions
Integrated administration and control system, Departmental forms 492
Prosecutions 338w
Social security benefits, Young people 474w

Loans
Court of Protection 69w

Local authorities
Millennium compliance 4–5w

Local broadcasting
Cable television 163–4w

Local education authorities
696w
Wales 672w

Local Government Act 1988
Questions
Homosexuality 28w

Local government borrowing
Regional airports 637–8w

Local government constituencies
860–1
Gloucestershire 212w
Northamptonshire 519w
Wales 591–2w

Local government corruption
1074–5
Scotland 362–4

Local government finance
224w, 511w, 857–8
Emergency planning 436–7w

Local government land
Smallholdings 339w

Local government reform
1070–1
Wales 545w

Local government social services
Wales 545w

Lock, Mr David
Debates etc.
Crown Prosecution Service (01.06.98) 51
Questions
Arable area payments scheme 201–2w
Attorney General, Ministerial duties 499
Crown Prosecution Service, Information technology 338w
EC Agriculture Council 202–3w
Health services, Worcestershire 153–4
International Whaling Commission 199–201w

Lockerbie
Bombings 666w

Lockheed Martin
Defence procurement 101w

Lome Convention
Human rights 458–9w

London and Continental Railways
579w

London Underground
Joint public-private sector ventures 515–6w

Lone parents
Social security benefits 315–6w

Long stay patients
Mental health services 172w

Lord Chancellor's Dept
Non-departmental public bodies 71w
Public appointments 71–2w

Lorries
Noise control 228w

Loughborough General Hospital
Private finance initiative 179w

Loughton, Mr Tim
Questions
Autism, Children 142w
Autism, Special education 368w
Capital gains tax 195w
Capital gains tax, Pensioners 195w
Housing construction, West Sussex 9w

Love, Mr Andrew
Questions
Whooping cough, Vaccination 133–4w

Low flying
Brecon Beacons National Park 639w
Tewkesbury 424w

Low incomes
Electricity tariffs 503–4w
Wales 250w

Low pay
Lancashire 497w
Pendle 497w

Lowery, David
(11.06.98) 1286–92

Luff, Mr Peter
Questions
Educational finance, Worcestershire 1187–8
Health services, Worcestershire 153

Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Debates etc.
Crown Prosecution Service (01.06.98) 45–6
Electoral systems (02.06.98) 186, 233–5

M4
Motorway service areas 29w
Road traffic 670–1w

M62
Road traffic 156w

M74
Road construction 515w

McAllion, Mr John
Debates etc.
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep adjourned (08.06.98) 779–81
Questions
Disability living allowance, Benefit integrity project 704

McCartney, Mr Ian, Minister of State, Dept of Trade and Industry
Questions
Art works, Greater London 124w
Association of Chief Police Officers, Company law 320w
EC Social Charter, North West region 684w
Homeworking, Fees and charges 117w
Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales 681–2w
Manufacturing industries, Flexible working 508w
Music, Internet 681w
Parcelforce 115–6w
Post Office 594w
Post Office, Driving licences 125w
Post Office, External financing limits 115w
Post Office, Reviews 319w
Post offices, Watford 508w
Postal services 115–6w
Postal services, USA 503w
Royal Mail, Complaints 116w
Small businesses, Unfair dismissal 684w

McCartney, Mr Robert
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland (Sentences) Bill, 2R (10.06.98) 1086, 1095, 1098, 1102, 1108, 1110, 1115, 1120, 1132, 1141–5, 1150
Questions
IRA, Weapons 366
Terrorism, Northern Ireland 662–3w

McDonagh, Ms Siobhain
Questions
Open government, Codes of practice 629w

Macdonald, Mr Calum, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Scottish Office
Questions
Beekeeping, Agricultural subsidies 275w
Bees, Varroasis 275w
Council housing, Scotland 330–1w
Derelict land, Scotland 428–9w
EC grants and loans, Administrative costs 261w
Fish conservation, Scotland 582w
Forestry Commission, Hunting 427–8w
Greenbelt, Scotland 79–81w
High rise flats, Glasgow 84w
High rise flats, Scotland 84–5w
Housing finance, Scotland 429–30w
Multiple occupation, Scotland 331w
Slums, Scotland 84w
Sports, Rate rebates 84w

McDonnell, Mr John
Debates etc.
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep adjourned (08.06.98) 808, 828

Macedonia
Military exercises 393w

McGrady, Mr Eddie
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland (Sentences) Bill, 2R (10.06.98) 1134–5

MacGregor, Rt Hon John
Debates etc.
Economic policy (11.06.98) 1210
Electoral systems (02.06.98) 188–9, 214–9

McIntosh, Miss Anne
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Allocation of time motion and Lords amendts (09.06.98) 965–6
Human Rights Bill (HL), Com (03.06.98) 450–1
Questions
Art works, Greater London 124w
Business questions 512
Central Science Laboratory 496
Customs and Excise, Accidents 499
Departmental correspondence 300w
European Parliament Members, Candidate selection 436w
Gascoigne, Paul 7
Hospital waiting lists, North Yorkshire 541w
Legal aid, Parent and child 412–3w
Legal Aid Board, Training 413w
NHS, Millennium compliance 542w
NHS pensions 542w
Police, Radio 436w
Tourism, New deal for young people 669w
Welfare to work 1192

McIsaac, Shona
Questions
Grimsby Hospital, Performance standards 170w

MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Debates etc.
Belfast Agreement (01.06.98) 34–5
Northern Ireland (Sentences) Bill, 2R (10.06.98) 1085, 1089, 1091–6, 1125, 1163–4
Questions
Army in Northern Ireland, Prisoners 663w

Mackinlay, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Channel tunnel (03.06.98) 373
Electoral systems (02.06.98) 175, 190, 193
Questions
Armed forces casualties 95–6w
Developing countries, Debts 234w
Environment Agency, Sea level 341w
Heathrow Airport, Public inquiries 864
Junior hospital doctors, Working hours 180w
Members' correspondence, Administrative delays 664w
Military decorations 103w
Military decorations, Northern Ireland 103–4w
NHS trusts, Industrial tribunals 134w
Prime Minister's questions 358–9
Sierra Leone, Armed forces deployment 314w
Sixth form colleges 692w

Maclean, Rt Hon David
Debates etc.
Electoral systems (02.06.98) 182, 223, 241–2, 262–3
Human Rights Bill (HL), Com (03.06.98) 417
Referendums (03.06.98) 290–1
Questions
Air travel, Duty free allowances 570–1w
Animal welfare 495
Armed forces reserves, NATO countries 491–2w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 599–601w
Carlisle Airport 519w

***Maclean, Rt Hon David**—continued*
Carlisle Airport, Transport of radioactive materials 572–3w
Class sizes, Cumbria 700w
EC Foreign Affairs Council 678–9w
Firearms, Compensation 566–7w
Flood control, Cumbria 660w
Housing improvement, Cumbria 571w
Housing policy, Cumbria 571w
Pennine Way 569–70w
Probation and aftercare, Inspections 640–1w
Probation officers 641–2w
RAF Carlisle, Property transfer 491w
Rivers, Sites of special scientific interest 572w
Road signs 572w
Road works, Cumbria 416w
Sierra Leone, Arms trade 664w
Special education, Cumbria 699w
Standard assessment tasks, Cumbria 700w
Territorial Army, Germany 489–91w

***McLeish, Mr Henry**, Minister for Home Affairs and Devolution, Scottish Office*
Debates etc.
Strathclyde Police, Racial discrimination (01.06.98) 148–52
Questions
Association of Chief Police Officers (Scotland) 83w, 430w
Association of Chief Police Officers (Scotland), Finance 83w
Complaints against police, Scotland 77–9w
Firearms, Departmental forms 431w
Grampian Police 83w
Prestwick Airport, Expenditure 259–60w
Prison population, Scotland 280–2w
Prisoners, Scotland 196w
Procurator Fiscal Service 499–502w
Public appointments, Scottish Office 77w
Road accidents, Scotland 582–3w, 657w
Road traffic offences, Scotland 196–7w
Scottish Parliament, Parliamentary buildings 657–8w
Scottish Parliament, Railway industry 84w
Urban areas, Scotland 499w

Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
Debates etc.
Electoral systems (02.06.98) 192, 194–5, 203–8, 210
Human Rights Bill (HL), Com (03.06.98) 430–1, 445, 448–50, 453, 470–1
National Lottery Bill, Rep and 3R (01.06.98) 55, 83–4
Questions
Arts Council of England 2
Dounreay, Nuclear fuel reprocessing 709–11
Open government 1065–6

McLoughlin, Mr Patrick
Debates etc.
Business questions (11.06.98) 1221
Derbyshire County Council, Points of order (10.06.98) 1078
Questions
Council tax capping, Derbyshire 635–6w
Educational finance, Derbyshire 1075

McNamara, Mr Kevin
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland (Sentences) Bill, 2R (10.06.98) 1083, 1089, 1091, 1107, 1110–5, 1119, 1144
Questions
Lisnevin Training School, Prison riots 432–3w

McNulty, Mr Tony
Debates etc.
Business questions (11.06.98) 1222
Review of Health Care in London Independent Advisory Panel (03.06.98) 315–6, 318
Questions
Better government programme 619w
Drug crimes 1076
Health action zones, Finance 170w
New deal for lone parents 695
Railway travel, Handicapped 864
Rwanda, Debts 232w
Sports, Young people 42w

MacShane, Mr Denis
Debates etc.
European Council (11.06.98) 1258
Questions
Income tax 386–9w
NHS, Employment agencies 602w

Mactaggart, Fiona
Debates etc.
Electoral systems (02.06.98) 217–9
Human Rights Bill (HL), Com (03.06.98) 444
Millennium compliance (08.06.98) 725
Questions
Committee on Standards in Public Life 2w
Developing countries, Debts 356–7
Entry clearances, Manpower 356–7w
Ice cream, Competition law 124w

McWalter, Mr Tony
Debates etc.
Electoral systems (02.06.98) 239–40
Northern Ireland (Sentences) Bill, 2R (10.06.98) 1099, 1131, 1147–50
Questions
Council of Ministers 350–4w
EC Foreign Affairs Council 354–5w
European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages 350w
Motorcycles, Transport policy 28w, 157w
Road safety 156w
Sudan, Human rights 612w

Madel, Sir David
Debates etc.
Business questions (11.06.98) 1220

Maginnis, Mr Ken
Questions
Royal Ulster Constabulary 216–7w

Magistrates
Ethnic minorities 484–5w

Magistrates' courts
Derbyshire 212w
Private finance initiative 212w
Public transport 212w
Suffolk (10.06.98) 1041–8
Worcester 412w

Magistrates' courts committees
213w

Mahon, Mrs Alice
Debates etc.
Nuclear weapons tests (01.06.98) 30
Questions
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 489–90

Maintenance
Children 187–9w, 552–4w

Maize
Genetically modified organisms 524–5w

Major, Rt Hon John
Debates etc.
Electoral systems (02.06.98) 191–7

Malins, Mr Humfrey
Debates etc.
Human Rights Bill (HL), Com (03.06.98) 441, 451–5
Questions
Crown Prosecution Service 502
Health service staff, Crimes of violence 181w

Mallaber, Judy
Debates etc.
Business questions (11.06.98) 1223
Questions
Millennium, Public holidays 218w

Mallon, Mr Seamus
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland (Sentences) Bill, 2R (10.06.98) 1101–5, 1123–4, 1131–2, 1143–5, 1150

Managers
Ashford and St Peter's Hospital NHS Trust 410w

***Mandelson, Mr Peter**, Minister Without Portfolio*
Questions
Millennium, Heavily indebted poor countries initiative 60–1w
Millennium Exhibition 60–1w
Millennium Exhibition, Admission charges 183w
Millennium Exhibition, Business 14–5
Millennium Exhibition, Costs 13–4
Millennium Exhibition, Finance 14–6, 60w
Millennium Exhibition, Sports 14, 60w
Millennium Exhibition, Tickets 15

Manufacturing industries
Flexible working 508w

Marek, Dr John
Questions
Ascension Island 247w
Gibraltar, Identity cards 148w
St Helena, Diplomatic service 247w
St Helena, Migrant workers 356w
Scottish Parliament, Railway industry 84w

Market Harborough
Theatres 6

Marketing
Multinational companies 349–50

Marsden, Mr Gordon
Questions
British dependent territories 150–1w, 243w
Turks and Caicos Islands 150w
Turks and Caicos Islands, Illegal immigrants 243w
Turks and Caicos Islands, Ministers' visits abroad 348–9w
Turks and Caicos Islands, Overseas aid 349w

Marsden, Mr Paul
Questions
A49, Road works 155w
Copthorne Barracks 105w
Food labelling, Diet and disease 249w
Local government finance 224w
Standard spending assessments, Rural areas 29w
Territorial Army 104w, 421w
Territorial Army, Costs 490–1w
Territorial Army, Shropshire 104–5w
Truancy 694–5w

Marshall, Mr David
Questions
Derelict land, Scotland 428–9w
High rise flats, Glasgow 84w
High rise flats, Scotland 84–5w

Marshall, Mr David*—*continued
Prestwick Airport, Expenditure 259–60w
Slums, Scotland 84w
Swanwick Air Traffic Control Centre 523–4w

Marshall, Mr Jim
Questions
Class sizes, Leicestershire 1179–80

Martlew, Mr Eric
Debates etc.
Channel tunnel (03.06.98) 380
Questions
Bovine tuberculosis, Vaccination 529w
Dentists, Cumbria 540w
Environment Agency, Government buildings 856
Hill farming 487
M74, Road construction 515w
Northern Ireland Assembly, Elections 369–70w
Untreated milk, Food poisoning 76w

Mass media
Ownership 4–5

Maternity services
Grantham and Kesteven General Hospital (10.06.98) 1170–6

Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Debates etc.
Economic policy (11.06.98) 1201–3
Oral question time intervention (01.06.98) 5
Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, Points of order (10.06.98) 1077
Questions
Allan, Timothy, British Sky Broadcasting 91w
Arts Council of England 46w
Broadcasting 45w
Digital television 45w
English Tourist Board 11–2
Millennium Exhibition, Finance 16
Museums and galleries 46w
Royal Opera House 46w
Television, Sports 47w
Tobacco advertising, Sports sponsorship 134w
Tourism 45w
UK Sports Institute 46w

Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
Debates etc.
Belfast Agreement (01.06.98) 38–9
Channel tunnel (03.06.98) 375

May, Mrs Theresa
Debates etc.
Human Rights Bill (HL), Com (03.06.98) 393–5, 414–7
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep adjourned (08.06.98) 743–5, 749–51
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (09.06.98) 878–82, 890–3, 895
Questions
Day nurseries, Tax allowances 693–4
Disabled facilities grants 416w
M4, Motorway service areas 29w
Motorway service areas 519w
Multiple sclerosis, Health services 163
Road finance 516w
Teachers, Skill shortages 1184–5
Wheelchairs 334–5w

***Meacher, Rt Hon Michael**, Minister for the Environment, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions*
Questions
"Access to the Open Countryside in England and Wales Consultation Paper" 631w
Air Quality Standards Expert Panel 580w
Common land 374w
Government Office for Eastern Region, Environment protection 300w
Greenhouse effect, Air pollution control 511–2w
Waste disposal 419–20w
Water charges 855–6
Water meters 855–6

Means tested benefits
251–2w
Pensioners 697–8

Meat Hygiene Service
Intimidation 341–3w, 451–2w

Mediation UK
13–4w, 567w

Medical equipment
Diabetes 541w

Medical examinations
Incapacity benefit 476–7w
Merchant seamen 578–9w

Medical profession
Accountability 365–6
Interagency cooperation 685w

Medical research
Alternative medicine 538w
Cannabis 464w

Medical Supplies Agency
Performance standards 395w

Medical treatments
Alcoholism 336–7w
Cancer 171w
Drug abuse 336–7w, 464–5w
Fertility 169w

Medicines Control Agency
605w

Members
Telephone tapping 301w, 666w

Members' conduct
(04.06.98) 551–94

Members' correspondence
Administrative delays 112w, 393w, 413w, 482w, 664w, 1060–1, 1066
Civil service agencies 1060
Judges 485w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 199w, 451w
Speaker's rulings and statements (04.06.98) 512, 514

Members' speeches
(04.06.98) 594

Members' suspension
(04.06.98) 594

Men
Cancer 155–6
Health education 161–2, 170w
Research councils 596w

Mental health
Telephone services 129w

Mental health community care
157

Mental health services
Judgments 541w
Long stay patients 172w

Mental health services*—*continued
North West region 172w

Mentally disadvantaged
413w
Data banks 539w

Mentally disturbed offenders
Homicide 407w
Inquiries 407w

Mentally handicapped
408w

Mercenaries
Treaties 459w

Merchant seamen
Medical examinations 578–9w

Merchant Shipping (Control of Pollution) (SOLAS) Order 1998
Debates etc.
(08.06.98) 843–6

Merchant ships
Sea pollution (08.06.98) 843–6

Merron, Ms Gillian
Questions
Literacy, Primary education 695–6w

Mesothelioma
Health hazards 521w

Methadone
Death 225w, 323w
Northern Ireland 323w

Methicillin resistant staphylococcus aureus
Greater London 539–40w
West Midlands 539–40w

Metropolitan Police
645–6w
Ethnic minorities 305–6w
Training 58w

***Michael, Mr Alun**, Minister of State, Home Office*
Debates etc.
Herring, Raymond (10.06.98) 1054–8
Questions
Association of Chief Police Officers 381–2w
Closed circuit television 439w
Confiscation of Alcohol (Young Persons) Act 1997 223w
Driving offences, Cellular phones 303–4w
Driving offences, Disqualifications 309w
Driving offences, Drug abuse 434–5w
Firearms, Compensation 438–9w, 566–7w
Firearms, Departmental forms 220w, 310w
Forensic Science Service 435w
Homicide 220–1w
Homicide, Children 222w
Mediation UK 567w
Metropolitan Police 645–6w
Metropolitan Police, Ethnic minorities 305–6w
Metropolitan Police, Training 58w
Offences against children, Young people 304–5w
Police, Finance 646w
Police, Manpower 437w
Police, Public holidays 437w
Police, Radio 436w
Police, Road traffic control 223w
Police discipline 483w
Police national computer, Probation and aftercare 52–3w
Police stations, Epsom 646w
Road traffic offences, Convictions 307–9w
Road traffic offences, Fines 309w
Road traffic offences, Lancashire 53w
Sentencing 167w

Michael, Mr Alun*—*continued
Sexual offences, Interagency cooperation 303–4w
Taxis, Greater London 565w
Young offenders 219–20w, 482–3w
Young offenders, Police custody 483w

Michie, Mr Bill
Questions
Emergency planning, Local government finance 436–7w
Local government reform 1070–1

Michie, Mrs Ray
Questions
Educational finance, Argyll and Bute 432w
Fish conservation, Scotland 582w
Piracy 210w
Post Office, Driving licences 125w
Scottish National Sleep Laboratory 81–2w
Secure accommodation, Scotland 429w
Widows' benefits 314w, 402–3w

Microbiology
Exports 604w

Midwives
237w
Vacancies 178w

Migrant workers
St Helena 356w

***Milburn, Mr Alan**, Minister of State, Dept of Health*
Debates etc.
Community hospitals, Oxfordshire (03.06.98) 345–8
Review of Health Care in London Independent Advisory Panel (03.06.98) 319–23
Questions
Ambulance services, Performance standards 537w
Ambulances 692w
Ashford and St Peter's Hospital NHS Trust, Managers 410w
Community hospitals 604w
Contraceptives 180w
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Health Authority 238w
Dentists 239w
Dentists, Cumbria 540w
Dentists, Norfolk 129w
Diabetes, Medical equipment 541w
Doctors' list of patients 130–1w
Drugs, Expenditure 130w
Drugs, Prices 177–8w
Eye tests 542w
General practitioners, Primary care groups 181w
Glaucoma, Eye tests 176–7w
Grimsby Hospital, Performance standards 170w
Health action zones, Finance 170w
Health Service Commissioner 174w
Health service staff, Crimes of violence 181w
Health service staff, Manpower 466w
Health service staff, Occupational health 175–6w, 405–6w
Health services, Worcestershire 153–4
Hospital admissions, Geriatric patients 688w
Hospital beds, Liverpool 540w
Hospital waiting lists 133w, 466w
Hospital waiting lists, North Yorkshire 541w
Hospital waiting lists, Worcestershire 154
Hospitals, Construction 171w
Hospitals, South West London 691–2w
Hospitals, Worcestershire 154–5

Milburn, Mr Alan*—*continued
Junior hospital doctors, Working hours 180w
Loughborough General Hospital, Private finance initiative 179w
Midwives 237w
Midwives, Vacancies 178w
Multiple sclerosis, Health services 163
National Institute for Clinical Excellence 178w
NHS, Employment agencies 602w
NHS, Empty property 686w
NHS, Millennium compliance 542w
NHS, Performance standards 169w, 171w, 173w, 536–7w
NHS, Public appointments 690–1w
NHS administration 542w
NHS administration, West Yorkshire 170w
NHS Executive, Advisory services 239w
NHS pensions 542w
NHS pensions, Early retirement 407w
NHS trusts, Billing 539w
NHS trusts, Greater London 408w
NHS trusts, Industrial health and safety 406w
NHS trusts, Industrial tribunals 134w
NHS trusts, Performance standards 237w
NHS trusts, Public appointments 691w
Nurses 337w
Ongar War Memorial Hospital 603–4w
Patients, Nutrition and health 179w
Pharmacies 172–3w
Pharmacists, Primary care groups 537–8w
Pharmacists, Primary health care 539w
Physiotherapists, Greater London 403–4w
Prescription drugs 171w, 465w
Prescriptions 465w
Primary care groups 173–4w, 465w
Prodigy prescribing system 687–8w
Residential care, Drugs 686–7w
Spinal injuries 177w
Terminal care 174w
United Bristol Healthcare NHS Trust, Inquiries 337w, 692w
West Kent Health Authority 136–7w, 542w

Military aircraft
421w
Defence procurement 227–8w

Military decorations
103w
Northern Ireland 103–4w

Military discipline
(08.06.98) 846

Military exercises
Macedonia 393w

Military intervention
Sierra Leone 587w

Milk
E coli 601w
EC law 534w
Italy 344–5w
Peak District 530w
Prices 453–4w
Production quotas 341w, 530w

Milk Development Council
662w

Millennium
12–3
Heavily indebted poor countries initiative 60–1w
Public holidays 218w

Millennium Commission
Wales 590w

Millennium compliance
Dept of Trade and Industry 122w

Millennium compliance*—*continued
Directories 680w
Local authorities 4–5w
Ministerial statements (08.06.98) 716–27
NHS 542w

Millennium Exhibition
60–1w
Admission charges 183w
Business 14–5
Christianity 34w
Costs 13–4
Finance 14–6, 60w
Flood control 33w
Land pollution 30–1w
Sports 14, 60w
Tickets 15
Transport 33–4w

Mines
423–4w

Minimum wage
364

Ministerial duties
Attorney General 499

Ministerial policy advisors
Dept for International Development 37–8w
Government departments 664w
Scottish Office 260w

Ministerial powers
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 620w

Ministerial statements
Channel tunnel (03.06.98) 367–84
Crown Prosecution Service (01.06.98) 42–52
Economic policy (11.06.98) 1195–215
Eritrea (08.06.98) 728–35
Millennium compliance (08.06.98) 716–27
Nuclear weapons tests (01.06.98) 21–32
Referendums (01.06.98) 33–41

Ministerial Tourism Advisory Forum
Public appointments 560–4w

Ministers
Electronic mail 624w
Information 317w

Ministers' domestic visits
Lancaster 1059
Northern Ireland 63–4w

Ministers' visits abroad
China 93w
East Timor 355–6w
Indonesia 89w
Korea 89w
Turks and Caicos Islands 348–9w

Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food
Alternative energy 526–8w
Energy consumption 528w
Members' correspondence 199w, 451w
Serials 197–8w
Small businesses 249w
Travelling expenses 526w

Ministry of Defence
Energy consumption 107w, 492w
Small businesses 108w

Mitchell, Mr Austin
Debates etc.
Electoral systems (02.06.98) 209, 216, 230
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Allocation of time motion and Lords amendts (09.06.98) 941–7, 951, 972
Human Rights Bill (HL), Com (03.06.98) 464–70, 475
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep adjourned (08.06.98) 828

Mitchell, Mr Austin*—*continued
Questions
Alternative medicine 538w
Bank of England, Seigniorage 585w
Disability living allowance 470w
EC Monetary Committee 442w
Economic and monetary union 496w
Economic and monetary union, Banking supervision 329–30w
Economic and monetary union, Seigniorage 442w
Euro 441w, 496w
Euro, Publicity 585w
European Communities, Conferences 616w
European Convention on Human Rights, Channel Islands 55w
Interest rates 445w
Millennium Exhibition, Costs 13–4
Millennium Exhibition, Flood control 33w
New deal schemes, Lincolnshire 1191–2
Public libraries, Blind 560w
Standing Committee on Regional Affairs 669–70w

Mobility of disabled
132w
Railway travel 29w

Modernisation of the House of Commons Select Committee
(05.06.98) 682

Moffatt, Laura
Debates etc.
National Lottery Bill, Rep and 3R (01.06.98) 67–9
Questions
Health service staff, Occupational health 175w
New deal schemes, Crawley 1188
Women, Government departments 694

Monetary Policy Committee
Bank of England 329w

Money lenders
Licensing 229w

Monopolies and Mergers Commission
123w

Moonie, Dr Lewis
Questions
Dounreay, Nuclear fuel reprocessing 385–6w
Plutonium 162w

Moore, Mr Michael
Questions
Scottish Office, Public appointments 384w

Moran, Ms Margaret
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland (Sentences) Bill, 2R (10.06.98) 1127–9
Questions
Better government programme 619w
Immigration rules, Domestic violence 167w

Moray College
332–3w

More Group
JC Decaux 123w

Morecambe
Prisons 31w, 54w, 168w, 417w, 484w

Morgan, Mr Alasdair
Questions
Nuclear weapons policy 606w

Morgan, Ms Julie
Questions
Bro Taf Health Authority, Electroconvulsive therapy 672–3w

Morgan, Ms Julie*—*continued
Psychiatry, Wales 672w

Morgan, Mr Rhodri
Questions
Cardiff Bay, Property development 545w
Council tax benefits, Wales 551w
Train operating units, Performance standards 513w

***Morley, Mr Elliot**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food*
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Allocation of time motion and Lords amendts (09.06.98) 956–7, 961, 966, 972–5
Questions
Agriculture 493
Agriculture, Exchange rates 492
Agriculture, Harmonisation of standards 491–2
Alternative energy, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 526–8w
Animal welfare, EC trade 248w
Arable area payments scheme 201–2w
Central Science Laboratory 496
Centre for Environment Fisheries and Aquaculture Science 74w
Coastal protection 344w, 601w
Common fisheries policy 74w
Crops 495–6
Drift nets 201w, 344w
Energy consumption, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 528w
Environment Agency, Sea level 341w
Euro 492–3
Farm incomes 340w, 486–7
Farm incomes, Interest rates 487–8
Farm incomes, Retail trade 487
Farmers, Bureaucracy 491
Fishing grounds 75w
Fishing quotas 660–1w
Flood control, Cumbria 660w
Furs, Farms 72–3w
Gangmasters 339w
Genetically modified organisms 496
Hill farming 487
Integrated administration and control system, Departmental forms 492
Interest rates 493
International Whaling Commission 199–201w, 340w
Livestock, Animal welfare 659–60w
Organic farming 340w, 659w
Pigs, Animal welfare 534w
Poultry, Animal welfare 73–4w
Set-aside schemes 338w
Sites of special scientific interest, Countryside stewardship scheme 529w
Slaughterhouses, Animal welfare 533–4w
Small businesses, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 249w
Smallholdings, Local government land 339w
Travelling expenses, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 526w
Welfare of Animals (Transport) Order 1997 534w
Whales 201w, 340w

***Morris, Ms Estelle**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept for Education and Employment*
Questions
Autism, Special education 368w
Derringham School 357w
Educational visits, Farms 696w
Higher education admission 693w
Play groups, Government grants 257w

Morris, Ms Estelle*—*continued
Pre-school education 696w
Pre-school education, Barnsley 364w
Pre-school education, Hereford and Worcester 708–9w
Primary education, Drug abuse 693w
Pupil exclusions 1181
Pupil exclusions, Chelmsford 626w
Pupil exclusions, Warrington 367w
School transport 1189–91
Special education 139w
Special education, Complaints 698w
Special education, Cumbria 699w
Special education, Training 366–7w
Standard assessment tasks, Cumbria 700w
Teacher training 1184
Teacher training, Student numbers 363w
Teachers, Skill shortages 1183–5
Truancy 694–5w

***Morris, Rt Hon John**, Attorney-General*
Debates etc.
Crown Prosecution Service, Ministerial statements (01.06.98) 42–52
Questions
Attorney General, Ministerial duties 499
Crown Prosecution Service 337w, 500–2
Crown Prosecution Service, Harmonisation of standards 499–500
Crown Prosecution Service, Information technology 338w
Customs and Excise, Accidents 499
Customs and Excise, Prosecutions 498–9
Phoenix companies, Prosecutions 338w
Prosecutions 338w
Thorne, Damien, Sentencing 662w

Mortgage defaulters
Scotland 291–3w

Moss, Mr Malcolm
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland (Sentences) Bill, 2R (10.06.98) 1157–60

Motability
110w

Mothers
Tax rates and bands 401–2w

Motor vehicles
Fraud 16w
Lead free petrol 16w
Lighting 20–1w
Petrol additives 516w

Motorcycles
Bus lanes 519w
Transport policy 28w, 157w

Motorway service areas
519w
M4 29w

***Mowlam, Rt Hon Marjorie**, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland*
Debates etc.
Belfast Agreement, Ministerial statements (01.06.98) 33–41
Northern Ireland (Sentences) Bill, 1R (04.06.98) 514
Northern Ireland (Sentences) Bill, 2R (10.06.98) 1082–92, 1096, 1126
Referendums, Ministerial statements (01.06.98) 33–41
Questions
Army in Northern Ireland, Prisoners 663w
Royal Ulster Constabulary 216–7w

Mullin, Mr Chris
Debates etc.
Crown Prosecution Service (01.06.98) 47

Mullin, Mr Chris—continued
Questions
Better Regulation Task Force, Public appointments 1–2w
Better Regulation Unit, Manpower 1w
Business questions 506–7
Commercial television 12
Coroners, Judges 56w
Police discipline 56w
Prisoners, Suicide 56w
Pupil exclusions 1181
Sewage, Water treatment 517w

Multilateral Agreement on Investment
234w

Multinational companies
Human rights 349
Marketing 349–50

Multiple occupation
Scotland 331w

Multiple sclerosis
Health services 163

Multiply handicapped
Pedestrians 3–4w

Murphy, Mr Jim
Questions
Epilepsy 131–2w
Sports, Governing bodies 48w

Murphy, Mr Paul, Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office
Questions
Agricultural subsidies, Administrative costs 185w
Belfast Agreement, Publications 481w
Civil servants, Northern Ireland Office 65w
Consultants, Northern Ireland Office 183w
EC grants and loans, Administrative costs 481w
Green papers, Northern Ireland Office 64w
Ministers' domestic visits, Northern Ireland 63–4w
Non-departmental public bodies, Northern Ireland Office 183–4w
Public appointments, Northern Ireland Office 184w
Sites of special scientific interest, Northern Ireland 184w
Sports, Rate rebates 185w
Transport, Northern Ireland Office 64–5w

Museums and galleries
8, 46w
Armed conflict 8
Finance 7–8
Public transport 376w
Wales 591w

Music
Internet 681w

Music education
625w

National air quality strategy
417w

National Air Traffic Services
637w

National Audit Office
19
Non-departmental public bodies 18–9

National Board for Nursing Midwifery and Health Visiting in Wales
see Welsh National Board for Nursing Midwifery and Health Visiting

National House Building Council
155w

National income
Wales 674w

National Institute for Clinical Excellence
178w

National insurance contributions
386–9w, 467–8w
Educational finance 137w

National Insurance Fund
550w

National Lottery
5–6
English Sports Council 6–7
Film industry 164w
Performing arts 9
Pontefract 668–9w
Tourism 11, 493–4w
Voluntary organisations 44–5w
Yorkshire and Humberside 668–9w
Youth clubs 302w

National Lottery Bill (HL) 1997/98
Debates etc.
Rep and 3R (01.06.98) 54–119

National Meat Hygiene Service
see Meat Hygiene Service

National parks
518w
New Forest 518w

National Savings Agency
Contracts for services (08.06.98) 840–3

National Sports Institute
see UK Sports Institute

NATO countries
Armed forces reserves 491–2w

Nature conservation
Birds 30w
Circuses 22w
Departmental coordination 520w
Seas and oceans 1–3w

Naval Bases and Supply Agency
Performance standards 397w

Navigation
Inland waterways 510w

Navy
Fuels 607w

Navy strength
606w

Negligence
Scotland 280w

Neill Committee
see Committee on Standards in Public Life

New deal for disabled people
112w, 138–9w, 364–5w, 473w, 699–700w, 711w
Departmental coordination 365w

New deal for lone parents
110–1w, 314–5w, 402w, 467w, 695–6, 706

New deal for long term unemployed
693w

New deal for young people
137w, 624w, 693–4w, 696–7w, 707w
Guildford 543–4w
Social security benefits reductions 255w
Tourism 669w

New deal schemes
1189
Access courses 138w
Crawley 1188
Ethnic minorities 1177
Lincolnshire 1191–2
Private sector 205w

New deal schemes—continued
Thanet 449–50w

New Forest
National parks 518w

New Opportunities Fund
After school clubs 10

Newhaven
Ports (03.06.98) 324–32

NHS
162
Administrative costs 265–6w
Employment agencies 602w
Empty property 686w
Millennium compliance 542w
Performance standards 169w, 171w, 173w, 536–7w
Public appointments 690–1w
Scotland 265–6w
Social services 165
Wales 61–2w

NHS administration
542w
West Yorkshire 170w

NHS Direct
Training 129w

NHS Executive
Advisory services 239w

NHS finance
169w
Scotland 197w

NHS pensions
542w
Early retirement 407w

NHS trusts
Billing 539w
Executives 266w
Expenditure 264w
Greater London 408w
Industrial health and safety 406w
Industrial tribunals 134w
Pay 266w
Performance standards 237w
Public appointments 157–9, 691w
Scotland 264w
Wales 166w, 673w

Nicholls, Mr Patrick
Debates etc.
Business questions (11.06.98) 1224–5
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Allocation of time motion and Lords amendts (09.06.98) 937, 968–72
Questions
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, West country 489
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Health Authority 238w
General practitioners, Primary care groups 181w

Niger
Overseas aid 231w

Nigeria
Arms trade 459w
Entry clearances 306–7w

Night clubs
Drug abuse 434w

No Mans Heath bypass
154w

Noise control
Lorries 228w

Nolan Committee
see Committee on Standards in Public Life

Nomenclature of statistical territorial units
EC grants and loans 384w
Population distribution 319w

Non-alcoholic drinks
Prices 868

Non-departmental public bodies
Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions 3w
Dept of Trade and Industry 112w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 71w
National Audit Office 18–9
Northern Ireland Office 183–4w

Non-domestic rates
Debt collection 374–5w

Non-fossil fuel obligation
Alternative energy 228–9w

Non-governmental organisations
Overseas aid 38–9w

Norfolk
Dentists 129w
School population 626w

Norman, Mr Archie
Debates etc.
Sports (05.06.98) 639–42

Norris, Dan
Questions
Medical profession, Accountability 365–6

North Cumbria Health Authority
Fertility 169w

North Korea
93w, 325–6w

North West region
Cancer 133w
Death 86–7w
EC Social Charter 684w
Kidney patients 133w
Mental health services 172w

North Yorkshire
Hospital waiting lists 541w

North Yorkshire Police
Police equipment 436w

Northampton
Floods 187–9w

Northamptonshire
Local government constituencies 519w

Northern Ireland
Agricultural subsidies 185w
Antismoking campaign 375w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 490–1
EC grants and loans 481w
Ethnic minorities 184–5w
Family planning 65–6w
Fire services (08.06.98) 846
Health service staff 323w
Legal aid 655–6w
Methadone 323w
Military decorations 103–4w
Ministers' domestic visits 63–4w
Petrol 66w
Prisoners' release (04.06.98) 514, (10.06.98) 1082–168
School transport 217–8w
Sites of special scientific interest 184w
Smoking 323w
Sports 185w
Terrorism 662–3w
Veterinary medicine 663w

Northern Ireland Arms Decommissioning Act 1997
Debates etc.
(01.06.98) 33–41

Northern Ireland Assembly
Elections 369–70w

Northern Ireland government
Referendums 361–2

Northern Ireland Office
Civil servants 65w
Consultants 183w
Green papers 64w
Non-departmental public bodies 183–4w
Public appointments 184w
Small businesses 67w
Transport 64–5w

Northern Ireland (Sentences) Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
1R (04.06.98) 514
2R and money res* (10.06.98) 1082–168
Programme motion* (11.06.98) 1284–5

Nuclear fuel reprocessing
Dounreay 385–6w, 595–6w, 709–15

Nuclear fuels
Japan 679–80w

Nuclear Installations Inspectorate
Dounreay 120w

Nuclear power
714

Nuclear power stations
Decommissioning 713
Health hazards 597–8w

Nuclear safety
Dounreay 120–1w, 715

Nuclear weapons
India 40w

Nuclear weapons policy
606w

Nuclear weapons tests
India 152w
Ministerial statements (01.06.98) 21–32
South Asia 242–3w

Nurses
337w

Nurses Midwives and Health Visitors Act 1979
Questions
337w

Nutrition and health
Patients 179w
Schools 167

Oaten, Mr Mark
Debates etc.
Registration of Political Parties Bill, 2R (04.06.98) 522
Questions
Access to work programme 707–8w
Blind, Internet 215w
Disability Discrimination Act 1995 138w
Disability living allowance 470w
Disabled person's tax credit 650–1w
Eye tests 542w
Handicap benefits, Earnings rules 109w
Handicap benefits, Social security benefits rules 109w
Housing construction, Building regulations 575–6w
Landlords 299–300w
New deal for disabled people 112w, 138–9w, 711w
Plant power 318w
Railway travel, Mobility of disabled 29w
UK National Data Centre 312–3w
Uniform business rate, Public houses 649–50w
Wheelchairs 335w

***Oaten, Mr Mark**—continued*
Wind power 506–7w
Winter fuel payments 554–6w

***O'Brien, Mr Mike**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office*
Questions
Entry clearances, Nigeria 306–7w
Entry clearances, Sri Lanka 53w
European Convention on Human Rights 311w
European Convention on Human Rights, Channel Islands 55w
Human rights, Departmental responsibilities 647w
Immigration 49–50w
Immigration applications 55w
Immigration controls, Kidnapping 647w
Immigration rules, Domestic violence 167w
Immigration Service (Ports), Manpower 646w
Political refugees, Cameroon 642–3w
Political refugees, Category A prisoners 222w
Political refugees, Expenditure 643w
Political refugees, Immigrant detainees 221w
Political refugees, Immigration appeals 55w
Political refugees, Legal representation 167w
Political refugees, Work permits 437–8w
Ports, Passengers 646–7w
Visas, Cyprus 168w

O'Brien, Mr William
Questions
Local government finance 858
National Lottery, Voluntary organisations 44–5w
NHS administration, West Yorkshire 170w
Pensions 701–2

Occupational health
Health service staff 62w, 175–6w, 323w, 405–6w

Occupational pensions
108w, 469w, 692
Scotland 551w

Offences against children
Young people 304–5w

Offenders
Repatriation 53w

Office for National Statistics
Public sector borrowing requirement 586w

Official hospitality
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 47–8w
Treasury 584w

Official receiver
County courts 318–9w

Offshore fixed platforms
Industrial health and safety 578–9w

O'Hara, Mr Edward
Questions
Mentally disadvantaged 413w

Ombudsman
Investment 193–4w

Ongar War Memorial Hospital
603–4w

Open government
619–20w, 1061–2, 1065–8
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 620w
Codes of practice 629w
Parliamentary questions 653w

Opik, Mr Lembit
Questions
Class sizes, Wales 676w
Retirement pensions 111–2w

Opposition days
Electoral systems (02.06.98) 171–268

Orange juice
Israel 327w

Orchestras
Wales 589–90w

Ordnance Disposal School Chattendon
394w

Organ, Mrs Diana
Debates etc.
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (09.06.98) 906

Organ donors
690w

Organic farming
340w, 659w

Organophosphates
127–8w

Osborne, Ms Sandra
Debates etc.
Strathclyde Police, Racial discrimination (01.06.98) 145–52

Ottawa Convention
356w, 488w

Ottaway, Mr Richard
Debates etc.
Referendums (03.06.98) 291–3
Questions
Jubilee line 869–70

Overseas aid
231w
Afghanistan 39w
Bulgaria 459w
Burma 41w
Charities 356
Group of Eight 40w
Human rights 37w
Indonesia 235–6w
Kosovo 41–2w
Niger 231w
Non-governmental organisations 38–9w
Rain forests 235w
Rule of law 36w
Sierra Leone 236w, 354, 445–6w, 587w
Sudan 233w, 350–3, 355–6, 449w
Thailand 41w, 168–9w
Turks and Caicos Islands 349w

Overseas investment
Environmentally sensitive areas 42w
Russia 505–6w

Oxfordshire
Community hospitals (03.06.98) 341–8

Ozone
Air pollution 415–6w

Page, Mr Richard
Debates etc.
Late Payment of Commercial Debts (Interest) Bill, Rep and 3R (01.06.98) 122–5, 136–8,140
Questions
Small businesses, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 45w
Small businesses, Dept for Education and Employment 140w
Small businesses, Dept of Health 135w
Small businesses, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions 29–30w

Page, Mr Richard—continued
Small businesses, Dept of Trade and Industry 160–1w
Small businesses, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 149w
Small businesses, Home Office 54w
Small businesses, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 249w
Small businesses, Ministry of Defence 108w
Small businesses, Northern Ireland Office 67w
Small businesses, Scottish Office 85w
Small businesses, Treasury 195w
Small businesses, Welsh Office 61w

Paice, Mr James
Questions
Agricultural subsidies 455–6w
Agriculture, Harmonisation of standards 491–2

Paisley, Rev Ian
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland (Sentences) Bill, 2R (10.06.98) 1084, 1094, 1122–7

Palace of Westminster
Recycling 557–8w

Palestinians
EC external relations 243w

Palmer, Dr Nick
Debates etc.
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep adjourned (08.06.98) 820
Questions
Developing countries, Debts 230w
Tobacco advertising 160–1

Panchen Lama
677w

Paper
Waste disposal 28w, 420w

Parc Prison
Operating costs 483–4w

Parcelforce
115–6w

Parent and child
Legal aid 412–3w

Parishes
415w

Parking
515w

Parliamentary buildings
Scottish Parliament 657–8w

Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration
411–2w

Parliamentary procedure
Treaties 244–5w

Parliamentary questions
Open government 653w
Sierra Leone 684w

Part-time education
Student loans 1186–7

Passengers
Ports 646–7w

Paterson, Mr Owen
Questions
Export licensing 125–6w
Open government 620w
Power industry 117w

Pathology
Kent and Canterbury Hospital 407w

Patients
Nutrition and health 179w

Patten Commission
see Independent Commission on Policing for Northern Ireland

Pay and Personnel Agency
Performance standards 488w

Peace negotiations
Cyprus 457–8w

Peak District
Milk 530w

Pearson, Mr Ian
Debates etc.
Sportsgrounds, Town and country planning (10.06.98) 1033–6, 1040
Questions
Accountants, Training 697w
Housing construction, Playing fields 511w
Prison visits, Drug crimes 439w

Pedestrians
Multiply handicapped 3–4w

Pendle
Low pay 497w

Pendry, Mr Tom
Debates etc.
National Lottery Bill, Rep and 3R (01.06.98) 107
Sports (05.06.98) 623–9, 662
Questions
Developing countries, Poverty 215w
Sports, Rate rebates 84w, 185w
UK Sports Council 48w

Pennine Way
569–70w

Pension Provision Group
552w

Pensioners
Capital gains tax 195w
Income distribution 550–1w
Income support 468w, 707
Means tested benefits 697–8
Poverty 699–700
Scotland 477–80w
Social security benefits 477–8w
Tax credits 87–8w

Pensions
254–5w, 467w, 551–2w, 701–2
Carers 700–1
Clergy 17
Personal savings 703
Tax allowances 651w

Pensions Act 1995
Questions
108w

Pensions Education Working Group
552w

Pensions review
702

Performing arts
Finance 9
Kettering 5–6
National Lottery 9

Perham, Ms Linda
Debates etc.
Review of Health Care in London Independent Advisory Panel (03.06.98) 307
Questions
Breast cancer 499–500w
Breast cancer, Scotland 657w

Persian Gulf
Armed forces deployment 608–9w

Personal injury
Civil proceedings 69w
Conditional fee agreements 69w
Legal aid 69w

Personal injury compensation
Social security benefits overpayment 550w

Personal pensions
700

Personal records
Intelligence services 52w

Personal savings
Channel Islands 652w
Pensions 703

Personal social services
Handicapped 132w

Pest control
Devon 157–8w
Insects 157–8w

Petrol
Distributive trade 115w
Northern Ireland 66w
Retail trade 114–5w
Smuggling 66w

Petrol additives
Motor vehicles 516w

Petrol alternatives
629–30w

Petroleum Bill (HL) 1997/98
Debates etc.
2R* and rem stages* (01.06.98) 53
Royal Assent (11.06.98) 1241

Petroleum exploration licences
502–3w

Pharmacies
172–3w

Pharmacists
Primary care groups 537–8w
Primary health care 539w

Phoenix companies
Prosecutions 338w

Physiotherapists
Greater London 403–4w

Pickles, Mr Eric
Debates etc.
Channel tunnel (03.06.98) 380
Questions
Channel tunnel, Railway network 573–4w
Ongar War Memorial Hospital 603–4w
Railway travel, Handicapped 864–5

Pickthall, Mr Colin
Questions
Departmental correspondence 1059–60
Gangmasters 339w
Niger, Overseas aid 231w

Pigs
Animal welfare 534w

Pike, Mr Peter L
Debates etc.
House of Commons procedure (04.06.98) 581–2
Leasehold housing (10.06.98) 1000, 1004
Nuclear weapons tests (01.06.98) 31
Questions
Church Commissioners, Investment 34w
Social security appeals 468–9w
Tobacco advertising 1194
Tourism 10–1

Pilot schemes
Dept of Health 688–90w
Dept of Social Security 710w
Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions 632–4w

Piracy
210w

Planning permission
Aerials 574–5w
Gas fired power stations 113–4w

Plant power
318w

Play groups
Government grants 257w

Playing fields
Bromsgrove (08.06.98) 848–54
Housing construction 511w

Plutonium
162w
Export controls 597w

Polegate bypass
Compensation 33w

Police
Finance 646w
Manpower 437w
Public holidays 437w
Radio 436w
Road traffic control 223w

Police custody
Young offenders 483w

Police discipline
56w, 483w

Police equipment
North Yorkshire Police 436w

Police national computer
Probation and aftercare 52–3w

Police stations
Epsom 646w

Police training
36w

Policing for Northern Ireland Independent Commission
see Independent Commission on Policing for Northern Ireland

Political activities
Government buildings 665w

Political parties
(04.06.98) 515–60
Finance 95w

Political refugees
Cameroon 642–3w
Category A prisoners 222w
Expenditure 643w
Immigrant detainees 221w
Immigration appeals 55w
Legal representation 167w
Work permits 437–8w

Pollard, Mr Kerry
Debates etc.
Structure plans, Hertfordshire (04.06.98) 604, 607
Questions
Afghanistan, Arms embargoes 349w
Taiwan, Arms trade 349w

Pollution
Ground water 31–2w

Pollution control
Prosecutions 299w

Pollution monitoring
9–13w

Pond, Mr Chris
Debates etc.
Channel tunnel (03.06.98) 374–5
Questions
Council tax capping, Derbyshire 420w
Pensions 254–5w

Pontefract
National Lottery 668–9w

Population distribution
Nomenclature of statistical territorial units 319w

Population projection
Elderly 442–3w

Pornography
Internet 425w

Portcullis House
49w
Expenditure 557w

Porton Down
207w

Ports
Newhaven (03.06.98) 324–32
Passengers 646–7w

Post Office
594w
Driving licences 125w
External financing limits 115w
Reviews 319w

Post Office Users' National Council
159–60w
Public appointments 124w

Post offices
Watford 508w

Postal services
115–6w
Customs 328w
USA 503w

Poultry
Animal welfare 73–4w

Poultry meat
Imports 248–9w

Pound, Mr Stephen
Debates etc.
Sports (05.06.98) 631, 655, 660, 662
Questions
Central Railway 30w
Gas fired power stations 507w
National air quality strategy 417w
Waste disposal 419–20w

Poverty
Developing countries 215w
Pensioners 699–700

Power industry
117w

Pregnant women
Benzodiazepines 463w

Prentice, Ms Bridget, An Assistant Whip
Debates etc.
European Council (11.06.98) 1284

Prentice, Mr Gordon
Debates etc.
Business questions (11.06.98) 1220–1
Electoral systems (02.06.98) 198
Nuclear weapons tests (01.06.98) 32
Questions
Animal feed, Antibiotics 494
Bradenstoke Priory Barn 427w
Bulgaria, Overseas aid 459w
Channel tunnel, Railway network 573w
Cosmetic surgery 127w

Prentice, Mr Gordon—continued
Electronic government 1064
Elgin Marbles 3–4, 302w
Green papers, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 2w
Green papers, Costs 92w
Green papers, Dept of Health 334w
Green papers, Dept of Trade and Industry 126w
Green papers, Northern Ireland Office 64w
Green papers, Scottish Office 259w
Industrial health and safety, Fuels 518–9w
Kray, Reginald 167w
Low pay, Pendle 497w
UNESCO, Cultural heritage 560w

Pre-school education
696w
Barnsley 364w
Doncaster 364w
Hereford and Worcester 708–9w
Scotland 268–75w

Prescott, Rt Hon John, Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for the Environment Transport and the Regions
Debates etc.
Channel tunnel, Ministerial statements (03.06.98) 367–84
Questions
Council tax capping, Derbyshire 420w
Cycling 867–8
Derelict land 859–60
Housing construction 859
Housing construction, Derelict land 858–60
Jubilee line 868–70
Members' correspondence, Administrative delays 413w
School transport 865–6
Transport policy 866–7
Transport policy, White papers 211w

Prescription drugs
171w, 465w
Wales 545w

Prescriptions
465w

President of the Council
Inquiries 509w

Press
Children 43w

Prestwick Airport
Expenditure 259–60w

Preventative Health Care and Home Insulation Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
1R (10.06.98) 1078

Primarolo, Ms Dawn, Financial Secretary to the Treasury
Questions
Alcoholic drinks duties, Beer 326w
Capital gains tax 195w
Capital gains tax, Pensioners 195w
Customs, Postal services 328w
Disabled person's tax credit 650–1w
Double taxation, Tax allowances 391w
Duty free allowances 194w
Duty free allowances, Ferries 328w
EC Finance Council 193w
Hydrocarbon oil duties 194w
Import duties, Israel 327w
Income tax 194–5w, 386–9w
Inheritance tax, Tax rates and bands 586w
Open government, Parliamentary questions 653w
Pensions, Tax allowances 651w
Personal savings, Channel Islands 652w
Self-assessment of tax 650w

Primarolo, Ms Dawn—continued
Sierra Leone, Arms trade 653w
Tax allowances, British residents abroad 652w
Tax allowances, Educational equipment 654w
Tax allowances, Interest payments 390–1w
Tax allowances, Vocational training 654w
Tax avoidance 649w
Tax burden, Statistics 224w
Tax credits 391–2w
Tax evasion 652w
Tax yields, Child benefit 651w
Taxation, Child benefit 392w
Taxation, Pay 654w
Taxation, Quarrying 494w
Tobacco duties 327w
Uniform business rate, Public houses 649–50w
VAT, Housing 328w

Primary care groups
173–4w, 465w, 1076
General practitioners 181w
Pharmacists 537–8w

Primary education
Drug abuse 693w
Literacy 695–6w
School population 626w

Primary health care
Pharmacists 539w

Primates
Animal experiments 644–5w

Prime Minister
Government information services 94w

Prime Minister's questions
358–9

Printing industry
Training 364w

Prior, Mr David
Debates etc.
National Lottery Bill, Rep and 3R (01.06.98) 57, 64, 68, 75–6, 93–4, 108–9
Questions
Aerials, Planning permission 575w
Areas of outstanding natural beauty 579w
Assisted places scheme 628w
Coastal protection 601w
Community hospitals 604w
Council tax, Second homes 576w
Dentists, Norfolk 129w
Food Standards Agency 339w
Music education 625w
Primary education, School population 626w
Road signs 572w
Road signs, Rural areas 572w
School closures 626w
Sites of special scientific interest 579w
Village schools 626w

Priority routes
Greater London 18w

Prison accommodation
Garth Prison 439w
Wymott Prison 439w

Prison medical services
56w

Prison Officers' Association
Private sector 55–6w

Prison population
223w
Foreigners 567–8w
Scotland 280–2w
Young offenders 382w

Prison riots
Lisnevin Training School 432–3w

Prison Service
Performance standards 380–1w
Property transfer 307w

Prison staff
Feltham Young Offender Institution and Remand Centre 52w

Prison visits
Drug crimes 439w

Prisoners
Army in Northern Ireland 359, 663w
Atkinson, George (02.06.98) 270–6
Drug abuse 310–1w
Scotland 196w
Self-mutilation 382w
Suicide 56w, 306w
Television 196w, 639–40w
Venezuela 618w

Prisoners' incentives and earned privileges scheme
50–1w, 640w

Prisoners of war
Japan 107w

Prisoners' release
Northern Ireland (04.06.98) 514, (10.06.98) 1082–168

Prisons
Construction 54w
Morecambe 31w, 54w, 168w, 417w, 484w
Private sector 382–3w
Surveys 417w

Private education
1178
Inspections 695w
Surrey 1178

Private finance initiative
223–4w
Home Office 51–2w
Loughborough General Hospital 179w
Magistrates' courts 212w
Scottish Office 278w

Private Hire Vehicles (London) Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
(09.06.98) 979

Private sector
New deal schemes 205w
Prison Officers' Association 55–6w
Prisons 382–3w

Privatisation
Channel Four 4–5
Student loans 256–7w

Probation and aftercare
Finance 58–60w
Inspections 640–1w
Police national computer 52–3w

Probation officers
641–2w

Procurator Fiscal Service
499–502w

Prodigy prescribing system
687–8w

Production quotas
Milk 341w, 530w

Property development
Cardiff Bay 545w

Property transfer
Prison Service 307w
RAF Carlisle 491w

"Proposals for a Strategic London Road Network Consultation Paper"
636w

Prosecutions
338w
Customs and Excise 498–9
Phoenix companies 338w
Pollution control 299w

Protection from Harassment Act 1997
Questions
Animal welfare 646w

Protest
Animal welfare 646w

Psychiatry
Wales 672w

Public appointments
Better Regulation Task Force 1–2w
Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions 3w
Dept of Trade and Industry 113w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 71–2w
Ministerial Tourism Advisory Forum 560–4w
NHS 690–1w
NHS trusts 157–9, 691w
Northern Ireland Office 184w
Post Office Users' National Council 124w
Reservoirs Act 1975 159w
Scotland 78w
Scottish Office 77w, 384w
Structure plans 26–7w
Welsh Advisory Committee on Drug and Alcohol Misuse 376–8w

Public bills
(04.06.98) 551–94

Public bodies
Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions 629w

Public buildings
Archaeological sites 44w

Public holidays
Millennium 218w
Police 437w

Public houses
Uniform business rate 649–50w

Public inquiries
Heathrow Airport 8w, 512w, 863–4
Legal costs 72w

Public libraries
Blind 560w
Information technology 165w

Public opinion
Genetically modified organisms 535w

Public petitions
Countryside (04.06.98) 595
Winwick (02.06.98) 269

Public sector borrowing requirement
Office for National Statistics 586w
Statistics 585–6w

Public sector debt
EC countries 327–8w
Economic policy 650w

Public sector earnings
392w

Public sector employment
Wales 673w

Public sector housing
Scotland 330–1w

Public transport
Magistrates' courts 212w
Museums and galleries 376w

Public Trust Office
67–9w, 411–2w
Court of Protection 69w

Public utilities
Regulatory systems 116w

Publications
Belfast Agreement 481w

Publicity
Breast feeding 404–5w
Contraceptives 536w
Euro 585w
Scottish Office 266–7w

Pupil exclusions
694–5w, 1181
Chelmsford 626w
Warrington 367w

Pupil-teacher ratios
Scotland 282–9w

Purchase, Mr Ken
Questions
New deal for disabled people 473w

Quarrying
Taxation 494w

Queen Mary's University Hospital
(03.06.98) 300–23

***Quin, Ms Joyce**, Minister of State, Home Office*
Questions
Cardiff Prison, Operating costs 483–4w
Community service orders 482w
Electronic tagging, Contracts 303w, 648w
Feltham Young Offender Institution and Remand Centre, Prison staff 52w
Home detention curfews 57–8w, 304w
Home detention curfews, Costs 433w, 565w
Home detention curfews, Sexual offences 57w
Kray, Reginald 167w
Police discipline 56w
Prison medical services 56w
Prison Officers' Association, Private sector 55–6w
Prison population 223w
Prison population, Foreigners 567–8w
Prison population, Young offenders 382w
Prison Service, Performance standards 380–1w
Prison Service, Property transfer 307w
Prisoners, Self-mutilation 382w
Prisoners, Suicide 56w, 306w
Prisoners, Television 639–40w
Prisoners' incentives and earned privileges scheme 50–1w, 640w
Prisons, Construction 54w
Prisons, Morecambe 168w, 484w
Prisons, Private sector 382–3w
Probation and aftercare, Finance 58–60w
Probation and aftercare, Inspections 640–1w
Probation officers 641–2w
Repatriation, Offenders 53w
Wymott Prison, Prison accommodation 439w

Quinn, Mr Lawrie
Questions
Beef, Exports 1072
Electronic government 1063–4
Pensioners, Poverty 699–700
School transport 865–6

Racial discrimination
Cricket 48–9w
Strathclyde Police (01.06.98) 145–52

Radice, Mr Giles
Debates etc.
Economic policy (11.06.98) 1204

Radio
Police 436w

Radioactive materials
Export controls 119–20w

Radioactive waste disposal
River Thames 525w

RAF Carlisle
Property transfer 491w

RAF Menwith Hill
Defence expenditure 96–7w

Railway fares
513w

Railway industry
Scottish Parliament 84w

Railway land
19w

Railway network
Channel tunnel 13w, 117w, 573–4w
Finance 23w
Leeds 514w

Railway safety
872

Railway travel
Compensation 523w
Handicapped 864–5
Information services 513w
Mobility of disabled 29w

Rain forests
Guyana 648w
Overseas aid 235w

Rammell, Mr Bill
Debates etc.
European Council (11.06.98) 1240
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep adjourned (08.06.98) 821–4
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (09.06.98) 917–8, 924–5
Questions
Child workers 234w
Local government corruption 1074–5
Theatres, Arts finance 1–2

Randall, Mr John
Debates etc.
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep adjourned (08.06.98) 772, 784
Questions
Birds, Nature conservation 30w
Sites of special scientific interest, Northern Ireland 184w
Sites of special scientific interest, Wales 62w

Rapson, Mr Syd
Questions
Lockheed Martin, Defence procurement 101w
Young offenders 219–20w

Rate rebates
Sports 84w, 185w

***Raynsford, Mr Nick**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions*
Debates etc.
Leasehold housing (10.06.98) 991, 1007–9
Playing fields, Bromsgrove (08.06.98) 852–4
Sportsgrounds, Town and country planning (10.06.98) 1037–40

Raynsford, Mr Nick—continued
Structure plans, Hertfordshire (04.06.98) 602–8
Questions
Aerials, Planning permission 574–5w
Areas of outstanding natural beauty 579w
Construction materials, Fire prevention 297–9w
Council tax, Second homes 576w
Council tax capping, Derbyshire 635–6w
Disabled facilities grants 416w
Disabled facilities grants, Elderly 17w
Energy prices, Business premises 568–9w
Greater London Authority 861–3
Greater London Authority, Better government programme 634–5w
Greater London Authority, Town and country planning 513w
Households, Single people 154–5w
Housing, Tewkesbury 30w
Housing, Wandsworth 373w
Housing benefits 511w
Housing benefits, Finance 575w
Housing construction 24–6w
Housing construction, Building regulations 575–6w
Housing construction, Playing fields 511w
Housing construction, West Sussex 9w
Housing Corporation, Operating costs 569w
Housing Corporation, Pay 569w
Housing improvement, Cumbria 571w
Housing policy, Cumbria 571w
Insects, Pest control 157–8w
Kent County Council 419w, 577w
Landlords 299–300w
Local Government Act 1988, Homosexuality 28w
Local government constituencies 860–1
Local government constituencies, Gloucestershire 212w
Local government constituencies, Northamptonshire 519w
National House Building Council 155w
Parishes 415w
Prisons, Morecambe 31w
Prisons, Surveys 417w
Rough sleepers initiative, West Midlands 19–20w
Second homes 576w
Social rented housing 510–1w
Social rented housing, Investment 14w
Standard spending assessments, Rural areas 29w
Structure plans, Public appointments 26–7w
Travelling people, Caravan sites 574w
Urban areas, Management 20w

Recycling
Palace of Westminster 557–8w

Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council
Government grants 579w

Redundancy
Duty free allowances 122w, 1074

Redwood, Rt Hon John
Debates etc.
Millennium compliance (08.06.98) 718–9
Questions
Arms trade, Africa 126w
Dounreay, Nuclear fuel reprocessing 712–3
Dounreay, Nuclear safety 120–1w
Ministers, Information 317w
Sierra Leone, Arms trade 653w, 682–4w

Reed, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Sports (05.06.98) 649–52, 660, 675
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (09.06.98) 903–4, 906

Reed, Mr Andrew—continued
Questions
Class sizes, Leicestershire 1179
Developing countries, Debts 370w
East Midlands Regional Development Agency 630–1w
Heavily indebted poor countries initiative 225w
Loughborough General Hospital, Private finance initiative 179w
Thailand, Overseas aid 168–9w
UK Sports Institute 668w

Referendums
(03.06.98) 277–99
Ministerial statements (01.06.98) 33–41
Northern Ireland government 361–2
Western Sahara 239w

Refrigeration
Chlorofluorocarbons 15w
Hydrofluorocarbons 14–5w

Refugees
Burma 168–9w

Reg(EC)258/97
453w

Reg(EC)577/97
454w

Reg(EC)623/98
454w

Regional aid
EC grants and loans 161w, 319–20w

Regional airports
Air routes 580w
Local government borrowing 637–8w

Regional development agencies
509w
Liverpool 509w
Skill shortages 203w
South West region 509w

Regional government
30w

Regional selective assistance
Shipbuilding 684w

Registration of births deaths and marriages
224w

Registration of Political Parties Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
2R and money res* (04.06.98) 515–60

Regulatory systems
Gas supply industry (09.06.98) 980–6
Public utilities 116w

Reid, Dr John, Minister for the Armed Forces
Questions
Armed forces, Germany 491w
Armed forces casualties 95–6w, 105–6w
Armed forces housing 393w
Armed forces reserves, NATO countries 491–2w
Armed forces training, Costs 101–2w
Armed forces training, Defence equipment 489w, 638–9w
Armed forces training, Indonesia 102–3w
Armed forces uniforms 102w
Armed forces women 312w
Army 607w
Army bases, York 103w
Army strength 606w
Chinook helicopters, Air accidents 183w

Reid, Dr John—continued
Copthorne Barracks 105w
Defence Dental Agency, Performance standards 396–7w
Defence Medical Training Organisation, Performance standards 394–5w
Defence Military Assistance Fund 422w
Defence Secondary Care Agency, Performance standards 395–6w
Exservicemen, Counselling 606w
Ex-Services Mental Welfare Society 422w
Fishery protection, Spain 106w
Helicopters 394w
Medical Supplies Agency, Performance standards 395w
Military aircraft 421w
Military decorations 103w
Military decorations, Northern Ireland 103–4w
Naval Bases and Supply Agency, Performance standards 397w
Navy strength 606w
Ordnance Disposal School Chattendon 394w
RAF Menwith Hill, Defence expenditure 96–7w
Ships Support Agency, Performance standards 397–8w
Sierra Leone, Armed forces deployment 314w
Territorial Army 104w, 421w
Territorial Army, Costs 490–1w
Territorial Army, Germany 489–91w
Territorial Army, Shropshire 104–5w
WE 177 nuclear bomb 96w
Western European Union 606–7w

Religious freedom
Developing countries 233w

Rendel, Mr David
Questions
Maintenance, Children 552–4w
New deal for lone parents 695–6

Rendering industry
Wales 671–2w

Rented housing
Glasgow 333w
Scotland 333w

Repatriation
Offenders 53w

Research councils
Men 596w

Reservoirs Act 1975
Questions
Public appointments 159w

Residential care
Drugs 686–7w
Elderly 463–4w

Residential care of children
Social workers 408–9w

Respite care
541w

Restoration of Damage to Sites of Special Scientific Interest Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
1R (10.06.98) 1079–81

Restricted Enforcement Unit
Arms trade 317–8w, 676–7w

Retail trade
Farm incomes 487
Petrol 114–5w
Tobacco 505w

Retirement pensions
111–2w, 467w, 546w
Equal opportunities 111w

Review of Health Care in London Independent Advisory Panel
(03.06.98) 300–23

Reviews
Dept of Social Security 192w
Post Office 319w

Rights of way
23w

River Tame
Sewage 372–3w

River Thames
Radioactive waste disposal 525w

Rivers
Sites of special scientific interest 572w

Road accidents
22w
Drinking and driving 20w, 22–3w
Drug abuse 20w
Scotland 582–3w, 657w

Road construction
Cameroon 447w
Dorchester 297w
Greater London 18w
M74 515w

Road finance
516w

Road safety
156w

Road signs
572w
Rural areas 572w

Road traffic
209–10w
M4 670–1w
M62 156w

Road traffic control
Police 223w

Road traffic offences
Convictions 307–9w
Fines 309w
Lancashire 53w
Scotland 196–7w

Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984
Questions
21w

Road works
153w
A49 155w
Cumbria 416w

Roads
Greater London Authority 636w
Lancashire 863

Robathan, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland (Sentences) Bill, 2R (10.06.98) 1084, 1111, 1135–8, 1163
Questions
Armed forces uniforms 102w
Art works, VAT 3
Business questions 510
Class sizes, Leicestershire 1178–9
Cycling 514w
Glaucoma, Hospital waiting lists 164
Poultry, Animal welfare 73–4w
Sierra Leone, Armed forces deployment 99w, 182w
Standard spending assessments, Leicestershire 512w
Transport policy 866–7

***Robertson, Rt Hon George**, Secretary of State for Defence*
Questions
Armed forces deployment 609–11w
Armed forces deployment, Bosnia-Herzegovina 609w
Armed forces deployment, Iraq 607w
Armed forces deployment, Persian Gulf 608–9w
Economic Community of West African States Military Observer Group 101w
Joint Service Command and Staff College, Shrivenham 423w
Military exercises, Macedonia 393w
Mines 423–4w
Nuclear weapons policy 606w
Prisoners of war, Japan 107w
Sierra Leone, Armed forces deployment 97–101w, 182w

Robertson, Mr Laurence
Questions
Afghanistan, Human rights 461w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 493–4
Business questions 510
Chronic fatigue syndrome 605w
Crown Prosecution Service 337w
Dentists 239w
Developing countries, Religious freedom 233w
Disability living allowance 471–2w
Exhaust emission controls 871
Grant maintained schools 139–40w, 627–8w
Health service staff, Manpower 466w
Hospital discharges, Geriatric patients 466w
Housing, Tewkesbury 30w
Indonesia, Arms trade 240w
Lorries, Noise control 228w
Low flying, Tewkesbury 424w
Prescription drugs 465w
Primary care groups 465w
Regional government 30w
School closures, Rural areas 255–6w
Small businesses, Unfair dismissal 684w
Special education 139w
Sudan, Civil wars 460–1w

***Robinson, Mr Geoffrey**, Paymaster General*
Questions
Tax credits 88w
Tax credits, Pensioners 87–8w

Robinson, Mr Peter D
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland (Sentences) Bill, 2R (10.06.98) 1088–9, 1094, 1110, 1150–4

***Roche, Mrs Barbara**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of Trade and Industry*
Debates etc.
Late Payment of Commercial Debts (Interest) Bill, Rep and 3R (01.06.98) 123–8, 132–6
Questions
Agenda 2000, Rural areas 321w
Arms exports, Export licensing 594w
Arms trade, Indonesia 227w
Business Link London North West, Finance 161–2w
Cellular phones, Health warnings 439–40w
Channel tunnel, Railway network 117w
Defence equipment, Exhibitions 385w, 504w
EC grants and loans 508w
EC grants and loans, Wales 507–8w
EC Telecommunications Council 162–4w
Export credit 504–5w

***Roche, Mrs Barbara**—continued*
Export credit guarantees 593w
Export credit guarantees, Indonesia 121w
Export licensing 125–6w
Export licensing, Cambodia 117–8w
Exports, Indonesia 121w
Internet Watch Foundation 506w
Millennium compliance, Directories 680w
Nomenclature of statistical territorial units, EC grants and loans 384w
Nomenclature of statistical territorial units, Population distribution 319w
Overseas investment, Environmentally sensitive areas 42w
Overseas investment, Russia 505–6w
Radioactive materials, Export controls 119–20w
Regional aid, EC grants and loans 161w, 319–20w
Shipbuilding, Regional selective assistance 684w
Small businesses, Dept of Trade and Industry 160–1w
Tobacco, Retail trade 505w

Roe, Mrs Marion
Questions
Cancer, Death 155
Palace of Westminster, Recycling 557–8w
Portcullis House 49w
Primary care groups 1076

Rogers, Mr Allan
Debates etc.
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep adjourned (08.06.98) 823

***Rooker, Mr Jeff**, Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food*
Questions
Agricultural products, Export rebates 454–5w
Agricultural subsidies 455–6w
Agricultural subsidies, Euro 453w
Animal feed, Antibiotics 76w, 494
Animal welfare 495
Antibiotics 495
Arable area payments scheme, Suffolk 452w
Artificial insemination, Cattle 535–6w
Barley, Export subsidies 532w
Beef, Exports 339–40w, 531–2w
Beekeeping 529–30w
Beekeeping, Agricultural subsidies 247–8w
Bees, Varroasis 247–8w, 344w, 496–7
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 489–90, 599–601w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Disease control 490
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Northern Ireland 490–1
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Slaughterhouses 598–9w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, West country 489
Bovine tuberculosis, Vaccination 529w
Butter, EC law 454w
Cattle, Canada 454w
Cattle tracing system 489
Common agricultural policy, Green rates 531w
Dogs, Disease control 530w
Eggs, EC action 338w
Food hygiene, Inspections 535w
Food labelling 340w
Food labelling, Diet and disease 249w
Food labelling, EC law 453w
Food poisoning 535w
Food standards, Civil service agencies 75w
Food Standards Agency 339w

Rooker, Mr Jeff—continued
Food surpluses, EC action 455w
Gangmasters 527–9w
Genetically modified organisms, Food labelling 498
Genetically modified organisms, Public opinion 535w
Hemp 454w
Livestock, Waste disposal 452–3w
Meat Hygiene Service, Intimidation 341–3w, 451–2w
Milk, E coli 601w
Milk, EC law 534w
Milk, Italy 344–5w
Milk, Peak District 530w
Milk, Prices 453–4w
Milk, Production quotas 341w, 530w
Poultry meat, Imports 248–9w
Sheep, Agricultural subsidies 531w
Slaughterhouses 452w
Slaughterhouses, Veterinary services 532–3w
Tobacco, Agricultural subsidies 344w, 530–1w
Untreated milk 339w
Untreated milk, Food poisoning 76w

Ross, Mr William
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland (Sentences) Bill, 2R (10.06.98) 1088, 1121, 1131, 1145–7, 1149
Questions
Association of Chief Police Officers 381–2w
Association of Chief Police Officers, Company law 320w
Association of Chief Police Officers (Scotland) 83w, 430w
Association of Chief Police Officers (Scotland), Finance 83w
Belfast Agreement, Publications 481w
Business questions 508–9
Extradition, USA 643–4w
Firearms, Departmental forms 220w, 310w, 431w
Grampian Police 83w
Petrol, Smuggling 66w
Veterinary medicine, Northern Ireland 663w
Veterinary medicine, Student numbers 703–4w

Rough sleepers initiative
West Midlands 19–20w

Rowe, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Channel tunnel (03.06.98) 376
Youth Parliament Bill, 1R (09.06.98) 875–7
Questions
Bishops, Travelling expenses 16–7
Christianity, Millennium Exhibition 34w
Multinational companies, Marketing 349–50

Rowlands, Mr Ted
Debates etc.
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep adjourned (08.06.98) 810–1
Questions
Cost per student, Wales 229w
Further education, Wales 63w
Lome Convention, Human rights 458–9w
UK contributions to EC budget 496w

Roy, Mr Frank
Questions
Housing benefits, Social security benefits overpayment 253w
Prisoners, Scotland 196w

Royal Deeside Partnership
262w

Royal Mail
Complaints 116w

Royal Opera House
46w

Royal parks
Festivals and special occasions 44w

Royal Ulster Constabulary
216–7w

Ruddock, Ms Joan, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of Social Security
Questions
Women, Domestic violence 476w, 703–4
Women, Government departments 694–5
Women, Government information services 691–2
Women's employment, Families 708

Ruffley, Mr David
Debates etc.
Magistrates' courts, Suffolk (10.06.98) 1045–6
Questions
Government Information and Communication Service 619w
Millennium Exhibition, Land pollution 30–1w
Road finance 516w

Rule of law
Overseas aid 36w

Rural areas
After school clubs 695w
Agenda 2000 321w
Road signs 572w
School closures 255–6w
Standard spending assessments 29w

Rural transport
Wales 675–6w

Russell, Bob
Debates etc.
Electoral systems (02.06.98) 192
Registration of Political Parties Bill, 2R (04.06.98) 530–3
Questions
Bicycles, Safety equipment 14w
Hospital discharges, Geriatric patients 170w
Millennium Exhibition 60w
Ombudsman, Investment 193–4w
Pensions review 702

Russell, Ms Christine
Questions
Children in care 174w

Russia
Overseas investment 505–6w

Rwanda
Debts 232w

S4C
302w

Safety equipment
Bicycles 14w

Safety measures
Fireworks 162w

St Aubyn, Mr Nick
Debates etc.
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep adjourned (08.06.98) 834
Questions
Haemophilia, Hepatitis 135w
Local government constituencies 860–1

St Aubyn, Mr Nick—continued
Pharmacies 172–3w
Private education, Surrey 1178

St Austell College
401w

St Helena
Diplomatic service 247w
Migrant workers 356w

St Helens
Crime prevention 364

Salmond, Mr Alex
Debates etc.
Economic policy (11.06.98) 1211
Referendums (03.06.98) 289, 292, 297
Questions
Dounreay, Uranium 364–5
Public appointments, Scotland 78w

Salter, Mr Martin
Debates etc.
Electoral systems (02.06.98) 208, 226–8
Questions
Grammar schools, Voting methods 256w

Sanders, Mr Adrian
Debates etc.
Leasehold housing (10.06.98) 996–8
Registration of Political Parties Bill, 2R (04.06.98) 518, 521, 532, 536–7, 539, 542
Questions
Asbestos, Import controls 517w
Biological weapons 132w
EC grants and loans, Administrative costs 261w, 481w
EC grants and loans, Wales 425–6w
Government information services, Dept for Education and Employment 255w
Government information services, Dept of Trade and Industry 126w
Government information services, Prime Minister 94w
Government information services, Scottish Office 84w
Government information services, Treasury 85w
Ministerial Tourism Advisory Forum, Public appointments 560–4w
National House Building Council 155w
Second homes 576w
Tourism, Coastal areas 45w

Sandline
92w, 101w, 144–5w, 240w, 301w, 317w, 354, 586–7w, 682–4w, 1067

Sarwar, Mr Mohammad
Questions
Arts sponsorship, Scotland 581w
Free school meals, Scotland 431w
Housing benefits, Scotland 547w
Insolvency 384–6w
Insolvency, Scotland 431–2w

Savidge, Mr Malcolm
Debates etc.
Millennium compliance (08.06.98) 726

Sawford, Mr Phil
Questions
Overseas aid, Rain forests 235w
Performing arts, Kettering 5–6

Sayeed, Mr Jonathan
Debates etc.
Referendums (03.06.98) 277–9
Questions
Alcoholic drinks duties, Beer 326w
Ministerial policy advisors, Dept for International Development 37–8w

Sayeed, Mr Jonathan—continued
Ministerial policy advisors, Scottish Office 260w
School transport 1190–1
Sierra Leone, Armed forces deployment 100w
Transport policy, White papers 211w

School administration
141w

School closures
626w
Rural areas 255–6w

School crossing patrols
21w

School leaving
701–3w

School population
Norfolk 626w
Primary education 626w
Scotland 282–9w

School Standards and Framework Bill 1997/98
Questions
256w

School transport
865–6, 1189–91
Northern Ireland 217–8w

Schools
399–400w
Bury 1180–1
Nutrition and health 167

Scientists
Women 204w

Scotland
Antismoking campaign 260–1w
Arts sponsorship 581w
Asthma 85w
Beekeeping 275w
Breast cancer 657w
Class sizes 282w
Complaints against police 77–9w
Council housing 330–1w
Derelict land 428–9w
Direct labour departments 580–1w
EC grants and loans 261w
Educational assessment 265w
Educational finance 262–4w
Educational publications 502w
Fish conservation 582w
Free school meals 431w
Greenbelt 79–81w
High rise flats 84–5w
Hospital waiting lists 289–90w
Housing benefits 547w
Housing finance 331–2w, 429–30w
Income distribution 550–1w
Insolvency 431–2w
Legal aid scheme 279–80w, 502w
Local government corruption 362–4
Mortgage defaulters 291–3w
Multiple occupation 331w
Negligence 280w
NHS 265–6w
NHS finance 197w
NHS trusts 264w
Occupational pensions 551w
Pensioners 477–80w
Pre-school education 268–75w
Prison population 280–2w
Prisoners 196w
Public appointments 78w
Public sector housing 330–1w
Pupil-teacher ratios 282–9w
Rented housing 333w
Road accidents 582–3w, 657w
Road traffic offences 196–7w

Scotland—continued
School population 282–9w
Secure accommodation 429w
Slums 84w
Smoking 260w
Social security benefits 698
Sports 84w
Student grants 428w
Student loans 275–8w
Student numbers 383w
Tuition fees 383w
Urban areas 499w

Scottish National Sleep Laboratory
81–2w

Scottish Office
Civil service recruitment 264–5w
Government information services 84w
Green papers 259w
Ministerial policy advisors 260w
Private finance initiative 278w
Public appointments 77w, 384w
Publicity 266–7w
Repairs and maintenance 77–8w
Small businesses 85w

Scottish Parliament
Parliamentary buildings 657–8w
Railway industry 84w

Screening
Breast cancer 237w
Chlamydiosis 181w

Sea level
Environment Agency 341w

Sea pollution
Merchant ships (08.06.98) 843–6

Seas and oceans
Nature conservation 1–3w

Second homes
576w
Council tax 509–10w, 576w

Secondary Care Agency
see Defence Secondary Care Agency

Secure accommodation
Greater London 181w
Scotland 429w

Security industry
Developing countries 232–3w

Security vetting
Defence contracts 638w

Sedgemore, Mr Brian
Questions
Arms trade 423w

Seigniorage
Bank of England 585w
Economic and monetary union 442w

Self-assessment of tax
650w

Self-mutilation
Prisoners 382w

Sentencing
167w
Thorne, Damien 662w

Serials
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 197–8w

Service charges
Leasehold housing 158–9w

Set-aside schemes
338w

Sewage
River Tame 372–3w
Water treatment 17w, 517w

Sewers
32w

Sexual offences
Home detention curfews 57w
Interagency cooperation 303–5w

Sheep
Agricultural subsidies 531w

Sheep dipping
536w

Sheerman, Mr Barry
Debates etc.
Business questions (11.06.98) 1223–4
Economic policy (11.06.98) 1212
Questions
Cancer, Death 155–6
Crown Prosecution Service, Harmonisation of standards 499–500
Derelict land 860
Developing countries, Debts 354–5
Farmers, Bureaucracy 491
Handicap benefits 470w
Higher education admission 1182
Historic buildings 426w
Millennium Exhibition, Business 14–5

Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Debates etc.
Economic policy (11.06.98) 1206–7
House of Commons procedure (04.06.98) 552, 558
Questions
Elgin Marbles 4
National Audit Office 19
National Audit Office, Non-departmental public bodies 18–9

Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Debates etc.
Channel tunnel (03.06.98) 370–2
Questions
Local government finance 857–8

Shepherd, Mr Richard
Debates etc.
House of Commons procedure (04.06.98) 569–71, 574–5, 583, 592

Shipbuilding
Regional selective assistance 684w

Shipping
Government assistance 18w

Shipping accidents
870

Ships Support Agency
Performance standards 397–8w

***Short, Rt Hon Clare**, Secretary of State for International Development*
Questions
Afghanistan, Overseas aid 39w
Arms trade 355
Bilateral aid 232w
Burma, Overseas aid 41w
Cameroon, Road construction 447w
Child workers 234w
Dept for International Development, EC staff 446–7w
Developing countries, Debts 35w, 230–1w, 234w, 354–8, 588w
Developing countries, Religious freedom 233w
Developing countries, Security industry 232–3w
Development Policy Forum 648–9w
Disaster relief 231–2w
EC aid, Disclosure of information 446w
EC aid, Sustainable development 447w
EC Development Council 236w, 447w

Short, Rt Hon Clare—*continued*
European Development Fund, UK contributions to EC budget 448w
Export subsidies 41w
Group of Eight, Overseas aid 40w
Guyana, Rain forests 648w
Heavily indebted poor countries initiative 42w
India, Nuclear weapons 40w
Indonesia, Overseas aid 235–6w
International trade, Business corruption 350
Iraq, International assistance 231w
Kosovo, Overseas aid 41–2w
Ministerial policy advisors, Dept for International Development 37–8w
Multilateral Agreement on Investment 234w
Multinational companies, Human rights 349
Multinational companies, Marketing 349–50
North Korea 325–6w
Overseas aid, Human rights 37w
Overseas aid, Non-governmental organisations 38–9w
Overseas aid, Rain forests 235w
Overseas aid, Rule of law 36w
Police training 36w
Rwanda, Debts 232w
Sierra Leone 325w
Sierra Leone, Arms trade 586–7w
Sierra Leone, Military intervention 587w
Sierra Leone, Overseas aid 236w, 354, 445–6w, 587w
South Africa, Higher education 648w
Stabex 448–9w
Sudan 36–7w
Sudan, EC aid 36w
Sudan, Human rights 352–3
Sudan, Overseas aid 233w, 350–3, 449w
UN agencies, UK contributions 38w
World Bank 587–8w

Shrivenham
Joint Service Command and Staff College 423w

Shropshire
Territorial Army 104–5w

Sierra Leone
91–2w, 143–6w, 325w, 345w, 370w
Armed forces deployment 97–101w, 182w, 314w
Arms trade 92w, 142–5w, 240w, 301w, 317–8w, 345–6w, 424–5w, 456–7w, 586–7w, 616–7w, 653w, 664w, 682–4w, 1068–70
Departmental correspondence 346w
EC aid 236w
Governments in exile 92w, 486–7w
Military intervention 587w
Overseas aid 236w, 354, 445–6w, 587w
Parliamentary questions 684w

Sierra Leone (United Nations Sanctions) Order 1997
Questions
145w

Silica
Health hazards 520–1w

Simpson, Mr Alan
Debates etc.
Economic policy (11.06.98) 1211–2
European Council (11.06.98) 1262–7
Questions
Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment 5w
Genetically modified organisms, Environment protection 5–7w

Simpson, Mr Alan—*continued*
Tax allowances, Educational equipment 654w

Simpson, Mr Keith
Questions
Sierra Leone 144w
Sierra Leone, Arms trade 143w

Single people
Households 154–5w

Sites of special scientific interest
579w, (10.06.98) 1079–81
Countryside stewardship scheme 529w
Lancashire 370–1w
Northern Ireland 184w
Rivers 572w
Wales 62w

Sixth form colleges
692w
Godalming 693w

Skill shortages
Armed forces civilians 394w
Regional development agencies 203w
Teachers 1183–5

Skinner, Mr Dennis
Debates etc.
House of Commons procedure (04.06.98) 555, 561–3, 582
Intervention during ministerial statement (08.06.98) 718
Nuclear weapons tests (01.06.98) 29
Questions
Local government finance 857
Nuclear power stations, Decommissioning 713

Slaughterhouses
452w
Animal welfare 533–4w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 598–9w
Spain 533–4w
Veterinary services 532–3w

Slums
Scotland 84w
Wales 592w

Small businesses
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 45w
Dept for Education and Employment 140w
Dept of Health 135w
Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions 29–30w
Dept of Trade and Industry 160–1w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 149w
Home Office 54w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 249w
Ministry of Defence 108w
Northern Ireland Office 67w
Scottish Office 85w
Treasury 195w
Unfair dismissal 684w
Welsh Office 61w

Smallholdings
Local government land 339w

Smith, Rt Hon Andrew, Minister for Employment and Disability Rights, Dept for Education and Employment
Questions
EC Education and Social Affairs Council 450–1w
Employment schemes, Lancashire 1188–9
European voluntary service for young people 137w
New deal for long term unemployed 693w
New deal for young people 137w, 624w, 693–4w, 696–7w, 707w

Smith, Rt Hon Andrew—*continued*
New deal for young people, Guildford 543–4w
New deal for young people, Social security benefits reductions 255w
New deal schemes 1189
New deal schemes, Access courses 138w
New deal schemes, Crawley 1188
New deal schemes, Ethnic minorities 1177
New deal schemes, Lincolnshire 1191–2
New deal schemes, Private sector 205w
New deal schemes, Thanet 449–50w
Small businesses, Dept for Education and Employment 140w
Tobacco advertising 1193–4

Smith, Angela
Questions
Chiropody 602w
Chiropody, Elderly 536w
Educational standards 1074
Immigration 49–50w
Vulnerable or Intimidated Witnesses Interdepartmental Working Group 481–2w

Smith, Rt Hon Chris, Secretary of State for Culture Media and Sport
Debates etc.
National Lottery Bill, Rep and 3R (01.06.98) 111–3, 115
Sports (05.06.98) 609–16, 620–1, 628, 673, 681
Questions
Art works 4
Arts Council of England 46w
Broadcasting 45w
Commercial television 12
Creative Industries Task Force 44w
Digital television 5, 45w
Elgin Marbles 3–4
Heritage Lottery Fund 43w
Independent Television Commission 12
Mass media, Ownership 4–5
Millennium 12–3
Millennium, Public holidays 218w
Museums and galleries 8, 46w
Museums and galleries, Armed conflict 8
Museums and galleries, Finance 7–8
National Lottery, Voluntary organisations 44–5w
Press, Children 43w
Royal Opera House 46w
Television, Sports 46–7w
Tourism 45w
UK Sports Institute 46w

Smith, Miss Geraldine
Questions
Food labelling 340w
Prisons, Construction 54w
Prisons, Morecambe 31w, 168w, 484w
Prisons, Surveys 417w

Smith, Mr Llew
Debates etc.
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep adjourned (08.06.98) 809
Questions
Dounreay, Nuclear fuel reprocessing 595–6w
Epilepsy 537w
India, Nuclear weapons tests 152w
Indonesia, Arms trade 151–2w
Nuclear fuels, Japan 679–80w
S4C 302w
Transport of radioactive materials, France 414w
WE 177 nuclear bomb 96w

Smith, Sir Robert
Debates etc.
Channel tunnel (03.06.98) 383–4
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep adjourned (08.06.98) 773, 787, 794

Smoking
Health education 465w
Northern Ireland 323w
Scotland 260w
Wales 323–4w
Young people 136w, 260w, 323–4w

Smuggling
Petrol 66w
Tobacco 1076

Smyth, Rev Martin
Debates etc.
Economic policy (11.06.98) 1213
Northern Ireland (Sentences) Bill, 2R (10.06.98) 1118, 1131, 1133
Referendums (03.06.98) 285
Questions
Family planning, Northern Ireland 65–6w
Sudan, Human rights 352–3
Tobacco, Common agricultural policy 161

Soames, Mr Nicholas
Debates etc.
House of Commons procedure (04.06.98) 560
Nuclear weapons tests (01.06.98) 26
Oral question time intervention (10.06.98) 1063
Questions
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 490
Members' correspondence, Administrative delays 1060

Social Exclusion Unit
Homelessness 213–4w
Wales 674w
West Midlands 213–4w

Social Fund
Floods 187–9w

Social rented housing
510–1w
Investment 14w

Social security
Expenditure 475w
Performance standards 479–80w

Social security abuse
Housing benefits 478–9w

Social security appeals
468–9w

Social security benefits
Children 473w
Lone parents 315–6w
Pensioners 477–8w
Scotland 698
Young people 474w

Social Security Benefits Agency
Manpower 189w
Personnel 472w

Social security benefits overpayment
Housing benefits 253w
Personal injury compensation 550w

Social security benefits reductions
New deal for young people 255w

Social security benefits rules
Handicap benefits 109w

Social security claims
Incapacity benefit 253w

Social security recipients
189–90w
Disability living allowance 548w

Social security recipients—continued
Handicap benefits 190–2w

Social security reform
469w

Social services
NHS 165

Social workers
Residential care of children 408–9w

Solar power
Research 122–3w

Soley, Mr Clive
Questions
Press, Children 43w

Solicitors
Legal aid 70w

South Africa
Higher education 648w

South Asia
Nuclear weapons tests 242–3w

South Devon
Housing 524w

South Downs
14w, 636w

South West London
Hospitals 691–2w

South West region
Regional development agencies 509w

Southworth, Ms Helen
Questions
Mentally disadvantaged, Data banks 539w
New deal schemes, Ethnic minorities 1177

Spain
Fishery protection 106w
Slaughterhouses 533–4w

Speaker and deputies, For rulings and statements see separate heading Speaker's rulings and statements
Debates etc.
Amendments and new clauses (01.06.98) 54, 83, 102, 120, 127, 129, (02.06.98) 171, (08.06.98) 738, 748, 751, 756, 765, 801, 840, (09.06.98) 878, 894, 896, 899–900
Conduct of proceedings (01.06.98) 65, 70, 76, 95, 128, 134, (02.06.98) 166–8, 223–4, 231, 247, 251, 264, (03.06.98) 2 78, 286, 313, 359, 363, 374–5, 380, 384, (04.06.98) 517, 519, 540, 601, (05.06.98) 630, 645, (08.06.98) 691, 697, 738, 753, 772–3, 775–7, 781, 807, 810, 828, 847, 849, (09.06.98) 885, 931–2, 939, 957, 960, (10.06.98) 1007, 1043, 1048, 105 5, 1065, 1086, 1126, 1164, (11.06.98) 1200, 1202, 1206, 1215, 1240, 1272, 1274
Disallowed questions (01.06.98) 6, (11.06.98) 1179, 1182, 1192
House of Commons accommodation, Points of order (08.06.98) 776
Orders and regulations motions (08.06.98) 840
Points of order (02.06.98) 168, (05.06.98) 629, (08.06.98) 736, 771–2, (09.06.98) 874, (10.06.98) 1004, 1077–8
Royal Assent (11.06.98) 1241
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep adjourned (08.06.98) 697

Speaker's rulings and statements
House of Commons procedure (03.06.98) 281–2
House of Commons questions (11.06.98) 1226

Speaker's rulings and statements—continued
Members' correspondence (04.06.98) 512, 514
Ten minutes rule (02.06.98) 171

Special education
139w
Autism 368w
Complaints 698w
Cumbria 699w
Training 366–7w
West Sussex 368w

Speed limits
Carbon dioxide 211–2w

Spellar, Mr John, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Defence
Questions
Air force bases 102w
Apache AH-64 helicopter 639w
Armed forces catering services, Beef 95w
Armed forces civilians, Skill shortages 394w
Armed forces housing, Kingston 422w
Armed forces strength, Wales 492w
Arms trade 421–3w
Arms trade, Trade promotion 422w
C17 aircraft 421w
Defence contracts 313w
Defence contracts, EC law 313w
Defence contracts, Security vetting 638w
Defence land, Hunting 209w
Defence land, Land reclamation 207–9w
Defence research, Uranium 182w
Export licensing, Indonesia 440w
Future large aircraft 421w
HMS Ocean 638w
Lockheed Martin, Defence procurement 101w
Low flying, Brecon Beacons National Park 639w
Low flying, Tewkesbury 424w
Ministry of Defence, Energy consumption 107w, 492w
Navy, Fuels 607w
Pay and Personnel Agency, Performance standards 488w
Porton Down 207w
Radioactive waste disposal, River Thames 525w
RAF Carlisle, Property transfer 491w
Small businesses, Ministry of Defence 108w
Tactical reconnaissance armoured combat equipment requirement 638w
Transport aircraft 639w
UK National Data Centre 312–3w
Uranium 107–8w

Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Debates etc.
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (09.06.98) 904–7, 923–4
Questions
Agriculture, Exchange rates 492
Housing construction, Derelict land 858–9
Parking 515w

Spicer, Sir Michael
Debates etc.
Economic policy (11.06.98) 1212
Electoral systems (02.06.98) 221–2
Questions
Common agricultural policy 488

Spinal injuries
177w

Sports
(05.06.98) 609–82

Sports—continued
Disadvantaged 6–7
Finance 7
Governing bodies 48w
Greater London 42–3w
Millennium Exhibition 14, 60w
Northern Ireland 185w
Rate rebates 84w, 185w
Scotland 84w
Television 46–7w
Young people 42–3w

Sports sponsorship
Tobacco advertising 134w

Sportsgrounds
Town and country planning (10.06.98) 1033–40

Sportsmatch
Chorley 46w
Government grants 218w

Spring, Mr Richard
Debates etc.
Magistrates' courts, Suffolk (10.06.98) 1041–3
National Lottery Bill, Rep and 3R (01.06.98) 54–64, 68, 80, 84–90, 99, 102–7, 110–1
Sports (05.06.98) 616–23, 628, 649–50, 653–4
Questions
Arts Council of England 2–3
Educational finance, Suffolk 1072
English Tourist Board 493w
Millennium Exhibition, Sports 14
National Lottery, Tourism 493–4w
UK Sports Institute 666–8w
Untreated milk 339w

Squire, Ms Rachel
Questions
House of Commons, Expenditure 557w
Portcullis House, Expenditure 557w

Sri Lanka
Entry clearances 53w

Stabex
448–9w

"Stability and Investment for the Long Term"
(11.06.98) 1195–215

Staffordshire Training and Enterprise Council
358w

Stakeholder pensions
697, 701–3

Standard assessment tasks
Cumbria 700w

Standard spending assessments
512w, 861
Leicestershire 512w
Rural areas 29w

Standards of Conduct in Public Office Standing Committee
see Committee on Standards in Public Life

Standing Committee on Regional Affairs
669–70w

Standing Order No 163
(04.06.98) 594

Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Questions
Arms to Sierra Leone Inquiry 679w
Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction 656w
Human rights, Departmental responsibilities 647w, 656w
Immigration controls, Kidnapping 647w

Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John—continued
Sierra Leone, Arms trade 145w, 301w, 457w

Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Debates etc.
House of Commons procedure (04.06.98) 580
Questions
Developing countries, Debts 230w
Israel, EC external trade 149w
NHS trusts, Public appointments 159
Primary care groups 173–4w
Research councils, Men 596w

Statistics
Public sector borrowing requirement 585–6w
Tax burden 224w, 1072–3

Steen, Mr Anthony
Debates etc.
Registration of Political Parties Bill, 2R (04.06.98) 518, 521
Questions
Farm incomes 340w
Food hygiene, Inspections 535w
Food poisoning 535w
Genetically modified organisms, Crops 417–8w
Genetically modified organisms, Maize 524–5w
Genetically modified organisms, Public opinion 535w
Homeworking 484w
Housing, South Devon 524w
Milk, E coli 601w
Milk, EC law 534w
Milk, Italy 344–5w

Stevenson, Mr George
Questions
Standard spending assessments 861

Stewart, Mr David
Debates etc.
Knoydart Estate, Land ownership and tenure (05.06.98) 683–90
Questions
Road accidents, Scotland 582–3w, 657w
Urban areas, Scotland 499w

Stewart, Mr Ian
Questions
Beef, Exports 497
Developing countries, Debts 230–1w

Stinchcombe, Mr Paul
Debates etc.
Human Rights Bill (HL), Com (03.06.98) 418–9
Questions
Habitual residence test 250w
Immigration applications 55w

Stoate, Dr Howard
Questions
Abortion 135w
Health service staff, Occupational health 62w, 176w, 323w

Stott, Mr Roger
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland (Sentences) Bill, 2R (10.06.98) 1092
Questions
Northern Ireland government, Referendums 361–2

Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin, Minister of State for Transport, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions
Questions
Birmingham Relief Road 865–6

Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin—continued
Birmingham Relief Road, Contracts 865
Bus services, Performance standards 514w
Drinking and driving 868
Exhaust emission controls 871
M74, Road construction 515w
Motor vehicles, Petrol additives 516w
National Air Traffic Services 637w
Non-alcoholic drinks, Prices 868
Parking 515w
Railway travel, Handicapped 864–5
Regional airports, Local government borrowing 637–8w
Road finance 516w

Strathclyde Police
Racial discrimination (01.06.98) 145–52

Straw, Rt Hon Jack, Secretary of State for the Home Dept
Debates etc.
Electoral systems (02.06.98) 173, 180–91, 200
Human Rights Bill (HL), Com (03.06.98) 407, 419–25, 467, 471–4
Registration of Political Parties Bill, 2R (04.06.98) 515–23, 527, 532
Questions
EU Justice and Home Affairs Council 378–80w
Extradition, USA 643–4w
Home Office, Private finance initiative 51–2w
Members' correspondence, Administrative delays 482w
Metropolitan Police 645w
Small businesses, Home Office 54w
Vulnerable or Intimidated Witnesses Interdepartmental Working Group 481–2w

Stray dogs
516–7w

Streeter, Mr Gary
Questions
Cyprus, Peace negotiations 457–8w
Developing countries, Debts 357–8, 588w
Euro, Teaching aids 457w
Sudan, Overseas aid 353

Stringer, Mr Graham
Debates etc.
Sports (05.06.98) 663–6, 681
Questions
Non-domestic rates, Debt collection 374–5w

Structure plans
Hertfordshire (04.06.98) 596–608
Public appointments 26–7w

Stuart, Ms Gisela
Debates etc.
Electoral systems (02.06.98) 179, 182, 199, 212, 217, 228, 231–3
Questions
Genetically modified organisms, Food labelling 498
Self-assessment of tax 650w

Student grants
Scotland 428w

Student loans
Part-time education 1186–7
Privatisation 256–7w
Scotland 275–8w

Student numbers
Further education colleges 701w
Scotland 383w
Teacher training 363w
Veterinary medicine 703–4w
Wales 674–5w

Stunell, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Electoral systems (02.06.98) 197, 203, 214
House of Commons procedure (04.06.98) 582–5
Waste disposal, Points of order (09.06.98) 874
Questions
Alternative energy, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 493w
Alternative energy, EC action 507w
Alternative energy, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 526–8w
Alternative energy, Non-fossil fuel obligation 228–9w
Alternative energy, Treasury 440w
Business questions 509–10
Electricity tariffs, Low incomes 503–4w
Energy conservation 574w
Energy conservation, Domestic appliances 7w
Energy consumption, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 558w
Energy consumption, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 528w
Energy consumption, Treasury 440–1w
Glaucoma, Eye tests 176–7w
Ministry of Defence, Energy consumption 107w, 492w
Travelling expenses, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 558w
Travelling expenses, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 168w
Travelling expenses, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 526w
Travelling expenses, Treasury 326–7w

Sudan
36–7w
Civil wars 460–1w
EC aid 36w
Genocide 460w
Human rights 352–3, 612w
Overseas aid 233w, 350–3, 355–6, 449w

Suffolk
Arable area payments scheme 452w
Educational finance 1072
Magistrates' courts (10.06.98) 1041–8

Suicide
Prisoners 56w, 306w
Young people 156–7

Sunday trading
Easter 168w

Supermarkets
Food prices 486

Supported employment programme
140w

Surrey
Private education 1178

Sustainable development
EC aid 447w

Sutcliffe, Mr Gerry
Questions
Health action zones, Finance 169w
Suicide, Young people 157
Teacher training 1184

Swanwick Air Traffic Control Centre
31w, 523–4w

Swayne, Mr Desmond
Debates etc.
Atkinson, George, Prisoners (02.06.98) 270–2, 275
Electoral systems (02.06.98) 253–4
House of Commons procedure (04.06.98) 554

Swayne, Mr Desmond—continued
Human Rights Bill (HL), Com (03.06.98) 400, 419
Northern Ireland (Sentences) Bill, 2R (10.06.98) 1082
Referendums (03.06.98) 286
Registration of Political Parties Bill, 2R (04.06.98) 516, 518, 524–5, 529, 537–40
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep adjourned (08.06.98) 774, 830
Questions
Farm incomes 486
Frogs, Import controls 373–4w
Greenhouse effect, Air pollution control 511–2w
Stakeholder pensions 697
Water charges 856

Swinney, Mr John
Questions
Dounreay, Nuclear fuel reprocessing 713–4
Social security benefits, Scotland 698

Syms, Mr Robert
Debates etc.
Electoral systems (02.06.98) 244–7
House of Commons procedure (04.06.98) 579–80, 583
Referendums (03.06.98) 293–4
Registration of Political Parties Bill, 2R (04.06.98) 517, 527, 533–5, 538
Sports (05.06.98) 652–5
Questions
Drinking and driving 868

Tactical reconnaissance armoured combat equipment requirement
638w

Taiwan
Arms trade 349w

Tapsell, Sir Peter
Questions
Electronic government 1064

Tax allowances
British residents abroad 652w
Day nurseries 693–4
Double taxation 391w
Educational equipment 654w
Gifts and endowments 654w
Interest payments 390–1w
Pensions 651w
Vocational training 654w

Tax avoidance
649w

Tax burden
Statistics 224w, 1072–3

Tax credits
88w, 391–2w
Pensioners 87–8w

Tax evasion
652w

Tax rates and bands
Fathers 401–2w
Inheritance tax 586w
Mothers 401–2w

Tax yields
Child benefit 651w

Taxation
Child benefit 392w
Church Commissioners 34w
Film industry 43w
Handicap benefits 469w
Pay 654w
Quarrying 494w

Taxis
Greater London 565w

***Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann**, President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons*
Debates etc.
Business statements (11.06.98) 1216–26
House of Commons procedure (04.06.98) 551–8, 589–94
Questions
Business statements 503–13
Delegated legislation 557w
House of Commons procedure, Disclosure of information 558w
House of Commons times of sittings 159w
Inquiries, President of the Council 509w
Standing Committee on Regional Affairs 669–70w

Taylor, Ms Dari
Questions
Truancy 694w
Women, Government information services 691–2

Taylor, Mr Ian
Debates etc.
Millennium compliance (08.06.98) 723
Questions
Health education, Curriculum 167

Taylor, Rt Hon John D
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland (Sentences) Bill, 2R (10.06.98) 1163
Questions
Visas, Cyprus 168w

Taylor, Mr John M
Debates etc.
Human Rights Bill (HL), Com (03.06.98) 405–7
Questions
Housing construction, Derelict land 510w
Jubilee line 868–9

Taylor, Mr Matthew
Debates etc.
Channel tunnel (03.06.98) 373–4
Domestic energy conservation (10.06.98) 1011–4, 1023, 1031
Intervention during ministerial statement (03.06.98) 378
Questions
Cameroon, Road construction 447w
Dept for International Development, EC staff 446–7w
EC aid, Disclosure of information 446w
EC aid, Sustainable development 447w
EC Development Council 447w
EC Finance Council 193w
European Development Fund, UK contributions to EC budget 448w
Government Office for Eastern Region, Environment protection 300w
Hospitals, Cornwall 1070
Housing construction 859
Stabex 448–9w
Trade competitiveness 126w
WE 177 nuclear bomb 96w

Taylor, Sir Teddy
Debates etc.
Electoral systems (02.06.98) 186
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Allocation of time motion and Lords amendts (09.06.98) 943, 958
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep adjourned (08.06.98) 762, 767, 769, 775, 781–3, 796
Questions
Agricultural products, Export rebates 454–5w
Barley, Export subsidies 532w

Taylor, Sir Teddy—continued
Food surpluses, EC action 455w
Ordnance Disposal School Chattendon 394w

Teacher training
1184
Student numbers 363w

Teachers
Early retirement 358–63w
Pay 624w, 703w
Skill shortages 1183–5

Teaching aids
Euro 457w

Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL) 1997/98
Debates etc.
Programme motion* and Rep adjourned (08.06.98) 738–842
Rep and 3R (09.06.98) 878–929

Technique LLC
300w

Telephone services
Mental health 129w

Telephone tapping
Members 301w, 666w

Television
Prisoners 196w, 639–40w
Sports 46–7w

Temporary employment
Research 1194

Ten minutes rule
Speaker's rulings and statements (02.06.98) 171

Terminal care
174w

Territorial Army
104w, 421w
Costs 490–1w
Germany 489–91w
Shropshire 104–5w

Terrorism
Northern Ireland 662–3w

Tewkesbury
Housing 30w
Low flying 424w

Thailand
Overseas aid 41w, 168–9w

Thanet
New deal schemes 449–50w

Theatres
Arts finance 1–2
Market Harborough 6
Wales 590w

Thomas, Mr Gareth
Debates etc.
Domestic energy conservation (10.06.98) 1020
Review of Health Care in London Independent Advisory Panel (03.06.98) 310, 314, 321
Sports (05.06.98) 669–71
Questions
Alcoholic drinks, Children 309w
Confiscation of Alcohol (Young Persons) Act 1997 223w
EC grants and loans, Wales 4w, 146w, 193w, 507–8w
Organic farming 340w
Sports, Young people 42–3w
Sunday trading, Easter 168w
Tourism, Harrow 11

Thompson, Mr William
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland (Sentences) Bill, 2R (10.06.98) 1108, 1154–6
Questions
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Northern Ireland 490–1

Thorne, Damien
Sentencing 662w

Thyroid gland
Cancer 444w

Tibet
EC action 149w

Tickets
Millennium Exhibition 15
World Cup 677w

Timms, Mr Stephen
Debates etc.
Channel tunnel (03.06.98) 376
Economic policy (11.06.98) 1214
Millennium compliance (08.06.98) 726–7
Questions
Bank of England, Monetary Policy Committee 329w
Central government borrowing 654–5w
EC Finance Council 225–6w

Tipping, Mr Paddy
Debates etc.
Business questions (11.06.98) 1218
Registration of Political Parties Bill, 2R (04.06.98) 538
Questions
"Access to the Open Countryside in England and Wales Consultation Paper" 631w
Millennium 12–3

Tobacco
Agricultural subsidies 344w, 530–1w
Common agricultural policy 161
Production 160
Retail trade 505w
Smuggling 1076

Tobacco advertising
159–61, 1193–4
Sports sponsorship 134w

Tobacco duties
327w

Todd, Mr Mark
Questions
Crown copyright 623w
Local education authorities 696w
Magistrates' courts, Derbyshire 212w
Magistrates' courts, Public transport 212w
Magistrates' courts committees 213w
Milk, Production quotas 530w
Widowers' benefits 250–1w

Tonge, Dr Jenny
Debates etc.
Eritrea (08.06.98) 732
Nuclear weapons tests (01.06.98) 27
Questions
Abortion 605w
Armed forces housing, Kingston 422w
Arms trade 355
Burma, Overseas aid 41w
Contraceptives 136w, 180w, 238–9w
Democratic Republic of the Congo 244w
Developing countries, Debts 89–91w, 215–6w
Economic situation, Asia 91w
Entry clearances, Sri Lanka 53w
Family planning 129–30w
Family planning, Northern Ireland 66w
Hammersmith bridge 517–8w

Tonge, Dr Jenny—continued
Heathrow Airport 8w
Heathrow Airport, Public inquiries 8w
Hospitals, South West London 691–2w
India, Nuclear weapons 40w
Mercenaries, Treaties 459w
Overseas investment, Environmentally sensitive areas 42w
Special education, Complaints 698w
Swanwick Air Traffic Control Centre 31w
World Bank 587–8w

Touhig, Mr Don
Questions
Cattle tracing system 489
Hereditary peers, House of Lords reform 1068

Tourism
10–1, 45w
Coastal areas 45w
Harrow 11
National Lottery 11, 493–4w
New deal for young people 669w
Wales 591w

Town and country planning
Greater London Authority 513w
Sportsgrounds (10.06.98) 1033–40

Townend, Mr John
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Allocation of time motion and Lords amendts (09.06.98) 935, 955–8
Questions
Developing countries, Debts 358

Toxocariasis
601–2w

Trade competitiveness
126w

Trade missions
China 341w

Trade promotion
Arms trade 422w

Train operating units
Performance standards 513w

Training
Accountants 697w
Judiciary 584w
Legal Aid Board 413w
Metropolitan Police 58w
NHS Direct 129w
Printing industry 364w
Special education 366–7w

Training and enterprise councils
357–8w, 698w
Finance 203w, 697–8w
Performance standards 698w
West Midlands 140–1w

Transco
(09.06.98) 980–6

Transport
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 47w
Millennium Exhibition 33–4w
Northern Ireland Office 64–5w

Transport aircraft
639w

Transport of animals
Animal experiments 644–5w

Transport of radioactive materials
577–8w
Air transport 631w
Carlisle Airport 572–3w
Channel tunnel 631–2w
Ferries 631–2w
France 414w

Transport policy
866–7
Motorcycles 28w, 157w
White papers 211w

Travel
Diseases 603w

Travel requirements
Vaccination 602–3w

Travelling expenses
Bishops 16–7
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 558w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 168w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 526w
Treasury 326–7w

Travelling people
Caravan sites 574w

Treasury
Alternative energy 440w
Energy consumption 440–1w
Government information services 85w
Official hospitality 584w
Small businesses 195w
Travelling expenses 326–7w

Treaties
Mercenaries 459w
Parliamentary procedure 244–5w

Tredinnick, Mr David
Debates etc.
Business questions (11.06.98) 1222
Questions
Alternative medicine, East London 605w
Alternative medicine, Medical research 538w
Nutrition and health, Schools 167

Trend, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Eritrea (08.06.98) 729–30
European Council (11.06.98) 1274–8, 1284

Trimble, Rt Hon David
Debates etc.
Northern Ireland (Sentences) Bill, 2R (10.06.98) 1096–101

Truancy
694–5w

Truswell, Mr Paul
Questions
Leeds Health Authority, Finance 172w

Tuberculosis
238w

Tuition fees
204w
Administrative costs 138w
Higher education admission 1192–3
Scotland 383w

Turkey
Human rights 146w

Turks and Caicos Islands
150w
Illegal immigrants 243w
Ministers' visits abroad 348–9w
Overseas aid 349w

Turnberg Review
see Review of Health Care in London Independent Advisory Panel

Turner, Dr George
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, Allocation of time motion and Lords amendts (09.06.98) 939, 948, 958–60
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep adjourned (08.06.98) 783–6

Twigg, Mr Derek
Debates etc.
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep adjourned (08.06.98) 806
Questions
Developing countries, Security industry 232–3w
EC Internal Market Council 322–3w
Inheritance tax, Tax rates and bands 586w
Social security benefits, Children 473w
Tuition fees, Higher education admission 1193

Twigg, Mr Stephen
Questions
New deal schemes, Private sector 205w

Tyler, Mr Paul
Debates etc.
Business questions (11.06.98) 1218
Electoral systems (02.06.98) 201
House of Commons procedure (04.06.98) 563–7, 570, 577, 588
Questions
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Disease control 490
Business questions 505–6

Tyrie, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
National Lottery Bill, Rep and 3R (01.06.98) 74–5
Questions
Sierra Leone, Armed forces deployment 97–9w

UK contributions to EC budget
496w
European Development Fund 448w

UK National Data Centre
312–3w

UK Sports Council
48w

UK Sports Institute
46w, 666–8w

UN agencies
UK contributions 38w

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
147–8w

UN resolutions
Kashmir 392w

Unemployment
Dundee 332w
Educational qualifications 498–9w

UNESCO
Cultural heritage 560w

Unfair dismissal
Small businesses 684w

Uniform business rate
Public houses 649–50w

United Bristol Healthcare NHS Trust
Inquiries 337w, 692w

Untreated milk
339w
Food poisoning 76w

Uranium
107–8w
Defence research 182w
Dounreay 364–5, 594–5w

Urban areas
Management 20w
Scotland 499w

Urinary system disorders
Industrial injuries disablement benefit 709w

USA
Barley 532w
Extradition 643–4w
Postal services 503w

Vacancies
Chelmsford 367–8w
Health service staff 406w
Midwives 178w

Vacant land
Housing construction 510w

Vaccination
Bovine tuberculosis 529w
Travel requirements 602–3w
Whooping cough 133–4w

Vaccine damaged children
Compensation 250w, 550w

Varroasis
Bees 247–8w, 275w, 344w, 496–7

VAT
Art works 3
Housing 328w

Vaz, Mr Keith
Questions
Asia-Europe meeting 93–4w
Cricket, Racial discrimination 48–9w
Ethnic minorities, Northern Ireland 184–5w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Ethnic minorities 487–8w
Heathrow Airport, Public inquiries 512w
Human rights, Annual reports 147w
Immigration applications 55w
Indonesia, Human rights 146–7w
Mines 423–4w
Ministers' visits abroad, China 93w
Ministers' visits abroad, Indonesia 89w
Ministers' visits abroad, Korea 89w
North Korea 93w
Sudan 36–7w
Trade missions, China 341w
Venezuela, Prisoners 618w
Work permits, Catering 141–2w
Yemen, Journalists 617–8w

Venezuela
Prisoners 618w

Ventilation
Hospitals 690w

Veterinary medicine
Northern Ireland 663w
Student numbers 703–4w

Veterinary services
Slaughterhouses 532–3w

Viagra
686w

Viggers, Mr Peter
Questions
Dounreay, Nuclear fuel reprocessing 714–5
Museums and galleries 8
Probation and aftercare, Finance 58–60w

Village schools
626w

Vis, Dr Rudi
Questions
Algeria, Human rights 611w
Common agricultural policy 488

Visas
Africa 346–7w
Algeria 459–60w
Cyprus 168w

Vitamin B6
486

Vocational training
Tax allowances 654w

Voluntary organisations
National Lottery 44–5w

Voting methods
Grammar schools 256w

Vulnerable or Intimidated Witnesses Interdepartmental Working Group
481–2w

Wales
Antismoking campaign 324w
Armed forces strength 492w
Arts finance 589w
Asthma 62–4w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 671w
Breast cancer 166w
Cancer 671w
Class sizes 676w
Community hospitals 62w
Cost per student 229w
Council tax benefits 551w
Cricket 591w
Dairy farming 324–5w
EC grants and loans 4w, 146w, 193w, 425–6w, 507–8w
Economic and monetary union 589w
European Communities 426w
Eye disorders 671w
Football Trust 166w
Further education 63w
Health service staff 62w
Hospital waiting lists 229w
Housing improvement 592–3w
Incontinence 377–8w
Local education authorities 672w
Local government constituencies 591–2w
Local government reform 545w
Local government social services 545w
Low incomes 250w
Millennium Commission 590w
Museums and galleries 591w
National income 674w
NHS 61–2w
NHS trusts 166w, 673w
Orchestras 589–90w
Prescription drugs 545w
Psychiatry 672w
Public sector employment 673w
Rendering industry 671–2w
Rural transport 675–6w
Sites of special scientific interest 62w
Slums 592w
Smoking 323–4w
Social Exclusion Unit 674w
Student numbers 674–5w
Theatres 590w
Tourism 591w

Walker, Mr Cecil
Questions
Legal aid, Northern Ireland 655–6w

Wallace, Mr James
Questions
Educational publications, Scotland 502w
Housing finance, Scotland 331–2w
Legal aid scheme, Scotland 502w
Procurator Fiscal Service 499–502w
Rented housing, Glasgow 333w
Rented housing, Scotland 333w
School transport, Northern Ireland 217–8w
Self-assessment of tax 650w

Walley, Ms Joan
Questions
Cellular phones, Health warnings 439–40w

Walley, Ms Joan—continued
Disability living allowance, Social security recipients 548w
Export credit guarantees 593w
Genetically modified organisms 496
Ground water, Pollution 31–2w
Population projection, Elderly 442–3w
Sewers 32w

Walter, Mr Robert
Debates etc.
European Council (11.06.98) 1258, 1267–71
Questions
Artificial insemination, Cattle 535–6w

Wandsworth
Housing 373w

War pensions
252–3w

Ward, Ms Claire
Questions
Beef, Exports 339–40w
Post offices, Watford 508w
Railway safety 872
Travelling people, Caravan sites 574w

Wareing, Mr Robert N
Questions
Developing countries, Debts 230w

Warrington
Incapacity benefit 253–4w
Pupil exclusions 367w

Waste disposal
419–20w
Agricultural land 28w, 420w
Livestock 452–3w
Paper 28w, 420w

Water abstraction
153w

Water charges
855–6

Water conservation
17w

Water meters
855–6

Water storage
Civil engineering 159w

Water treatment
Sewage 17w, 517w

Waterson, Mr Nigel
Debates etc.
Registration of Political Parties Bill, 2R (04.06.98) 515
Questions
Judges, Members' correspondence 485w
Polegate bypass, Compensation 33w
South Downs 636w
Thorne, Damien, Sentencing 662w

Watford
Post offices 508w

Watts, Mr Dave
Questions
Crime prevention, St Helens 364

WE 177 nuclear bomb
96w

Weapons
IRA 366

Webb, Mr Steve
Questions
Ambulances 692w
Child benefit 402w
Family income 475–6w
Fathers, Tax rates and bands 401–2w

Webb, Mr Steve—continued
Local government constituencies, Gloucestershire 212w
Maintenance, Children 187–9w
National insurance contributions 467–8w
New deal for lone parents 110–1w, 314–5w
Pensioners, Poverty 700
Pensions, Tax allowances 651w
Probation officers 642w
Sierra Leone, Armed forces deployment 99–100w
Social security, Expenditure 475w
Tax yields, Child benefit 651w

Welfare of Animals (Transport) Order 1997
Questions
534w

Welfare to work
1192

Wells, Mr Bowen
Debates etc.
European Council (11.06.98) 1251–4

Welsh, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep adjourned (08.06.98) 753, 762–3, 786–90, 793, 814–6
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (09.06.98) 907–8

Welsh Advisory Committee on Drug and Alcohol Misuse
Public appointments 376–8w

Welsh National Board for Nursing Midwifery and Health Visiting
675w

Welsh Office
Inquiries 588–9w
Small businesses 61w

West coast railway line
Investment 520w

West country
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 489

West Drayton
Air traffic control 523–4w

West Kent Health Authority
136–7w, 542w

West Midlands
Community transport 519–20w
Cycleways 19w
Methicillin resistant staphylococcus aureus 539–40w
Rough sleepers initiative 19–20w
Social Exclusion Unit 213–4w
Training and enterprise councils 140–1w

West Sussex
Housing construction 9w
Special education 368w

West Yorkshire
NHS administration 170w

Western European Union
606–7w

Western Sahara
(03.06.98) 333–40
Referendums 239w

Whales
201w, 340w
Japan 94w

Wheelchairs
334–6w
Access to work programme 365–6w
Disabled workers 699–700w

White, Mr Brian
Debates etc.
Millennium compliance (08.06.98) 719–20
Questions
Indonesia, Overseas aid 235–6w
Royal parks, Festivals and special occasions 44w
School transport 866

White papers
Transport policy 211w

Whitehead, Dr Alan
Questions
Bus services, Performance standards 514w
Chlorofluorocarbons, Refrigeration 15w
Hydrofluorocarbons 15w
Hydrofluorocarbons, Refrigeration 14–5w
National parks 518w
New Forest, National parks 518w
Shipbuilding, Regional selective assistance 684w

Whittingdale, Mr John
Questions
Centre for Environment Fisheries and Aquaculture Science 74w
National Lottery, Film industry 164w

Whooping cough
Vaccination 133–4w

Wicks, Mr Malcolm
Questions
Pensions, Carers 700–1

Widdecombe, Rt Hon Ann
Debates etc.
House of Commons procedure, Points of order (02.06.98) 168
Questions
Hospital discharges 165–6
Hospital waiting lists 158–9

Widowers' benefits
250–1w

Widows' benefits
314w, 402–3w

Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Debates etc.
Economic policy (11.06.98) 1215
European Council (11.06.98) 1230–1, 1249, 1259–62, 1281
Questions
Agricultural subsidies, Administrative costs 185w
Cancer 156
Community hospitals, Wales 62w
Dairy farming, Wales 324–5w
Developing countries, Debts 216w
Economic and monetary union, Wales 589w
European Communities, Wales 426w
European Convention on Human Rights 311w
Football Trust, Wales 166w
Low incomes, Wales 250w
Medical profession, Interagency cooperation 685w
Motorcycles, Bus lanes 519w
National income, Wales 674w
NHS Executive, Advisory services 239w
NHS trusts, Wales 673w
Nomenclature of statistical territorial units, EC grants and loans 384w
Ottawa Convention 488w
Social Exclusion Unit, Wales 674w
Vaccine damaged children, Compensation 550w
Wheelchairs 334w

Wild boar
155–6w, 662w

Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981
Questions
30w

Wilkinson, Mr John
Debates etc.
Channel tunnel (03.06.98) 378–9
Review of Health Care in London Independent Advisory Panel (03.06.98) 309–11, 320
Questions
Apache AH-64 helicopter 639w
Cancer, Medical treatments 171w
Duty free allowances, Redundancy 1074
Millennium Exhibition, Transport 33–4w
Tobacco, Production 160

Willetts, Mr David,
Debates etc.
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep adjourned (08.06.98) 765–72, 778–9, 797, 804–7, 812
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (09.06.98) 914–9, 922
Questions
Class sizes, Leicestershire 1180
Educational finance, National insurance contributions 137w
Employment 86w
European voluntary service for young people 137w
Higher education admission 1183
Inflation 195–6w
New deal for young people 137w, 707w
New deal schemes, Access courses 138w
Tuition fees, Administrative costs 138w

Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Debates etc.
Economic policy (11.06.98) 1210

Williams, Mr Alan W
Debates etc.
European Council (11.06.98) 1237, 1239, 1249–51
Registration of Political Parties Bill, 2R (04.06.98) 517
Questions
Antibiotics 495
Incapacity benefit, Medical examinations 476–7w

Williams, Mrs Betty
Questions
EC grants and loans 508w

Willis, Mr Phil
Debates etc.
Belfast Agreement (01.06.98) 37
Northern Ireland (Sentences) Bill, 2R (10.06.98) 1086, 1105–10
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep adjourned (08.06.98) 740, 757, 771, 773–4, 803, 819
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (09.06.98) 897, 919–23
Questions
Discretionary student grants 205w
New deal for young people 624w, 697w
Personal injury compensation, Social security benefits overpayment 550w
Pharmacists, Primary health care 539w
Police discipline 483w
Railway network, Leeds 514w
Student loans, Part-time education 1186–7

Wills, Mr Michael
Questions
Armed forces civilians, Skill shortages 394w

Wilshire, Mr David
Questions
Ashford and St Peter's Hospital NHS Trust, Managers 410w
European Council, Furniture 461–2w
Members' correspondence, Administrative delays 393w
Sierra Leone, Armed forces deployment 100w
Sierra Leone, Arms trade 317w, 424–5w, 457w
Sudan, Overseas aid 449w

Wilson, Mr Brian, Minister for Education and Industry, Scottish Office
Debates etc.
Knoydart Estate, Land ownership and tenure (05.06.98) 685–90
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep adjourned (08.06.98) 766, 768–9, 778, 781, 792–7
Teaching and Higher Education Bill (HL), Rep and 3R (09.06.98) 891, 893–5
Questions
Educational finance, Argyll and Bute 432w
Educational publications, Scotland 502w
Free school meals, Scotland 431w
Insolvency, Scotland 431–2w
Royal Deeside Partnership 262w
Small businesses, Scottish Office 85w
Student grants, Scotland 428w
Student numbers, Scotland 383w
Tuition fees, Scotland 383w

Wiltshire
Hospital waiting lists 361

Wind power
506–7w

Winnick, Mr David
Debates etc.
Belfast Agreement (01.06.98) 36
Electoral systems (02.06.98) 184, 201
Northern Ireland (Sentences) Bill, 2R (10.06.98) 1092–3, 1118, 1151, 1155
Questions
Business questions 507–8
Disability living allowance 706
Iraq, Chemical and biological warfare 149–50w
Lawrence, Stephen, Homicide 302w
Members' correspondence, Administrative delays 112w
NHS 162
Tax evasion 652w

Winter fuel payments
402w, 554–6w, 707–8
Worcester 554–6w

Winterbourne Gunner
Land reclamation 207–9w

Winterton, Mrs Ann
Debates etc.
Electoral systems (02.06.98) 190
Questions
Agriculture 493
Developing countries, Debts 35w
Primary education, Drug abuse 693w

Winterton, Mr Nicholas
Debates etc.
Economic policy (11.06.98) 1214
Questions
British Road Federation, Finance 515w
Developing countries, Debts 35w
Greater London Authority 861–2
Industrial investment 318w
Manufacturing industries, Flexible working 508w

Winterton, Mr Nicholas—continued
Mental health services, North West region 172w
Open government 1067
Printing industry, Training 364w
Sudan, Overseas aid 350–2

Winterton, Ms Rosie
Questions
Cleaner Vehicles Task Force 16w
Hydrocarbon oil duties 194w
Immobilisation of vehicles 153w
Lead free petrol, Motor vehicles 16w
Motor vehicles, Fraud 16w
Road works 153w

Winwick
Public petitions (02.06.98) 269

Wise, Audrey
Debates etc.
House of Commons procedure, Points of order (02.06.98) 168
Questions
NHS trusts, Public appointments 158

Women
Domestic violence 476w, 703–4
EC action 473–4w
Government departments 694–5
Government information services 691–2
Internet 691–2
Scientists 204w

Women's employment
Families 708

Woodward, Mr Shaun
Debates etc.
Community hospitals, Oxfordshire (03.06.98) 343, 346
Sports (05.06.98) 646–9, 655
Questions
Overseas aid, Charities 356
Spinal injuries 177w

Woolas, Mr Phil
Questions
Caravans, Consumer protection 126–7w

Worcester
Magistrates' courts 412w
Winter fuel payments 554–6w

Worcestershire
Educational finance 1187–8
Health services 153–4
Hospital waiting lists 154
Hospitals 154–5

Work permits
Catering 141–2w

Work permits—continued
Political refugees 437–8w

Working benefits campaign
546–7w

Working hours
Families 692–3
Junior hospital doctors 180w

World Bank
587–8w

World Cup
7
Tickets 677w

Worthington, Mr Tony,
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Northern Ireland Office
Questions
Antismoking campaign, Young people 375w
Ethnic minorities, Northern Ireland 184–5w
Family planning, Northern Ireland 65–6w
Health service staff, Occupational health 323w
Methadone, Death 323w
School transport, Northern Ireland 217–8w
Smoking, Young people 323w
Veterinary medicine, Northern Ireland 663w

Wright, Mr Anthony D
Questions
Minimum wage 364

Wright, Dr Tony
Debates etc.
Electoral systems (02.06.98) 177, 187, 235–7
Registration of Political Parties Bill, 2R (04.06.98) 519
Questions
Birmingham Relief Road, Construction costs 209w
Birmingham Relief Road, Contracts 865
House of Commons times of sittings 159w
Political parties, Finance 95w
Vaccine damaged children, Compensation 250w

Wyatt, Derek
Debates etc.
Millennium compliance (08.06.98) 722
Sports (05.06.98) 635, 642–5, 660–1
Questions
BBC 492–3w
Kent County Council 419w, 577w
Mass media, Ownership 5
Student loans, Part-time education 1187

Wyatt, Derek—continued
Supermarkets, Food prices 486
West Kent Health Authority 136–7w, 542w

Wymott Prison
Prison accommodation 439w

Yemen
Journalists 617–8w

Yeo, Mr Tim
Debates etc.
Leasehold housing (10.06.98) 988–9, 1005–7
Questions
Housing construction, Derelict land 859–60

York
Army bases 103w

Yorkshire and Humberside
National Lottery 668–9w

Young, Sir George
Debates etc.
Business questions (11.06.98) 1216–7
House of Commons procedure (04.06.98) 558–61
House of Commons questions, Point of order (11.06.98) 1226
Questions
Business statements 503–5
Electronic government 1063

Young offenders
219–20w, 482–3w
Police custody 483w
Prison population 382w

Young people
Antismoking campaign 260–1w, 324w, 375w, 685w
Cancer 444w
Offences against children 304–5w
Smoking 136w, 260w, 323–4w
Social security benefits 474w
Sports 42–3w
Suicide 156–7

"Your Right to Know White Paper"
620w

Youth clubs
National Lottery 302w

Youth employment
Dundee 581–2w

Youth Parliament Bill 1997/98
Debates etc.
1R (09.06.98) 875–7

CAMBRIDGESHIRE LIBRARIES